

### **BOS: LONG AND SHORT FORMS**

One characteristic feature of the Cornish verbal system which can be problematic for learners is the distinction between the so-called *long* and *short* forms of the verb **bos** “to be.” Although many European languages like Spanish and Breton also make such a distinction, English does not. The long and short forms have quite different functions in Middle Cornish, but speakers of Late Cornish tend to generalise the long form for all cases, which adds to the confusion. A very basic way of deciding which form to use is the following: whenever you are talking about **being somewhere** or being in the process of **doing something**, you need to use the long form. Of course, in some cases you may have to choose *which* long form out of two or three possibilities... but that’s something we’ll discuss in more detail below.

Let’s start with a table of the long and short forms of **bos** in the Present and Imperfect Tenses. You will notice that both forms are translated identically in English, but that should not worry you. We’ll cover the subtler nuances afterwards.

	PRESENT TENSE		ENGLISH	IMPERFECT TENSE		ENGLISH
	SHORT FORM	LONG FORM		SHORT FORM	LONG FORM	
1s	<b>ov</b>	<b>esov</b>	<i>I am</i>	<b>en</b>	<b>esen</b>	<i>I was</i>
2s	<b>os</b>	<b>esos</b>	<i>you are (sg.)</i>	<b>es</b>	<b>eses</b>	<i>you were (sg.)</i>
3s	<b>yw</b>	<b>yma, usi, eus</b>	<i>he/she is</i>	<b>o</b>	<b>esa</b>	<i>he/she was</i>
1p	<b>on</b>	<b>eson</b>	<i>we are</i>	<b>en</b>	<b>esen</b>	<i>we were</i>
2p	<b>owgh</b>	<b>esowgh</b>	<i>you are (pl.)</i>	<b>ewgh</b>	<b>esewgh</b>	<i>you were (pl.)</i>
3p	<b>yns</b>	<b>ymons, esons</b>	<i>they are</i>	<b>ens</b>	<b>esens</b>	<i>they were</i>
0	<b>or</b>	<b>eder</b>	<i>one is</i>	<b>os</b>	<b>eses</b>	<i>one was</i>

### WHICH FORM OF BOS?

- Does the verb refer to spatial location (e.g. I am **in the bathroom**, The dog was **in the car**)? If so, use the LONG FORM.

**Yth esov vy y'n stevel omwolhi.** = I am in the bathroom.

- Is the verb part of a progressive tense ('am-doing' or 'was-doing') construction (e.g. You **were going** to school, The man **is eating** lunch)? If so, use the LONG FORM.

**Yma'n den ow tybri li.** = The man is eating lunch.  
(lit. 'Is the man at eating lunch.')

- Does the verb express the fact that something exists or existed (e.g. **There is** butter in the refrigerator, **There was** always enough to eat)? If so, use the LONG FORM.

**Yma amanen y'n yeynel.** = There is butter in the refrigerator.

- Is the verb part of a prepositional construction that means 'to have' (e.g. **There was** a red car **to you**, **There is** a new book **with her**)? If so, use the LONG FORM.

**Esa karr rudh dhis?** = Did you have a red car?  
(lit. 'Was-there a red car to-you?')

- Does the verb equate two nouns (e.g. **Mary is** a **doctor**, **That man was** a **teacher**)? If so, use the SHORT FORM.

**Medhyges yw Maria.** = Mary is a doctor. (lit. 'A doctor is Mary.')

- Does the verb equate a noun and a pronoun (e.g. **You are** a **doctor**, **He was** a **teacher**)? If so, use the SHORT FORM.

**Medhek os ta.** = You are a doctor. (lit. 'A doctor you-are you.')

- Does the verb link a noun or pronoun to an adjective which describes it (e.g. **They were happy**, **That dog is smart**[er than your brother])? If so, use the SHORT FORM.

**Lowen ens i.** = They were happy. (lit. 'Happy they-were they.')

### **YMA, USI, OR EUS?**

Now here's an additional complication. Even after you've decided that you have to use the long form of **bos**, you may still have to make the correct choice among different long forms. In the present tense, there are three possible long forms in the third person singular: **yma** ('is' as in 'there is'), **usi** ('is' as in 'the ... is not'), and **eus** ('is' as in 'there is no ...'). Feeling confused? Don't worry. It will all become clear when we look at the examples!

- If the sentence is AFFIRMATIVE, use **YMA**.

**Yma Pawl tre.** = Paul is at home.

Take care, though, because you have to use **yma** (the singular form) not **ymons** (the plural form), with all noun subjects, even plural ones. The only word that ever goes with **ymons** is the third person plural pronoun **i**, "they."

**Yma Pawl ha Jowan tre.** = Paul and John are at home.  
(lit. 'P. and J. **is** at home')

*but*

**Ymons i tre.** = They are at home. (lit. 'They-are they at home.')

In both sentences, we would expect a plural form of the verb because the subject designates more than one person. In the first sentence however, the subject is not **i**, and so we have to use **yma**.

- If the sentence is NOT AFFIRMATIVE (that is, if it is a question or a negative statement), and the subject is DEFINITE (e.g. **the house, my sister, she, Paul**), use **USI**.

**Nyns usi ow hwor tre.** = My sister is not at home.

*Definite subjects* can be names, personal pronouns (**my, ty, ev...**) or nouns preceded by either the article **an** or a possessive pronoun (**ow, dha, y...**). All other subjects are indefinite. For a more in-depth explanation, have a look at *Nebes Geryow 01*.

- If the sentence is NOT AFFIRMATIVE, and the subject is INDEFINITE (e.g. **a dog, who?, what?**), use **EUS**. *Eus* is often best translated as 'there is'.

**Eus keus?** = Is there cheese?

**Nyns eus keus.** = There is no cheese.

## YMONS OR ESONS?

As we have seen under YMA above, the use of the form **ymons** is limited to sentences featuring the subject **i** or no explicit subject at all. But that is not all: there is a further restriction which limits it to affirmative sentences. In negative sentences and questions, the form **esons** is used instead:

- If the sentence is AFFIRMATIVE, use YMONS.

<b>Ymons i y'n lowarth.</b>	= They are in the garden.
<b>Y'n lowarth ymons.</b>	= They are *in the garden*.

- If the sentence is NOT AFFIRMATIVE, use ESONS.

<b>Esons i y'n lowarth?</b>	= Are they in the garden?
<b>Nyns esons i y'n lowarth.</b>	= They aren't in the garden.

We agree that this is pretty heavy stuff for learners who don't speak another Brythonic language, but it is one of the most important features of how Cornish works. Learning the rules is an important step, but in our experience the best way to really assimilate them is by exposing yourself to as much spoken and written Cornish as possible. The human brain has an amazing capability of automatically deducing and storing rules it infers from language we are exposed to. Try to take advantage of this extremely useful innate feature by listening, reading, writing, and speaking as much Cornish as you can!

One page version (Handout)

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Yma, Usi, or Eus?

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If the sentence is NOT AFFIRMATIVE, and the subject is DEFINITE (e.g. **the house**, **my sister**, **she**, **Paul**), use USI.

If the sentence is NOT AFFIRMATIVE, and the subject is INDEFINITE (e.g. **a dog**, **who?**, **what?**), use EUS.

Ymons or Esons?

If the sentence is AFFIRMATIVE, use YMONS.

If the sentence is NOT AFFIRMATIVE, use ESONS.