

POLISH *SIĘ* CONSTRUCTIONS AND THEIR ENGLISH COUNTERPARTS

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One of the striking and interesting differences between Polish and English is the extent to which reflexive constructions are used in one language and not in the other. In Polish reflexive constructions tend to occur much more often. Reflexivization shows up in a number of different Polish constructions where corresponding English examples do not show even a trace of being reflexive. Niedzielski (1976) calls some of these constructions pseudo-reflexive since although in form they resemble true reflexives semantically they appear to be non-reflexive. In the majority of cases *się* reflexive particle appears in such pseudo-reflexive constructions. Hence the subject of this paper. It must be however noted that pseudo-reflexive constructions are also possible with reflexive pronoun *sobie* like in (1) and (2).

- (1) Pójdę *sobie* do domu.
I will go home.
- (2) Janek myśli *sobie* o Marysi.
John is thinking about Mary.

Such constructions are however not as common as the *się* constructions and will not be discussed here.

This paper is meant to voice some questions which seem to deserve an explicit explanation. Any answers hinted here may be judged as varying in their plausibility or implausibility. Thus it must be kept in mind that any tentative conclusions reached here are hardly conclusive and that all the issues discussed in this paper need a more thorough and serious treatment than offered below.

The following list of *się* constructions and their English counterparts will be examined:

A. *True reflexives*

- (3) Janek myje się.
John is washing (himself).
- (4) Janek myje siebie.
John is washing (himself).
- (5) *Janek myje¹.
- (6) Marysia skaleczyła się.
Mary hurt herself.
- (7) Marysia skaleczyła siebie.
Mary hurt herself.
- (8) *Marysia skaleczyła.¹

B. *Symmetric predicates.*

- (9) Jaś i Marysia pocałowali się.
John and Mary kissed (each other).
- (10) ?Jaś i Marysia pocałowali siebie.
?John and Mary kissed themselves.
- (11) *Jaś i Marysia pocałowali.²
- (12) Jaś i Marysia kochają się.
John and Mary love each other.
- (13) Jaś i Marysia kochają siebie.
John and Mary love themselves.
- (14) *Jaś i Marysia kochają.²

C. *Inchoatives*

- (15) Gwóźdź zgiął się.
The nail bent/.The nail got bent.
- (16) *Gwóźdź zgiął siebie.
- (17) *Gwóźdź zgiął.
- (18) Drzwi otworzyły się.
The door opened.
- (19) *Drzwi otworzyły siebie.
- (20) *Drzwi otworzyły.

¹ Examples (5) and (8) may in fact be acceptable but not on the reflexive reading.

² Examples (11) and (14) may be acceptable but not on the symmetric predicate reading.

D. *Reflexive verbs which must be accompanied by się.*

- (21) Niebo zachmurzyło się.
The sky clouded up.
- (22) *Niebo zachmurzyło siebie.
- (23) *Niebo zachmurzyło.
- (24) Jaś boi się ciebie.
John is afraid of you.
John fears you.
- (25) *Jaś boi siebie ciebie.
- (26) *Jaś boi ciebie.
- (27) Jaś wahał się przez chwilę.
John hesitated for a moment.
- (28) *Jaś wahał siebie przez chwilę.
- (29) *Jaś wahał przez chwilę.

E. *Verbs with in some contexts must occur with się and in some may not.*

- (30) Janek irytuje się tą sytuacją.
John is irritated by this situation.
- (31) ?Janek irytuje siebie tą sytuacją.
- (32) *Janek irytuje tą sytuacją.
- (33) Ta sytuacja irytuje Janka.
This situation irritates John.
- (34) *Ta sytuacja irytuje się Janka.

F. *Subjectless (impersonal) constructions.*

- (35) a. Tę książkę czyta się z przyjemnością.
b. This book is pleasant to read.
c. *This book reads with pleasure.
d. This book is read with pleasure.
- (36) *Tę książkę czyta siebie z przyjemnością.
- (37) a. Ten samochód prowadzi się łatwo.
b. This car is easy to drive.
c. This car drives easily.
- (38) *Ten samochód prowadzi siebie łatwo.

It is obvious that this list is anything but exhaustive but for the time being it will do for a tentative and rather informal analysis.

Niedzielski (1976) claims that one of the tests for pseudo-reflexives is the substitution of *się* by *siebie*, which is possible only in case of "true" reflexives. The substitution of *się* by *siebie* yields grammatical sentences only in the cases of A and B. The difference between pairs of sentences like (3) and (4)

or (6) and (7) is only slight. (3) and (6) are perceived by some native speakers as having larger integrity than (4) and (7). Besides, in (3) and (6) the agentive function of the subject NP does not seem to be as stressed as in (4) and (7). This is particularly visible if one compares examples (39) and (40).

- (39) Janek upił siebie.
John got himself drunk.
(40) Janek upił się.
John got drunk.

In (39) the subject NP stands for a demoralized agent who seems to have got himself drunk on purpose while in (40) the subject NP seems to denote a rather unlucky patient.

In the case of B a change of meaning seems to be involved. (12) does not convey the same message as (13). (12) describes a nice couple while (13) conveys an image of two individuals with inflated egos. If however *siebie* in (13) is supplemented by *nawzajem* the original meaning is restored.

Examples in C, D, E and F are clearly pseudo-reflexive since *się* cannot be replaced by *siebie*.

Another obvious observation is that only in the case of A can we speak of a coherent English reflexive counterpart of the Polish construction. However in the case of "true" reflexives deletion of the reflexive pronoun is sometimes permissible in English (3) while in Polish constructions the reflexive particle is always retained.

In the case of B the counterpart of the Polish *V+reflexive particle* is English $V + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{each other} \\ \text{one another} \end{array} \right\}$. The reflexive particle cannot be deleted in Polish while in English the deletion of *each other/one another* forms is sometimes possible (9).

In the case of C Polish reflexive inchoatives correspond either to English inchoatives, which are not reflexive contrary to their Polish counterparts, or to *get* passives (15).

Polish reflexive verbs (D) correspond to English non-reflexive ones or to *be+adjective* construction.

Polish reflexive verbs in E correspond to English *be+past participle* in passive constructions.

Finally the Polish impersonal pseudo-reflexive constructions correspond to the English passive construction or the *be+adjective+complement* construction. The two other possible English counterparts are the patient-subject construction (37c) of the type discussed by Lakoff (1977) and the construction with *one* acting as the subject.

It may thus be said that Polish *się* constructions are (with the exception of A and perhaps B) pseudo-reflexive and correspond to a large number of

English non-reflexive constructions. The abundance of pseudo-reflexive constructions in Polish will be the sole reason for reflexivization being such a common-place in Polish when compared to English. This is perhaps true but even if true it is a somewhat trivial observation. What must be elucidated is why should all these seemingly unrelated Polish constructions be marked in the same way i.e., is there a common semantic denominator for all these constructions which would warrant the appearance of the same syntactic marking. Another question to be answered is why does the Polish (and not only Polish but also Spanish, Portuguese and probably many others) grammatical system allow so many pseudo-reflexives while English does not. However before trying to consider these problems it might be helpful to discuss the status of the *się* particle itself.

According to Fisiak, Grzegorek-Lipińska, Zabrocki (1978) *się* is a reflexive pronoun in some cases just like *siebie*, *sobie*, *sobą* and a reflexive particle associated with a verb in other cases. Thus when it occurs in "true" reflexives *się* is a reflexive pronoun and when it occurs in pseudo-reflexives it is not. This is somewhat strange. Curiously enough *się* displays interesting behavior also in "purely" reflexive constructions. For instance it may not be conjoined with other NPs (41).

- (41) *Janek skaleczył się i Marysię.
Janek skaleczył siebie i Marysię.
John hurt himself and Mary.

It does not appear in prepositional phrases (42).

- (42) *Patrzę na się.
Patrzę na siebie.
I'm looking at myself.

It does not appear in isolation from the verb (43).

- (43) Kogo widzisz na tym zdjęciu? $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} *Się. \\ Siebie. \end{array} \right\}$
Whom do you see in this picture? Myself.
(44) a. Kogo widzisz na tym zdjęciu?
b. Widzę się na tym zdjęciu.
c. Widzę siebie na tym zdjęciu.
Whom do you see in this picture?
I see myself in this picture.

Another curious fact is that in (44), (44b) is not perceived as an appropriate answer to (44)a. An appropriate answer to (44a) is (44c).

All these problems would automatically disappear if *się* was not a reflexive pronoun at all, even in "true" reflexives, but a reflexive particle associ-

ated with verbs. If this were the case, *się* not being a NP could not appear in prepositional phrases, could not appear in isolation from its verb and finally could not appear conjoined with NPs. *Się* could not also act as a direct object in a sentence. Since upon uttering (44a) the speaker requests information about the identity of the direct object of the action, (44b) could not be an appropriate answer to that question. It may thus be claimed that in the case of *się* constructions rather than having a subject, which is the agent, a verb and a reflexive pronoun, which is the direct object and patient, we have a reflexive verb (verb+reflexive particle) and a subject which is both the agent and the patient. It is interesting to note here that in Russian verbs are reflexivized by means of suffixes — *сь* or — *ся*. It would be even more difficult to speak of these suffixes as reflexive pronouns.

There is however a strong counterargument of the claims made above. Polish has two variants of the singular second person personal pronoun in the accusative case: *cię* and *ciebie*. *Cię* obeys restrictions very similar to the ones imposed on *się*. It does not appear in prepositional phrases (45), it is not conjoined with other NPs (46) and so on.

(45) *Patrzę na *cię*.

Patrzę na *ciebie*.

I am looking at you.

(46) *Widzę *cię* i Janka na tym zdjęciu.

Widzę *ciebie* i Janka na tym zdjęciu.

I see you and John in this picture.

In this case however it cannot be claimed that *cię* is not a personal pronoun. Perhaps the curious behaviour of *się* should be explained in terms of the idiosyncratic properties of all short pronominal forms. Nevertheless, even if this were the case its properties would set *się* apart from the other reflexive pronouns. Therefore the claims presented above are considerably weakened although not completely vitiated. Incidentally, it should be pointed out here that Polish reflexive pronouns will differ quite substantially from all the other pronouns. Pronouns are usually characterized by such categories as person, number and gender. Polish reflexive pronouns are exceptional in that respect while the English reflexive pronouns correspond quite neatly to that paradigm.

If *się* is not a reflexive pronoun, then in "true" reflexives the subject is both a patient and an agent (or to use Lakoffian terminology will have properties of both patient and agent). That the subject NP in a sentence with a *verb+reflexive particle* is both a patient and an agent, is not an uncommon way of viewing things and may be found implicit in Wolczyńska-Sudół (1977), who however still maintains that *się* is a reflexive pronoun. What is perhaps new here (at least in comparison to the transformational treatment of reflexivization) is that instead of having two NPs one standing for the patient

and the other for the agent, the link between the two being coreference, we have only one NP with properties of both patient and agent. *Się* is treated only as a reflexive particle accompanying the verb. This would incidentally account for the relatively greater integrity which seems to characterize *się* constructions in comparison to *siebie* constructions where an analysis in terms of two coreferential NPs seems to be the most plausible solution.

The situation is very similar in the case of symmetric predicates. There are however at least two agents and patients in such constructions. Whereas in the case of "true" reflexives the agent is also a patient of the performed action, in case of symmetric predicates one of the agents is also a patient of the action performed by the other agent and vice versa.

In inchoative constructions the subject seems to be a patient and the verb is reflexive. What will differentiate this construction from the previous two is that the subject is not an agent. However Lakoff (1977) claims that the most important property of an agent is primary responsibility for the action he performs: In case of inchoatives primary responsibility for the action seems to be a property of the patients which act as subjects.

Polish reflexive verbs will to some extent overlap with Polish inchoatives. There is however a lot of variation within this class of verbs. In (21) the subject may be characterized as a patient with primary responsibility for the action. Other examples will differ from inchoatives in allowing more, so to speak, agenthood in the subjects (27). All these constructions seem to have one thing in common, the person or object designated by the subject NP rather than being a source or instigator is a recipient of an action. This is the reason why Niedzielski (1976) calls reflexive verbs like *bać się* passive.

Verbs of the E group will be reflexivized only if their subject is an experiencer, again a recipient of an action. This does not mean of course that all verbs which take experiencers as subjects will be reflexivized. (47) clearly shows that this is not the case.

(47) Każdy lubi kaszankę.

Everybody likes blood sausage.

(48) Każdy zachwyca się kaszanką.

Everybody is enchanted with blood sausage.

(49) Ta kaszanka zachwyca wszystkich.

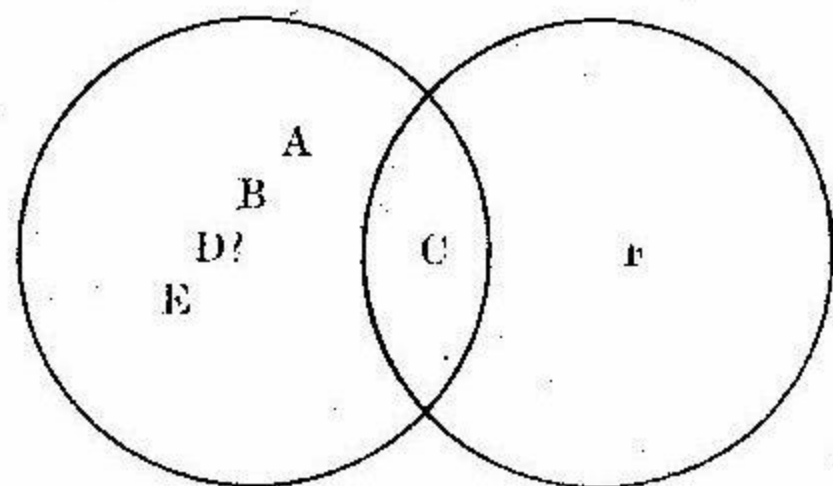
This blood sausage enchants everyone.

What (47)–(49) exemplify is that only those verbs which allow the experiencer in the direct object position will be reflexivized if the experiencer is promoted to the subject position.

Subjectless or impersonal *się* constructions differ quite significantly from all the constructions previously discussed in that they do not have grammatical subjects. What appears as subject in the English counterparts will

not be a subject in the Polish sentences, i.e., not being in agreement with the verb and in nominative case. However even in such constructions NPs denoting patients, if present, seem to be characterized by primary responsibility for the action or state of affairs denoted by the verb and more often than not will be topicalized. Impersonal constructions will be perhaps most similar to inchoative constructions, since both will be characterized by the absence of the agent.

The conclusions of this short informal discussion of *się* constructions may be summarized in the following diagram:



Object NP promoted to the subject position or properties of the patient/experiencer realized in the subject.

Individual properties of the patient/experiencer more responsible for the action or state of affairs depicted in particular sentences.

Agent demoted from the subject position and not expressed.

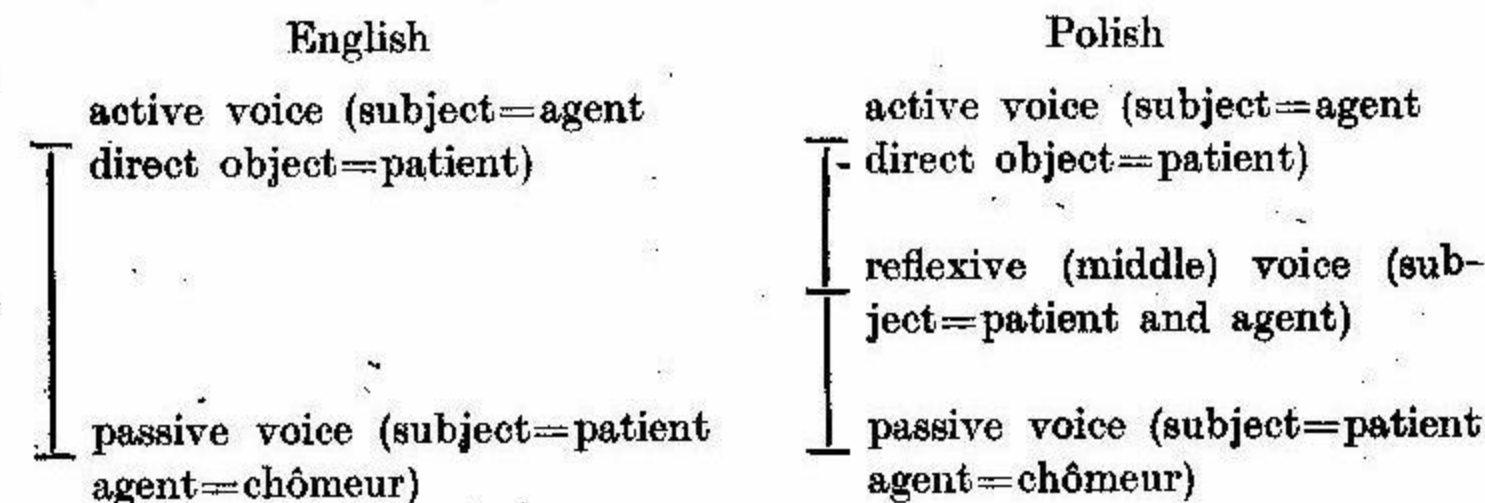
Individual properties of the agent not responsible for the action or state of affairs depicted in particular sentences.

All these observations are quite curious and again the question as to why the *się* particle appears in all these constructions might be raised. Van Oosten (1977) and Lakoff (1977) write about patients of the action which to some extent act as agents in the so-called patient-subject constructions. They evoke the principle of partial pattern matching to account for such constructions. Perhaps this principle might be made use of also in case of Polish pseudo-reflexives.

In English active constructions the prototypical subject is an agent and the prototypical direct object is a patient. In the passive constructions the prototypical subject is a patient and the agent ends up as a *chômeur* and need not be even expressed. The patient might be promoted to the subject posi-

tion in active constructions provided it has primary responsibility for the action characterized by the verb (the agent in such cases is not expressed).

In Polish the situation is rendered more complex by the existence of the "middle" or reflexive voice. The subject in the Polish middle voice constructions will be both a patient and an agent. Thus Polish will have three prototypical constructions (active, middle, passive) while English only two (active, passive). This situation might be schematically represented in the following diagrams:



In English the less prototypical patients which bear larger responsibility for the action, will appear as subjects in active constructions via partial pattern matching to the active voice prototype. In Polish the less prototypical patients will appear as subjects in reflexive voice (the closest prototypical construction intermediate between the active and passive voice). In case of less prototypical (absolved from primary responsibility) agents we will move down the scale also towards the reflexive voice prototype. Thus the Polish pseudo-reflexive constructions may be viewed as instances of partial pattern matching to the reflexive voice prototype. English reflexive constructions will find their place either in the active voice or passive voice paradigms.

This scheme may seem to be fairly neat but again reality is more complex than theory.

The first claim which cannot be retained in its full strength is that all these constructions may be characterized using such semantic labels as agent and patient. The whole E group will stand out as an exception, demanding an analysis in terms of experiencer and source labels. This is true also in case of other constructions (50).

(50) Janek i Marysia słyszą się doskonale.

John and Mary hear each other very well.

Can we really speak of two agents and patients in (50)? It may be possible to resolve this problem by either claiming that the realization of the patient in

the subject position is the prototypical case and the other examples will be instances of partial similarity to the prototype or by claiming that we rather deal here with instances of direct objects being promoted to subjects (a not totally unfamiliar view characteristic for relational grammar).

Another problem appears with the reflexive verbs (D). What on earth can account for the reflexivization of the verb in (51) and not in (52)?

(51) Janek przechadza się.
John is taking a walk.

(52) Janek spaceruje.
John is taking a walk.

Is the verb in (51) really so semantically different from the verb in (52) as to deserve special syntactic marking? Is there really anything notionally passive about a verb like *modlić się*: to pray? Perhaps it may turn out to be necessary to label these verbs as "fossil" reflexives which only sometimes retain reflexes of their once notionally passive character and to trace the reasons for their reflexivization not on the synchronic plane but in the depths of diachrony.

Finally there are problems with the impersonal *się* constructions and their relation to the other *się* constructions. It is indeed tempting to place such pairs of sentences as (53) and (54) under one label.

(53) Polskie konie świetnie się sprzedają za granicą.
Polish horses sell very well abroad.

(54) Polskie konie świetnie się sprzedaje za granicą.
Polish horses are sold very well abroad.

Sentences like (53) seem to have a lot in common with the other *się* constructions while sentences like (54) seem to resemble only reflexive inchoatives. In other words inchoative constructions share some properties with "true" reflexives and symmetric predicates and other with impersonal constructions. Naro (1976) claims that notional passives are only in diachronic relationship with reflexive impersonal constructions in Portuguese. A similar state of affairs might be hypothesized for Polish. Any thorough account of Polish *się* constructions will have to cope with this problem.

The basic question asked in this paper is why does Polish allow so many pseudo-reflexive constructions and English does not. The answer to this question given here is a very poor one, if indeed it is an answer at all, but perhaps may serve as a stimulus for a more adequate and closer to empirical data account of this interesting and complex problem.

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