

## SOME ASPECTS OF DEFINITENESS AND INDEFINITENESS OF NOUNS IN POLISH

ALEKSANDER SZWEDEK

*University of Łódź*

1. Within contrastive studies one of the more difficult problems has always been the problem of Polish equivalents of the English article which, among others, is used to indicate coreference. Although there is no article in Polish we seldom have doubts whether a noun in a text is definite or indefinite. It is obvious that there must exist linguistic mechanisms in Polish which perform the function parallel to the function of the article in English. There would seem to be in Polish three possible ways of showing the definite/indefinite distinction:

- (a) pronouns,
- (b) stress and intonation,
- (c) word order.

The first is obvious, the second has only recently been mentioned in the case of English (Akmajian and Jackendoff 1968), the third might be considered absurd. All three remain uninvestigated, perhaps with the exception of pronouns the article function of which has been denied by Pisarek (1968).

I do not propose to give exhaustive description and ready solutions to all problems involved here. If only for the simple reason that I do not have the descriptions and the solutions. My purpose has been to call attention to some aspects of, what I consider to be, the main issues in the expression of the definite/indefinite distinction in Polish. One of the more particular aims has been to demonstrate that word order in Polish is not free as has generally been assumed, and specifically that it plays a crucial role in anaphoric processes.

2. As has already been said very little can be found in linguistic literature about pronouns and their relation to the definite/indefinite distinction. The

only work which mentions pronouns in connection with this problem was written by Krystyna Pisarek in 1968. There we find two observations relevant for the present discussion. One is a description of definiteness and indefiniteness in Polish, the other concerns the demonstrative pronoun *ten*.

As to the former Pisarek correctly observes that indefiniteness of Polish pronouns should be understood differently from indefiniteness of pronouns in those languages in which it appears in opposition to definiteness. This opposition is expressed most fully by pairs of articles. In Polish where there are no articles nor explicit definiteness or the lack of it realized by morphological features, there are no pronouns which can be called definite. The opposition of definiteness to indefiniteness is expressed in a specific way: for example, by the opposition of a given pronoun to the lack of the pronoun. This is how I understand the sense of grammatical definiteness in Polish... (Pisarek 1968: 12).

However, in my opinion, there are clear and well defined cases where the lack of the pronoun does not mark the noun as indefinite. I shall return to this problem briefly in section 4.

The remarks on the pronoun *ten* are more interesting and more detailed. According to Pisarek, and I fully agree with her here, it is the only pronoun that can be thought of as having a definite article function. She distinguishes several functions of *ten*, among others article-like usage which is clearest in two occurrences:

a) in the substantivating function, as in

(1) *Te najporządniejsze też robią w łazience bałagan* where *te* simply substantivates the adjective *najporządniejsze*.

b) with proper names, as in

(2) *Byliśmy najpierw oglądać ten Erfurt*.

At the end of the discussion of *ten* Pisarek states that only in such adverbial phrases as *w tych dniach*, *tej niedzieli*, etc. is *ten* obligatory. Since all other occurrences of this pronoun are, according to her, optional the suspicion that *ten* may have an article function is unjustified. Examples given by Pisarek seem to support this view:

(3) *Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Ten milicjant siedział za to.*

We may omit *ten* without changing the definiteness of the noun.

(4) *Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Milicjant siedział za to.*

Let us, however, change the word order in the sequence sentence, putting the noun under consideration in sentence final position, and let us examine the optionality of *ten*.

(5) *Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Siedział za to ten milicjant.*

(6) *Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Siedział za to milicjant.*

It is clear that (6) is not in anyway equivalent with (3). It means that the

adverbial mentioned above are not the only structures in which *ten* is obligatory. If we want the noun in (6) to have the same definite interpretation as (3) we have to use *ten*. The above examples demonstrate also that the obligatoriness is connected with word order. I shall return to this problem again in section 4.

3. It has been recognized for some time that intonation affects semantic interpretation. Chomsky (1969: 53) writes: "It has been noted by Akmajian and Jackendoff (1968) that stress plays a role in determining how the reference of pronouns is to be interpreted. For example, in sentence (93), "him" refers to Bill if it is unstressed, but it may refer either to John or to someone other than John or Bill if it is stressed:

[(7)] (93) John hit Bill and then George hit him.

Chomsky also devotes several pages of his work to the discussion of focus and presupposition in sentences with normal intonation. He admits, however, that 'The concept of "normal intonation" is far from clear' and that 'Special grammatical processes of a poorly understood sort may apply in the generation of sentences, marking certain items... as bearing specific expressive or contrastive features that will shift the intonation center'. He finally concludes that 'Given the obscure nature of these matters, it is difficult to say anything more definite'. (Chomsky 1969: 73aff)

The neglect of these problems in Polish is even more acute. We find nothing about them in grammars. Let me, however, consider briefly what happens with sentences (3) - (6) if contrastive intonation is used. Specifically I want to see whether contrastive intonation a) changes the meaning of *ten*: b) changes the difference hinted at by (5) and (6).

The contrastive stress may fall on any word although such stress on *to* seems very awkward at first glance. What changes in (3) and (5), regardless of the place of the stress, are implications. So, for example, the stress on *ten* emphasizes this particular policeman as opposed to other policemen, the stress on *milicjant* sets the policeman as belonging to the class of *policemen* against other classes, for example, *civilians*. Nothing, however, changes in the coreference.

In (4) and (6) we get different interpretations depending on the place of the stress. If *milicjant* is stressed the sentence is ambiguous. We get three readings:

(a) this policeman and not the 'he' mentioned in the initial sentence,

(b) a different policeman,

(c) policeman as a class opposed to, say, the class *civilian*.

In the first reading *milicjant* in the sequence sentence is coreferential with *milicjant* in the initial sentence. In the second and third it is not. In all other cases *milicjant* is coreferential although I have some doubts as to (6) in this respect.

The conclusions of this very superficial discussion of contrastive stress are as follows:

- (a) the contrastive stress does not affect the definiteness of the noun if the noun is accompanied by *ten*.
- (b) if the noun stands alone (without *ten*) and bears the contrastive stress it possesses three-way ambiguity:
  - (I) it is definite, opposed to the other noun in the initial sentence.
  - (II) it is indefinite in that a different referent is meant,
  - (III) it is indefinite in that the referent is understood as a class in opposition to some other class.
- (c) if the noun stands alone and does *not* bear the stress it is definite.

The situation described in point (b) seems to be the same as the one discussed for English by Chomsky (1969).

The aims of the above brief survey have been two:

- (a) to stress the need of work on these problems,
- (b) to make it possible for me to write the next section without having to explain what the concept *normal intonation* is. I will only repeat after Chomsky (1969) that normal intonation is to be 'understood tentatively as referring to cases in which the intonation contour is determined by rules of the sort discussed in Chomsky and Halle (1968), with no expressive or contrastive intonation'.

4. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that, contrary to widespread and advocated beliefs, word order in Polish is not free and that it plays a crucial role in anaphoric processes. Very little is found in Polish grammars about word order and nothing about its participation in definite/indefinite distinction. The total neglect of these problems is due to the traditional and deeply rooted assumption that word order in Polish is free because logical functions are unmistakably indicated by inflexion. Let us, however, consider the initial sentence (8)

(8) W pokoju siedziała dziewczyna.  
and two sequence sentences (9) and (10)

- (9) Wszedł chłopiec.
- (10) Chłopiec wszedł.

According to the traditional view sentences (9) and (10) have the same meaning and thus we would expect that both can follow (8).

And yet we find that only (9) is correct after (8).

Likewise, given the initial sentence (11)

(11) W pokoju siedział chłopiec.  
and two sequence sentences (12) and (13)

(12) Chłopiec wyszedł.

(13) Wyszedł chłopiec.

we would expect that both (12) and (13) might follow (11) and yet again we find that only (12) is correct. We would expect that since there was only one boy in the room and only one boy left, and the two sentences constitute a sequence, the boy in both (11) and (13) is the same and word order would not matter. Instead we find that the sequence (11) - (13) is simply impossible. The boy in (13) is different from the boy in (11) and the whole situation becomes absurd.

Let us consider now a more complex example with three nouns. There are twelve variants which I want to discuss, disregarding the other combinations on the basis of an at the moment unjustified argument of their infrequency (especially those with the verb in sentence initial and sentence final position seem infrequent)

The initial sentences are the following:

- (14) Na podwórzu bawił się piłką chłopiec.
- (15) Na podwórzu bawił się chłopiec z kotem.
- (16) Na podwórzu bawił się kot piłką.

The twelve variants are as follows:

- (17) Chłopiec dał kotu piłkę.
- (18) Chłopiec dał piłkę kotu.
- (19) Chłopiec piłkę dał kotu.
- (20) Chłopiec kotu dał piłkę.
- (21) Kotu chłopiec dał piłkę.
- (22) Kotu piłkę dał chłopiec.
- (23) Kotu dał chłopiec piłkę.
- (24) Kotu dał chłopiec piłkę.
- (25) Piłkę dał chłopiec kotu.
- (26) Piłkę dał kotu chłopiec.
- (27) Piłkę kotu dał chłopiec.
- (28) Piłkę chłopiec dał kotu.

We will find that (14) can be followed only by (18), (19), (25) and (28), that is, by those sequence sentences in which the new noun is in the final position. The same with (15) which can be followed only by (17), (20), (21) and (24), and with (16) which can be followed by (22), (23), (26) and (27).

Sentences with adverbs of time or place behave in the same way. With the initial sentence (29)

(29) Widziałem w oknie kobietę.

only (30) is possible

(30) Kobieta wyszła na ulicę.

(31) cannot follow (29) if we are talking about the same woman.

(31) Na ulicę wyszła kobieta.

Given (32) as the initial sentence

(32) Do domu, który obserwowalem, wszedł mężczyzna.

and two sequence sentences (33) and (34)

(33) Mężczyzna wyszedł o 3:00.

(34) O 3:00 wyszedł mężczyzna.

we will easily discover that only (33) may follow (32).

There are two interesting points here. One is that the shift of the time adverbial in (33) to the front does not change the interpretation of the noun from definite to indefinite.

A similar change of (34) to

(35) Wszedł mężczyzna o 3:00.

renders a sentence which must have the contrastive stress on one of its elements. The position of the stress determines the interpretation (see section d).

A second interesting point is that no similar change is possible with time adverbials of duration, for example

(36) Mężczyzna szedł godzinę.

(37) Godzinę szedł mężczyzna.

(37) is possible only if it contains a contrastive stress.

The few examples presented here allow only for two indisputable but rather trivial conclusions and one interesting but tentative one. The two trivial conclusions are:

- (a) contrary to the general belief word order in Polish is not free,
- (b) it is used as one of the ways to express coreferentiality or noncoreferentiality which in English are indicated by the definite/indefinite article distinction.

The more interesting but tentative conclusion can be formulated as follows:

- (c) nouns with indefinite interpretation appear in sentence final position only (unless explicitly marked indefinite in some other way). This is why the pronoun *ten* is obligatory with a noun in this position if the noun is to be interpreted as definite. Nouns with definite interpretation appear in non-final positions (again, unless explicitly marked otherwise).

There is one somewhat unexpected consequence of the above discussion. Any Polish linguist would agree that the passive of (38)

(38) Mężczyzna popchnął kobietę.

is (39)

(39) Kobieta została popchnięta przez mężczyznę.

Consider, however, (38) and (39) when preceded by (40)

(40) Ulicą szedł szybko mężczyzna.

Only (38) is correct as a sequence sentence of (40). (39) is impossible. Consider

further (41) followed in succession by (38), (42) and (39) ((38) and (39) are repeated for convenience).

(41) Na ulicy stała kobieta.

(38) Mężczyzna popchnął kobietę.

(42) Kobietę popchnął mężczyzna.

(39) Kobieta została popchnięta przez mężczyznę.

It is immediately clear that (39) is the passive voice of (42) and not, as is generally assumed, of (38). I do not know what the passive of (38) is but I am sure it is not (39). This is in perfect agreement with conclusion c) above.

5. To complete the paper let me repeat the most important conclusions.

Definiteness and indefiniteness in Polish may be accomplished in at least three ways: pronouns, intonation, and word order. It has been shown that in sentences with normal intonation word order plays a role in anaphoric processes in that a noun in sentence initial position is marked definite, a noun in sentence final position is marked indefinite, regardless of the syntactic function.

It has also been demonstrated that contrastive stress determines the interpretation of nouns in terms of definiteness and indefiniteness. It has been found that whenever the stress falls on the noun the latter becomes ambiguous in three ways, when the stress does *not* fall on the noun the latter is definite, although the influence of word order here is quite possible.

A general conclusion is that word order plays a crucial role in anaphora with the exception when the noun is accompanied by the demonstrative pronoun *ten*. Whether a similar conclusion can be drawn with respect to other pronouns remains to be investigated.

Let me also indicate a few areas of further research:

- (a) other pronouns, their relation to word order and to the definite/indefinite distinction.
- (b) genericness, its relation to pronouns, intonation and word order.
- (c) word order in other structures, for example, in questions.
- (d) the effect of quantifiers on definiteness and indefiniteness in relation to word order, intonation and pronouns.
- (e) relations and dependencies between pronouns, intonation and word order from the point of view of the definite/indefinite distinction.

#### Examples

1. *Te najporządniejsze też robią w łazience bałagan.*  
(These tidiest (fem.) also make in bathroom mess)
2. *Byliśmy najpierw oglądać ten Erfurt.*  
(We were first to see this Erfurt)
3. *Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Ten milicjant siedział za to.*  
(He stole policeman (Dat) gun. This policeman was in prison for it)

4. Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Milicjant siedział za to.  
(He stole policeman (Dat) gun. Policeman was in prison for it)
5. Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Siedział za to ten milicjant.  
(He stole policeman (Dat) gun. Was in prison for it this policeman)
6. Wykradł milicjantowi rewolwer. Siedział za to milicjant.  
(He stole policeman (Dat) gun. Was in prison for it policeman)
7. John hit Bill and then George hit him.
8. W pokoju siedziała dziewczyna.  
(In room was sitting girl)
9. Wszedł chłopiec.  
(Entered boy)
10. Chłopiec wszedł.  
(Boy entered)
11. W pokoju siedział chłopiec.  
(In room was sitting boy)
12. Chłopiec wyszedł.  
(Boy went out)
13. Wyszedł chłopiec.  
(Went out boy)
14. Na podwórzu bawił się piłką chłopiec.  
(On courtyard was playing ball (Instr) boy)
15. Na podwórzu bawił się chłopiec z kotem.  
(On courtyard was playing boy with cat)
16. Na podwórzu bawił się kot piłką.  
(On courtyard was playing cat (Nom) ball (Instr))
17. Chłopiec dał kotu piłkę.  
(Boy gave cat (Dat) ball (Acc))
18. Chłopiec dał piłkę kotu.  
(Boy gave ball (Acc) cat (Dat))
19. Chłopiec piłkę dał kotu.  
(Boy ball (Acc) gave cat (Dat))
20. Chłopiec kotu dał piłkę.  
(Boy cat (Dat) gave ball (Acc))
21. Kotu chłopiec dał piłkę.  
(Cat (Dat) boy (Nom) gave ball (Acc))
22. Kotu piłkę dał chłopiec.  
(Cat (Dat) ball (Acc) gave boy (Nom))
23. Kotu dał chłopiec piłkę.  
(Cat (Dat) gave boy (Nom) ball (Acc))
24. Kotu dał chłopiec piłkę.  
(Cat (Dat) gave boy (Nom) ball (Acc))

25. Piłkę dał chłopiec kotu.  
(Ball (Acc) gave boy (Nom) cat (Dat))
26. Piłkę dał kotu chłopiec.  
(Ball (Acc) gave cat (Dat) boy (Nom))
27. Piłkę kotu dał chłopiec.  
(Ball (Acc) cat (Dat) gave boy (Nom))
28. Piłkę chłopiec dał kotu.  
(Ball (Acc) boy (Nom) gave cat (Dat))
29. Widziałem w oknie kobietę.  
(I saw in window woman (Acc))
30. Kobieta wyszła na ulicę.  
(Woman (Nom) went out on street)
31. Na ulicę wyszła kobieta.  
(On street went out woman (Nom))
32. Do domu, który obserwowałam, wszedł mężczyzna.  
(To house which I was watching went in man (Nom))
33. Mężczyzna wyszedł o 3:00.
34. O 3:00 wyszedł mężczyzna.  
(At 3:00 went out man (Nom))
35. Wyszedł mężczyzna o 3:00.  
(Went out man (Nom) at 3:00)
36. Mężczyzna szedł godzinę.  
(Man (Nom) walked hour)
37. Godzinę szedł mężczyzna.  
(Hour walked man (Nom))
38. Mężczyzna popchnął kobietę.  
(Man (Nom) pushed woman (Acc))
39. Kobieta została popchnięta przez mężczyznę.  
(Woman (Nom) was pushed by man (Acc))
40. Ulicą szedł szybko mężczyzna.  
(Street (Instr) was walking quickly man (Nom))
41. Na ulicy stała kobieta.  
(On street was standing woman (Nom))
42. Kobietę popchnął mężczyzna.  
(Woman (Acc) pushed man (Nom))

## REFERENCES

- Akmajian, A. and R. Jackendoff. 1968. Squib. Mimeographed. The M.I.T. Press.  
 Chomsky, N. 1969. *Deep structure, surface structure and semantic interpretation*.  
 Reproduced by the Indiana University Linguistic Club.  
 Pisarek, K. 1968. "Zaimek w polskim zdaniu. 2. Obserwacje przydawki zaimkowej". *Język polski XLVIII*. 12 - 33.  
 Szober, S. 1967 8th ed. *Gramatyka języka polskiego*. Warszawa: PWN.