

ENGLISH RESULTANT, AFFECTED AND EVENTIVE OBJECTS  
IN POLISH GRAMMAR

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1. Introduction

Some of the major contributions of Contrastive Studies are, on the one hand, the awareness that in many respects languages have to be described in their own terms, particularly at the level of structure, and, on the other hand, that, nevertheless, it is very instructive, and often revealing, to apply grammatical categories of one language to the analysis of another language. Instructive and revealing in that such descriptions may uncover unknown mechanisms and offer new explanations of so far unexplained phenomena in another language. Such an analysis very often requires interlevel considerations.

Since Polish grammars do not distinguish resultant, affective and eventive objects, we have the most interesting situation in Contrastive Analysis where a category in  $L_1$  does not have its equivalent in  $L_2$  (Krzyszowski 1976). Two questions that have to be asked in such a case are: a) whether it is possible to identify in Polish equivalents of English resultant, affective and eventive objects, and, more importantly, b) what purpose it could be used for, other than sub-categorization of the object category, as in English.

In an earlier paper (Szwedek 1998) I pointed out that some imperfective verbs in Polish can acquire perfective reading, if they are in the past tense, and are accompanied by an object (which I compared then to RESULTANT OBJECT as described by Quirk et al. 1985) which must have a "given", context dependent status.

The present brief study is devoted to the discussion of the relevance of resultant, affected and eventive objects as described for English (Quirk et al. 1985), and particularly some of their semantic features, in the interpretation of

Polish aspect, two apparently diverse phenomena. First, I briefly describe resultant, affected and eventive objects in English and in Polish, and try to identify their common semantic properties which could have some bearing on the interpretation of Polish aspect. I then discuss the nature of oppositions particularly with respect to Polish aspect, and finally mention some other, additional, factors, of semantic and textual nature, which have to be considered in such an interpretation.

### 2.1. Resultant and affected objects in English

Quirk et al. (1985) define a resultant object in the following way:

“A RESULTANT object [also ‘object of result’, or ‘effected object’] is an object whose referent exists only by virtue of the activity indicated by the verb:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) Baird invented <i>television</i> .      | (2) They are designing <i>a new car</i> . |
| (3) John has painted <i>a new picture</i> . | (4) She made <i>a fire</i> .              |
| (5) I’m writing <i>a letter</i> .           | (6) I baked <i>a cake</i> .”              |
- (Quirk et al. 1985: 749-750).

The distinction of a resultant object in those terms is a very subtle procedure, and requires further clarification:

With an agentive subject and an affected object, one may always capture part of the meaning of a clause (eg: *X destroyed Y*) by saying ‘X did something to Y’; but this does not apply to a resultant object: *Baird invented television* does not imply ‘Baird did something to television’. Contrast the affected object in *I’m digging the ground* with the resultant object in *I’m digging a hole* (Quirk et al. 1985: 750).

To clarify possible confusion, Quirk et al. provide contrasts between a resultant and affected object:

- | resultant object                   | affected object                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (7) <i>I baked a cake.</i>         | (8) <i>I baked some potatoes.</i>    |
| (9) <i>She cooked a meal.</i>      | (10) <i>She cooked some carrots.</i> |
| (11) <i>He’s frying an omelet.</i> | (12) <i>He’s frying an egg.</i>      |

The examples clearly support Quirk et al.’s definition that the resultant object owes its existence or state to the activity indicated by the verb. It seems that the common feature of the resultant and affected objects is the emergence, through the activity specified by the verb, of new, complete entities or new states thereof, by which they are understood as identifiable units. As the above examples show, in conjunction with the meaning of the Past Tense (gap between the completion of event/state and present time, and definite time at which event/state took place; cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 183), both resultant and affected

objects produce a default, completed/perfective interpretation, unless it is explicitly canceled by a progressive form or some other element of the context.

### 2.2. Eventive object in English

Eventive object is described by Quirk et al. (1985) as a frequent type of object which “generally takes the form of a deverbal noun preceded by a common verb of general meaning, such as *do, give, have, make, take*. This eventive object ... is semantically an extension of the verb and bears the major part of the meaning. Compare:

- |   |
|---|
| (13) They <i>are arguing</i> . [verb only]                          |
| (14) They <i>are having an argument</i> . [verb + eventive object]” |
- (Quirk et al. 1985: 750).

Quirk et al. further remark that “Some noun heads in eventive objects are not derived from verbs. For example there is no verb *effort*, although *an effort* is eventive in *I’m making an effort ...*” (Quirk et al. 1985: 751). Similarly in *do one’s homework, have a game, have a haircut, have/take a bath*, etc.

As in constructions with resultant and affected objects, unless marked for progressive aspect, eventive object is interpreted as completed/perfective.

- |                                |                                    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (15) I <i>took a bath</i> .    | (18) I <i>was taking a bath</i> .  |
| (16) I <i>made a mistake</i> . | (19) I <i>was doing a report</i> . |
| (17) I <i>did a report</i> .   |                                    |

A possible explanation of this completed/perfective sense of (15), (16) and (17) is that the events represented by a nominal form have a singular character, limited in time, allowing for their interpretation as entities (possibly through the “events are objects” metaphor; cf. Lakoff – Johnson 1980: 30). In conjunction with the meaning of Simple Past as described by Quirk et al. (1985: 183), the whole structure carries the meaning of completion.

### 3. Resultant, affected and eventive objects in Polish

In Polish the situation is slightly more complex, since completion is overtly signaled by the Perfective form of verbs, most commonly expressed by prefixes, sometimes a different root. This distinction between non-completion and completion, that is, imperfective and perfective aspect, can be exemplified by the following pairs of sentences:

Imperfective	Perfective
resultant object	
(20) <i>Janek malował obraz.</i> John painted picture 'John was painting a picture.'	(21) <i>Janek namalował obraz.</i> John Pref-painted picture 'John (has) painted a picture.'
affected object	
(22) <i>Piekłem kartofle.</i> Baked-I potatoes 'I was baking potatoes.'	(23) <i>Upiekłem kartofle.</i> Pref-baked-I potatoes 'I (have) baked potatoes.'
eventive object	
(24) <i>Brałem kąpiel.</i> Took-I bath 'I was taking bath.'	(25) <i>Wziąłem kąpiel.</i> Took-I bath (different root) 'I took a bath.'

It should be pointed out, however, that while in English the opposition is between marked-progressive vs. unmarked-nonprogressive (I disregard here the Perfect Tense with the "current relevance" meaning; cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 190), in Polish the opposition is between marked-perfective vs. unmarked-imperfective. Thus the English unmarked-nonprogressive (Simple Past)

(7) *I baked a cake.*

is by default interpreted as completed by virtue of the past tense of the verb expressing an activity whose product is the object (hence its specific reading), and has to be translated in Polish by the Perfective form of the verb. Since, however, resultant, affected and eventive objects also occur with Imperfective forms, a question arises as to the result of a potential conflict between a completed state of the object (resultant, affected or eventive) and a non-completed (imperfective) verb.

At first glance nothing much seems to be happening, in that the imperfective meaning is quite clearly a dominating factor, leaving the semantics of the object ineffective. This is borne out by the following examples (20), (22) and (24) which leave no doubt as to their imperfective interpretation. As, however, I remarked in my earlier work (Szwedek 1976: 137-138), there are cases in which imperfective verbs receive perfective interpretation, for example:

(26) *Ten\* obraz\* malował Janek.*  
This-ACC picture-ACC painted John-NOM  
'John painted this picture.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Forms marked with an asterisk represent Accusative which for those pronouns and nouns happens to be the same as Nominative.

- (27) *Te\* kartofle\* piekłem godzinę temu.*  
These-ACC potatoes-ACC baked-I hour ago  
'I baked these potatoes an hour ago.'
- (28) *Kąpiel\* brałem rano.*  
Bath-ACC took-I morning  
'I took a bath in the morning.'

The above examples clearly show that the "completed"/finished status of the object cancels the imperfective reading and changes it into perfective. A question arises why this is possible. To answer this question we should examine both the status of the imperfective – perfective aspect opposition, as well as properties of the object.

#### 4. Aspect in Polish

Recent studies (Bogusławski 1981; Karolak 1992) show that aspect in Polish is a much more complex category than a simple distinction into unmarked imperfective and marked perfective would lead us to believe. Both Bogusławski and Karolak agree that, as Karolak put it: relations between imperfective and perfective verbs are very complex, and that "lack of correlation between perfective and imperfective verbs turned out to be more systematic and common than had initially been thought." (Karolak 1992: 94).

It is worth recalling at that point that, as Jakobson pointed out as early as in 1932, the unmarked – marked opposition is not symmetrical. He specifically claimed that

- a) The two members of the opposition are not equal in their meanings.
- b) The (smaller) member A of an opposition has a definite, single, positive categorical meaning.
- c) The other member (unmarked) of the opposition does not signal whether the categorical meaning of the marked member is present or not.
- d) The categorical meaning of the marked member is described as real in the marked structure, and as possible in the unmarked structure.
- e) The meaning of the unmarked category depends on the context or situation.

Applied to the category of Polish aspect the most crucial of the above points would get the following formulation:

- The (smaller) member of the opposition has a definite, single, positive categorical meaning of perfectiveness.
- The other, unmarked imperfective member of the opposition does not signal whether the perfective meaning (of the marked member) is present or not.

- The perfective meaning (of the marked member) is described as real in the marked structure, and as possible in the unmarked structure.
- The meaning of the unmarked, imperfective category depends on the context or situation.

That is, the unmarked meaning is not in fact imperfective in the sense antonymous to perfective, as the term would suggest, but simply unmarked, open to interpretation (cf. also Twaddell 1965: 6). It is generally true, however, of human categorization that, when a certain meaning is isolated and becomes marked, the remaining part is commonly perceived as its opposition in the antonymous sense. A tendency for binary categorization can be seen, for example, in Hegel's claim (*Logic*) that of all relations, the most universal is that of contrast or opposition, as well as Dressler's remark about "The general tendency for binary relations" (1994: 99; with reference to an earlier, 1990 paper). It is also implied in Bogusławski's (1981) words directly related to aspect: "... it is misleading to talk about their "unmarkedness" without qualification: they are far from being substituted for PFs in a mechanical fashion." (Bogusławski 1981: 37), where, in my opinion, "substitution in a mechanical fashion" implies symmetry. But as Jakobson points out, the unmarked member of such an asymmetrical opposition is an open category, neutral with respect to the marked member's meaning, and thus not excluding the possibility of the whole sentence to have perfective interpretation. It also means that the default imperfective meaning can be overridden by some non-neutral, relevant meaning represented by other elements in the sentence.

The meaning that overrides the imperfective meaning in the examples under discussion seems to be located in the object. But it is not simply the semantics of the object (resultant, affected or eventive) that overrides the imperfective meaning. In (20), which has a clearly imperfective interpretation,

(20) *Janek malował obraz.*

the object noun is in final position and stressed, and as such constitutes the "new" information segment of the sentence (for details, cf., e.g., Szwedek 1986), thus corresponding to the indefinite article + noun in English. In a free word order language like Polish, we can change (20) to (26):

(26) *Ten\* obraz\* malował Janek.*

This-ACC picture-ACC painted John-NOM  
'John (has) painted this picture.'

According to the rules of word order in Polish, sentence initial position, and more importantly, absence of stress on a noun signal its "given"/context dependent information status which in (26) is strengthened by the demonstrative

pronoun, very often comparable in its function to the definite article. It seems that such a status clearly indicates some completed state of the object which imposes a perfective interpretation on the sentence.

It must be added, however, at this point, that "completed" objects do not always impose the perfective interpretation on the verb in the favourable conditions just described. For example, the imperfective verb *czytać* 'to read', even when accompanied by a completed object *książkę*, and with appropriate other signals (lack of stress, presence of demonstrative pronoun), does not acquire perfective reading. Compare the following examples (capital letters indicate the place of the sentence stress):

(27) *Wczoraj czytałem KSIĄŻKĘ.*  
Yesterday read-I book-ACC  
'I was reading a BOOK yesterday.'

(28) *Książkę czytałem WCZORAJ.*  
Book-ACC read-I yesterday  
'I was reading a book YESTERDAY.'

(29) *Tę książkę czytałem WCZORAJ.*  
This-ACC book-ACC read-I yesterday  
'I was READING this book yesterday.'

(27) is a simple description of an activity I was engaged in yesterday and the meaning of the verb is clearly imperfective. (28) is contrastive, and could be preceded, for example, by

(30) *Poczytaj sobie książkę.*  
Read yourself book.  
'Go read a book.'

followed by

(31) *... a dziś będę czytał gazetę.*  
and today will-I read paper-ACC  
'... and today I will read a paper.'

Native speakers most frequently interpreted (28) as imperfective, probably due to both, the preceding and following, clearly imperfective context, and perhaps the newness/indefiniteness (in this contrastive structure) of the object.

Native speakers on whom that sentence (28) was tested, were not sure whether the activity was completed or not, but most of them were inclined to interpret it as imperfective, due perhaps to the following clearly imperfective context.

## 5. Conclusions

The present short study has shown once again that, indeed, cross-language and cross-level analyses may reveal new possibilities of interpretation of linguistic phenomena.

In particular it has been shown that

- a. semantic subcategories of resultant, affective and eventive objects in English are also relevant for Polish;
- b. as the initial observation assumed, some Polish verbs of imperfective form may, in certain conditions, acquire a perfective interpretation. Those conditions were shown to be:
  - i. presence of resultant, affective or eventive objects (with some restrictions discussed in the paper) which introduce a new complete referent or a new completed state thereof.
  - ii. the object must have a status of "given" information: in Polish the relevant signals are: demonstrative pronoun preceding the noun, sentence initial position of the noun, absence of sentence stress on the noun (cf. Szwedek 1986 for detailed discussion of the relations among the three signals);
  - iii. as examples show, the verb must be in Past Tense form.

Once again, cross-language, English – Polish analysis and cross-level considerations, textual – given/new information, semantic subcategorization of the object, and tense form, helped illuminate some difficult problems of a complex phenomenon of aspect in Polish.

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