

Polish aspect as eventuality centering

MARIA BITTNER

Abstract

Most research on Polish aspect has so far focused on the morphology of perfective-imperfective alternations and on the lexical semantics, primarily the relation to so-called “lexical aspect” (i.e. eventuality type; see e.g. Agrell 1908, Czochralski 1975, Młynarczyk 2004, Aalstein and Blackburn 2009). In this talk, I build on this research (esp. the last two references), but extend the empirical scope of the inquiry to discourse.

I propose that, in relation to discourse reference, grammatical aspect features of Polish verbs (imperfective $\backslash I$ or perfective $\backslash P$, e.g. *pisa-* ‘write $\backslash I$ ’ or *napisa-* ‘write $\backslash P$ ’) play a similar role as grammatical gender features of Polish nouns (masculine $\backslash M$, feminine $\backslash F$, or neuter $\backslash N$, e.g. *pisarz* ‘writer $\backslash M$ ’, *pisarka* ‘writer $\backslash F$ ’, or *pismo* ‘journal $\backslash N$ ’). That is, they are part of a grammatical centering system that determines the resolution of attention-guided discourse anaphora to currently salient antecedents (see e.g. Webber 1988, Stone and Hardt 1999, Bittner 2001, 2011, on attention-guided anaphora across domains; Kamp 1979, 1981, Kamp and Rohrer 1983, on the role of an inflectional perfective-imperfective distinction in temporal discourse reference in French).

For Polish verbs, the grammatical centering system I propose consists of the *aspect feature* of the verbal base ($\backslash I$ or $\backslash P$), the *tense inflection* (-PRS, -PST, or -FUT), and the *subject inflection* (e.g. -1SF, -3PM). These three grammatical elements saturate the eventuality argument, the reference time argument, and the subject argument, respectively. In each case, they fill in an anaphor referring to a top-ranked discourse entity of the relevant type (i.e. eventuality, time, or individual). And in each case, a discourse entity counts as top-ranked, if it is either itself highest in the relevant hierarchy, or is the value of some universal algebraic operation (e.g. *consequent-state-of*, *time-of*, *agent-of*) applied to a top-ranked event (e.g. the speech act).