

POLYSEMIOUS NATURE OF THE POLISH MARKER *SIEBIE*

Introduction

In the Polish language there are two markers², *siebie* and *się*, which are typically associated with reflexivity. However, their actual usage goes far beyond coding reflexivity, no matter how broad definition of reflexivity we would assume. This paper focuses on the range of uses of the marker *siebie*³. We want to analyze its polysemous nature and reveal motivating links between various apparently unrelated uses that are in fact not reflexive. The study is couched in a Cognitive Grammar framework and uses notions typical of this area of linguistics.

1. What is a prototypical reflexive?

One of the first attempts to characterise reflexives in syntactico-semantic terms comes from Faltz (1977:3). He defines the archetypal reflexive context as follows: "The archetypal reflexive context consists of a simple clause expressing a two-participant predication in which one participant is a human Agent or Experiencer and the other a Patient, and in which two participants refer to the same entity". More recently, but in the same spirit, Kemmer (1993) discusses reflexive constructions as modifications of the canonical event model⁴. While the canonical event model which underlies transitive constructions involves two participants (the human

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² Throughout the paper we use the term 'markers' and not personal pronouns because of three reasons. Firstly, the status of the two forms, especially of *się*, is uncertain in the Polish literature of the subject. *Się* has been treated as a syllable (Bogusławski 1986), as a personal pronoun (Grzegorzycykowa et al. 1984), as an independent lexeme (Saloni 1975), or as a derivational morpheme (Wilczewska 1966, Szymańska 2000). Secondly, as this analysis focuses on the semantics of *siebie*, its pronominal status is irrelevant for this paper. Thirdly, because we want to cover all senses of *siebie*, many of them non-reflexive, calling *siebie* a reflexive pronoun would be a misnomer.

³ An analysis of senses of *się* is the subject of a separate paper, soon to appear.

⁴ The canonical event model is presented in Hopper and Thompson (1980), Givón (1984), Talmy (1985) and Langacker (1991).

Agent acting volitionally and exerting physical force on an inanimate entity, i.e. the Patient), some kind of energy transfer between the participants, and affectedness of the Patient as a result of that action, the reflexive situation modifies the canonical event in the way participants are construed. In reflexive constructions the Agent and Patient are co-referential, i.e. they are conflated in a single referential entity, which makes the Patient human and definite. As we can see, for both Faltz and Kemmer, co-reference is a defining characteristic of reflexivity. Frajzygier (2000) adds subject affectedness as a feature of reflexives, especially those realised by the marker *się*.

Kemmer's idea that reflexive constructions constitute a modification of the canonical event is very valuable because it shows the continuum between transitive, reflexive and intransitive constructions. However, this view leads us to assume that the prototype for the reflexive would involve two, and not more, participant roles, because of its affinity to the canonical event. This is the line of reasoning found in Kemmer when she classifies constructions involving more than two participants such as *He bought himself a book* as coding the indirect reflexive situation type. They are seen as further departures from both canonical event and reflexive prototype. This approach may be justified for English as even an informal count⁵ reveals that 40 per cent of all reflexive constructions meet this description. Unfortunately, a surprisingly small number of the uses of *siebie*, such as in (1)

- (1) Tomek ogolił siebie.
Tom shaved himself.

can be explained by this definition (only 2.7 per cent). We seem to face a problem: if we were to treat such constructions as prototypical, then we would expect them to be more frequent, but if we are guided by the frequency of occurrence, then we should extend our understanding of the reflexive prototype.

If we consider the constructions in (2) we can see that they have all the characteristics of the prototypical reflexive apart from the fact that more than two participants are involved: not only the agent (the sentence-referent) and patient (*siebie*-referent) but also some third participant.

- (2) a) Kupiłem sobie książkę.
I bought a book for myself.
b) Ewa kupiła sobie tę książkę.
Eve bought herself a book.
c) Ewa upiekła sobie tort.
Eve made a cake for herself.
d) Górscy wystawili sobie piękny dom.
The Górski family built a beautiful house.

⁵ For the purpose of this study we carried out an informal count on a sample of about 200 English and Polish reflexive sentences.

- e) Ewa wynajęła sobie pokój w centrum.
Eve rented a house in the centre.
- f) Ewa już zarezerwowała sobie bilet.
Eve has already booked a ticket.
- g) Zamówiłem sobie zupę.
I've ordered some soup.
- h) Prezydent przyznał sobie najwyższe uprawnienia.
The President granted himself the highest powers.

In these sentences the referent of the sentence subject (i.e. subject-referent) and the referent of the marker *siebie* (i.e. *siebie*-referent)⁶, corresponding to the trajector and landmark of the relation, are the same real-life entity; they are co-referential. The subject-referent is a human being who initiates the event and is somehow affected by the action. In our count such constructions constituted 27 per cent of all uses of *siebie*. All in all, in the face of linguistic data, we believe that the prototypical sense of *siebie* is exemplified both by the sentence in (1) and in (2). Although such examples cover a substantive number of uses of *siebie*, there are many more which show senses different from these discussed above.

2. Non-prototypical uses of the marker *siebie*

In our analysis of further uses of *siebie* we need to address the following questions:

- i) Are the subject-referent and *siebie*-referent the same real-life entity?⁷
- ii) Is the subject-referent a human being?
- iii) Is the subject-referent affected by the action profiled in the sentence?
- iv) Is there energy transfer between the subject-referent and *siebie*-referent?

Let us first discuss the group of examples in (3):

- (3) (a) Ona nie lubi siebie.
She doesn't like herself.
- (b) On nienawidzi siebie.
He hates himself.
- (c) Ci egoiści kochają tylko siebie⁸.
Those selfish people love only themselves.

⁶ We prefer to talk about subject-referent instead of agent, because we find it less ambiguous, especially that not all referents of subjects function as agents.

⁷ It appears that in the study of polysemy of *siebie* it is not sufficient to discuss co-reference as such but we have to consider the nature of co-reference as well. The case of image reflexives demonstrates that *siebie*-referent can be co-referential not with the subject-referent, but with its broadly-understood image.

⁸ In (3c) the number of real-life participants cannot be concluded from the sentence and technically it could be any number of people. However, if we relate these constructions

In the sentences in (3), the subject-referent and *siebie*-referent are the same real-life entity, the subject-referent is a human being functioning as the source of the action and he becomes affected as a result of the action. This is what these constructions share with the prototypical sense of *siebie*. However, they all involve mental verbs or verbs of perception. As a result, the subject-referent does not in fact initiate an action, but is instead involved in mental process or contemplating his emotions. Obviously, there is no energy transfer either.

The next group of examples is also devoid of energy transfer.

- (4) (a) Popatrzył przed siebie.
He looked ahead.
(b) Patrzę za siebie w przeszłość.
I look back into the past.
(c) Ruszył przed siebie.
He moved on.
(d) Rzucił za siebie.
He threw (something) behind.
(f) Dom zapadł się w sobie.
The house collapsed.
- (5) (a) Położył książkę z dala od siebie.
He put the book far from himself.
(b) Ma szklankę wody blisko siebie.
He has a glass of water next to him/himself.
(c) Obok siebie Jan zobaczył węża.
Near himself John saw a snake.

In these sentences the subject-referent functions as a reference point in space or time⁹. The subject-referent and *siebie*-referent are the same real-life entity, but the subject-referent does not have to be human or even animate. Because of the nature of the relation (spatial or temporal location) this use of *siebie* does not involve affectedness of the subject-referent. Again, as in the case of prototypical senses, the number of event participants is irrelevant. The sentences in (5) clearly

to the canonical event model, then what counts are semantic roles performed by participants and not their absolute numbers. Thus, even if we assume that the sentence in (3c) refers to a group of ten people, they all perform the role corresponding to that of the agent in the canonical event.

⁹ On the basis of the English language, Deane (1993:216) maintains that such examples are rare and usually have idiomatic or metaphorical meaning. According to him, this characteristic is a consequence of the pointlessness of locating an object with respect to itself. The evidence of the Polish language contradicts this claim. Sentences of the type given in (4) and (5) are fairly common. What is more, the subject-referent, whether animate or not, seems to make a perfect reference point because of its salience.

demonstrate the reference-point function of *siebie* even though there are more than two participants involved in the event.

The next groups of examples can be called the “removal” sense of *siebie*:

- (6) (a) Ewa usunęła sobie piegi.
Eve removed her freckles.
(b) Odmawiał sobie wszystkiego dla dobra dzieci.
He denied himself everything for the good of the children.
(c) Ewa odebrała sobie życie.
Eve took her own life.
- (7) (a) Aby nie dopuścić do rozprzestrzenienia gangreny Steven musiał obciąć sobie nogę.
To avoid the spread of the infection, Steven had to amputate his leg.
(b) Indianki Navajo na znak żałoby obcinały sobie mały palec u ręki.
The Navajo women cut off their little fingers as a sign of mourning.
- (8) (a) Rąbiąc drzewo uciął sobie palec.
While cutting wood he cut off his finger.
(b) Ewa zwichnęła sobie nogę.
Eve has sprained her ankle.
(c) Tomasz złamał sobie rękę.
Tom has broken his hand.

The sentences in (6)-(8) are close to the prototype in that they all display subject-referent and *siebie*-referent co-reference and they all feature human subject-referent. However, as Rudzka-Ostyn observed in her analysis of Dative in Polish, in all such sentences the result of the action performed by the agent is a removal of an object from the domain of *siebie*-referent rather than introducing it into its domain. Thus the referent of the reflexive becomes the recipient of volitional deprivation of an object (2000:156). What is more, while the subject-referent in (6) and (7) intentionally initiates the action, in (8) the results of the action initiated by subject-referent and its effects on *siebie*-referent are not intentional. They appear to be a side-effect of what the subject-referent did and are usually undesirable for the affected entity¹⁰.

The difference between sentences in (7) and (8) deserves more attention. Technically speaking, the examples in (8) depart further from the prototypical sense of *siebie* as the activity is unintentional. However, due to the content of such sentences, i.e. some harm coming to the agent as a result of his actions, the inter-

¹⁰ For Kemmer, who calls such sentences “body-part reflexives” the motivation for the use of the reflexive marker in this context is the fact that “the body-part possessor is also a recipient of the action of the verb by virtue of being intimately connected to the affected body part” (1993: 77).

pretation of the sentence as describing an accident is the default one. As we can see in (7), if a sentence is to mean an intentional harm, then full context must be provided.

The group of examples in (9) may be conveniently called the “image *siebie*”.

- (9)
- (a) Jan usłyszał siebie (na taśmie).
John heard himself (on the tape).
 - (b) Jan zobaczył siebie na zdjęciu/w lustrze.
John saw himself in the picture/ in the mirror.
 - (c) Nie nocuję dzisiaj u siebie.
I won't be staying home tonight.
 - (d) On nie jest dzisiaj sobą.
He is not himself today.
 - (e) On wyszedł z siebie z gniewu.
He was beside himself with anger.
 - (f) On doszedł do siebie.
He came round.

What distinguishes “image *siebie*” is the nature of co-reference. In all the constructions discussed up to this point we observed that *siebie*-referent and the subject-referent were the same real-life person (assuming the human agent). In (9) we also have the co-reference link but it obtains between *siebie*-referent and some kind of representation standing metonymically for the subject-referent. The provided examples show various kinds of representation or image: in (9a) the voice of a person stands for the person, in (9b) it is the picture, in (9c) it is the place of living, in (9d), (9e) and (9f) the *siebie*-referent is an image of a person acting in what passes for normal or conscious. (9e) and (9f) are particularly interesting, because they not only exemplify the “image” constructions but also the “reference-point” constructions because the image of a person (and not the real person) functions as a reference point and is incorporated in conventional metaphors of emotion based on the JOURNEY metaphor. As in the prototype, the subject-referent is a human being either intentionally initiating an action (as in (9a)-(9c)), or construed as if he did (as in (9d)-(9f)).

The last two groups of sentences present examples which might seem puzzling if we considered the marker *siebie* as exclusively coding reflexivity. Consider:

- (10)
- (a) Dzieci czytają sobie książki.
The kids are reading books.
 - (b) Zjadłem sobie obiad.
I had dinner.
 - (c) Górszy jadą w góry. – Niech tam sobie jadą.
The Górski are going to the mountains. – Let them go.
 - (d) Żył sobie raz bardzo bogaty kupiec.
There was once a rich merchant.

- (11) (a) Jak się czujesz? Tak sobie.
How are you? So-so.
(b) ...taki sobie film.
The film was so-so.
(c) Dziewczyna niczego sobie.
This girl. She's some chick!

Apart from co-reference between the subject-referent and *siebie*-referent, these sentences bear little resemblance to the prototypical reflexive use of the marker *siebie*. Firstly, no transfer of energy is involved, even though the marker occurs in its Dative form. While some of the examples can be paraphrased into periphrastic Dative in which the direction of the transfer is made explicit, most of them cannot, e.g. *jadą dla siebie (lit. they go for themselves), *żył dla siebie (lit. he lived for himself), etc. Secondly, the marker *siebie* (in its Dative form *sobie*) is optional in all these examples: the sentences would be equally grammatical if *siebie* were removed, though their meaning would be slightly altered. This is because *siebie* does not fill the role of the second participant of the event, especially that some of the sentences involve transitive verbs with no second participant. But if *sobie* is optional, what is its contribution?

Sentences of the type in (10), when contrasted with parallel sentences without the marker *sobie*, reveal the meaning of a decreased degree of subject involvement in the sense of Maldonado (2000). Consider:

- (12) (a) Ona pije herbatę.
She's drinking tea.
(b) Ona pije sobie herbatę.
She's just drinking tea.

Rudzka-Ostyn (2000) calls such uses of the reflexive pronoun “expressive *sobie*” and points out that the use of *sobie* expresses the speaker’s lack of respect towards the action in which the speaker is involved. We believe that Rudzka-Ostyn rightly finds the motivation for this use of *sobie* in the role it has in the Dative construction. She analysed different uses of the Dative marker *sobie* using Langacker’s notion of sphere of control. The prototype of the Dative construction involves transfer of an object from the subject to the referent of *sobie*. As a result, the object enters the sphere of control of the recipient. The use of the marker in the Dative construes the experience of its referent as limited to his own sphere of control, which leads us to assume that he has no power or will to extend his own domain. This meaning of confinement is especially pronounced in the expression *niczego sobie* as in (11c) where it carries the meaning “good within the limits of its own category or domain”, the domain being personal or social. Such limitation to some domain can be interpreted as a manifestation of being average, and average does not obtain general respect. This meaning is highlighted in the use of *tak sobie* “so, so” in (11a). *Sobie* in (10d) has the meaning of locating the participant in some space. The space is not precisely identified but the use of the marker *sobie*

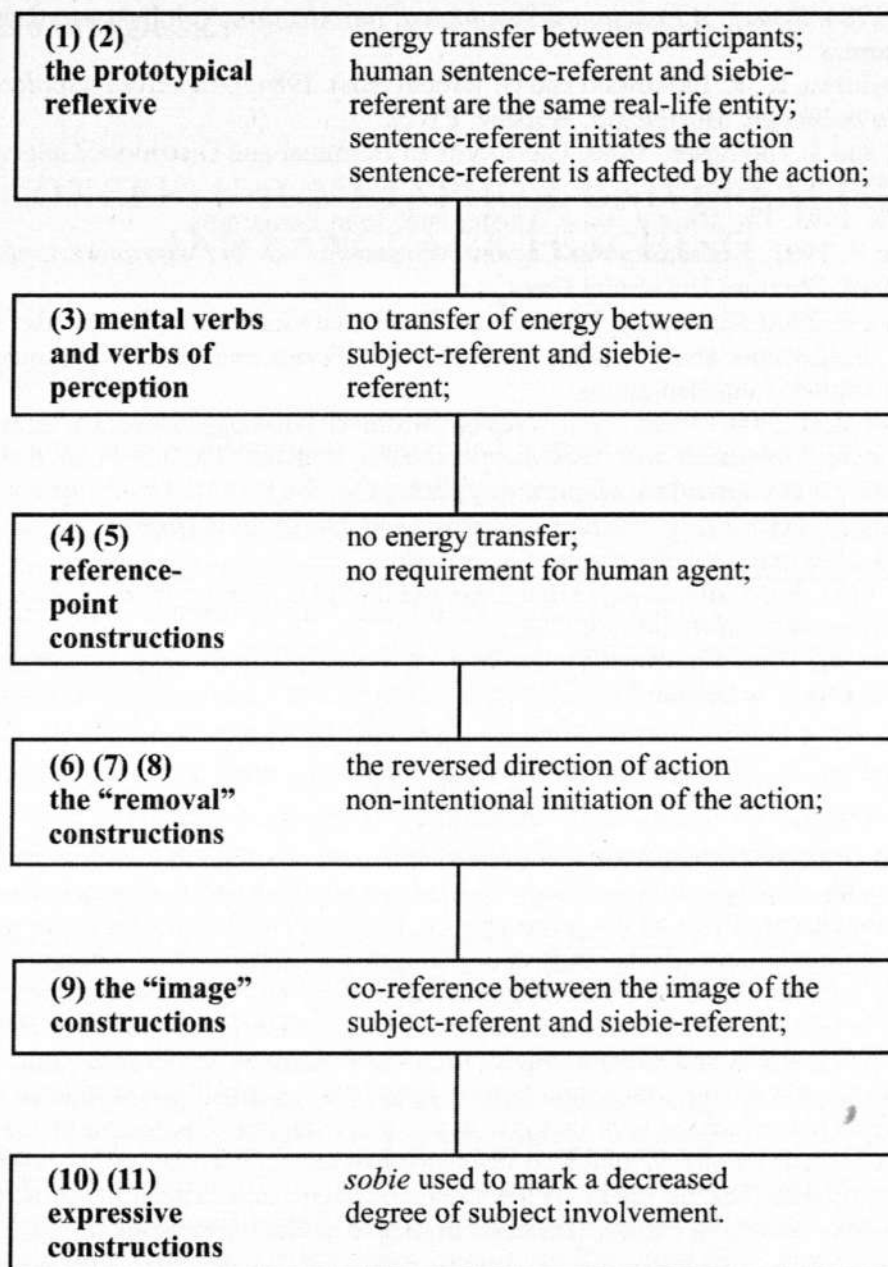
construes it as part of the speaker's sphere of control and hence familiarity, creating a friendly and informal atmosphere.

The use of the marker *siebie* in the expressive function is not rare in actual usage, though we believe that personal preferences and real-life situations referred to by the speaker influence the frequency of occurrence. In an informal count this use constituted about 8 per cent of all uses of the marker *siebie*.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that the various uses of the marker *siebie* constitute a semantic chain of related senses. The prototypical sense of *siebie* involves its function as a reflexive pronoun coding co-reference between human subject-referent and *siebie*-referent. Although *siebie* is most often associated with this sense, there are a number of other uses, which depart from the prototype to a greater or lesser degree. These non-prototypical uses include:

- i) the use of *siebie* with mental verbs and verbs of perception with no transfer of energy between subject-referent and *siebie*-referent;
- ii) the use of *siebie* as a reference-point with no energy transfer and no requirement for human agent;
- iii) the "removal" constructions, with the reversed direction of action and, in some cases, non-intentional initiation of the action;
- iv) the "image" constructions, in which co-reference obtains not between *siebie*-referent and the subject-referent but the image of the subject-referent;
- v) expressive constructions, in which *siebie* is used to mark a decreased degree of subject involvement.



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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the sense of the Polish marker *siebie*. An analysis of linguistic data reveals that the actual meanings of *siebie* constitute a radial category. The senses of *siebie* are clustered around the prototype, i.e. the use of *siebie* as a reflexive pronoun, coding co-reference between the referent of the sentence subject and the referent of *siebie*, and energy transfer obtaining between the participants of the event. Other senses include: the use of *siebie* with mental verbs and verbs of perception with no transfer of energy between subject-referent and *siebie*-referent; the use of *siebie* as a reference-point with no energy transfer and no requirement for human agent; the "removal" constructions, with the reversed direction of action and, in some cases, non-intentional initiation of the action; the "image" constructions, in which co-reference obtains not between *siebie*-referent and the subject-referent but the image of the subject-referent; and expressive constructions, in which *siebie* is used to mark a decreased degree of subject involvement.