

## The reflexive impersonal construction in Polish

In the study of argument linking, two kinds of alternations or operations are commonly distinguished under one guise or another: *morphosyntactic* alternations and *morphosemantic* alternations (see e.g. Ackerman and Moore 2001, p. 5). A morphosyntactic alternation – the paragon example is the passive voice – does not affect meaning and so is considered to be a purely syntactic ‘relinking’ of arguments, whereas a morphosemantic alternation both affects meaning and involves a relinking of arguments. It is safe to say that morphosyntactic alternations are generally better understood than morphosemantic alternations.

A possible example of a morphosemantic alternation is the reflexive impersonal construction in Polish (Kibort 2001, sect. 7.4, Ackerman and Moore 2001, sects. 6.2.2–6.2.3, Kibort 2008, sect. 5.2), which applies to both transitive and intransitive verbs:

- (1) a. Budowało się szkołę. (Kibort 2008, (53))  
built.3SG.NEUT REFL school.ACC  
‘A/The school was built.’  
b. Tutaj się tańczyło. (Kibort 2001, (49))  
here REFL danced.3SG.NEUT  
‘There was dancing here.’

Observe that in (1) what would be the subject argument in the active voice is unexpressed, the verb shows singular neuter agreement, and the object argument (if there is one) has accusative case-marking (just as it would in the active voice). What would be the subject argument in the active voice may sometimes be realized as an indirect object argument with dative case-marking in the reflexive impersonal construction:

- (2) a. Łatwo się kapralowi biło Piotra. (Kibort 2001, (51))  
easily REFL corporal.DAT beat.3SG.NEUT Peter.acc  
‘The corporal found it easy to beat Peter.’  
b. A mi się właśnie fajnie czytało! (internet)  
and I.DAT REFL in.fact well read.3SG.NEUT  
‘And I in fact had a good read!’

Ackerman and Moore 2001, sects. 6.2.2–6.2.3 propose what may be the most explicit analysis of the reflexive impersonal construction, arguing that it is a morphosemantic alternation. (That it is a morphosemantic alternation is a view also taken by Kibort (2001, p. 181) but curiously not by Kibort (2008, p. 274), who treats it as a morphosyntactic alternation, diverging from her earlier view, though without saying why.) Ackerman and Moore’s idea is that this construction exhibits (what they call) *attenuated agentivity*, which basically means that what would be the subject argument in the active voice is less agent-like in the reflexive impersonal construction (whether it is left unexpressed or expressed as an indirect object with dative case-marking). They make use of Dowty’s (1991) proto-role properties for Proto-Agent and Proto-Patient, proposing (p. 152) essentially the following analysis for the alternation between *czytać* ‘read’ and *czytać się* ‘read REFL’:

- (3) a. czytać ‘read’:  $\langle x_1, x_2 \rangle$ ,  
where  $x_1$  has the Proto-Agent property VOLITIONAL (and may have other Proto-Agent properties) and is linked to SUBJ, and  $x_2$  has various Proto-Patient properties and is linked to DIRECT OBJECT.  
b. czytać się ‘read REFL’:  $\langle x_1, x_2 \rangle$ ,  
where  $x_1$  lacks the Proto-Agent property VOLITIONAL (but may have other Proto-Agent properties) and has the Proto-Patient property CAUSALLY AFFECTED and is

linked to INDIRECT OBJECT, and  $x_2$  has various Proto-Patient properties and is linked to DIRECT OBJECT.

It is clear that, in the ‘active frame’ in (3a), the argument  $x_1$  is volitional and not causally affected, whereas in the ‘reflexive impersonal frame’ in (3b), it is causally affected and lacks volition. The argument  $x_2$  remains constant in both frames.

Ackerman and Moore offer the unacceptability of the following sentence as evidence that the argument  $x_1$  lacks volitionality:

- (4) \*Jankowi czytało się tę książkę  
John.DAT read.3SG.NEUT REFL this.ACC book.ACC  
dobrowolnie/celowo/chętnie. (Ackerman and Moore 2001, (16b), p. 152)  
voluntarily/on.purpose/willingly

If  $x_1$  (linked to *Jankowi*) in (4) were volitional, we would expect adverbs expressing intentionality to be compatible with the reflexive impersonal verb, but this is not the case, which suggests that  $x_1$  lacks intentionality.

There are two difficulties with Ackerman and Moore’s account, a theoretical one and an empirical one. The theoretical difficulty is that on their analysis, the relation between the active frame and the reflexive impersonal frame is not semantically monotonic. This is because either the property VOLITIONAL is eliminated from the reflexive impersonal frame or the property CAUSALLY AFFECTED is eliminated from the active frame. The choice of a non-monotonic analysis should be a last resort, even in the case of a morphosemantic alternation.

The empirical difficulty is that it is hard to see how the argument  $x_1$  should always lack volition. For example,  $x_1$  may be an argument of the reflexive impersonal verb *chcieć się* ‘want REFL’ and control the volitional subject argument of an infinitive:

- (5) Chciało się wyjechać. (Kibort 2008, (61))  
wanted.3SG.NEUT REFL leave.INF  
‘There was eagerness to leave.’

As for the unacceptability of (4), a plausible alternative hypothesis is that adverbs expressing intentionality require the argument that they modify to be linked to a nominative case-marked noun phrase. Observe that adverbs expressing the lack of intentionality are also not good in this construction, though they should be compatible with a lack of volition:

- (6) \*Jankowi czytało się tę książkę niechcący/mimo woli.  
John.DAT read.3SG.NEUT REFL this.ACC book.ACC unintentionally/involuntarily

An alternative account of the reflexive impersonal construction does *not* revoke volition from the argument  $x_1$  but rather *adds* the information that  $x_1$  is an Experiencer, thus  $x_1$  is both an Agent and an Experiencer. This combination of roles is awkward in thematic role approaches and even in a proto-role approach if Experiencer is defined as ‘sentience without volition or causation’ precisely because Agent entails volition (Dowty 1991, p. 577). Ackerman and Moore’s proposal that  $x_1$  is causally affected is more promising but also too general because  $x_1$  need not even be sentient in order to be causally affected. I suggest the introduction of a new property for Proto-Patient that aims to capture the notion of Experiencer needed here, namely, ‘undergoes emotional change of state’, which is more specific than Dowty’s ‘undergoes change of state’, which is intended for physical change of states. Moreover, the property ‘undergoes emotional change of state’ should be understood as (aspectually) an activity rather than an accomplishment. The kind of emotional change of state is determined by the kind of event described. For example, in (2a), it is the emotional experience of beating Peter, and in (2b), it is the emotional experience of reading whatever was contextually salient.