

Polish reflexive pronoun *sobie*: understanding the ‘ethical’ uses

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The aim of the present study is to determine the semantic factors motivating the ‘ethical’ uses of the Polish dative reflexive pronoun *sobie*:

- (1) *Na naszym podwórku biegał* *sobie*
on 1PL.POSS.LOC yard.LOC.SG run(IPFV).PST.M.3SG **REFL.DAT**
pies (National Corpus of Polish, NKJP)
dog.NOM.SG
‘A dog was roaming around our yard’

Several approaches recognise the construction as a ‘free’ or ‘redundant’ element of scarce contribution, which can be easily elided without a significant change to the semantic content and the core syntactic structure. The exact semantic contribution of the marker is unclear. Interpretations include its autobenefactive character as well as its potential to express volitionality, ‘acting on one’s will’ and aimlessness – ‘acting on a whim’, ‘just like that’ (cf. e.g. Dąbrowska 1997, Rudzka-Ostyn 2000 for discussions).

The crucial factor in analysing the ‘ethical’ use of *sobie* consists in taking into account that it can also serve as a recipient (in a kind of ‘leaving something for oneself’ self-transfer sense) or reciprocity marker:

- (2) *Normalnie, pomagają* *sobie*, *bo* *prowadzą* *podobny*
normally help.NPST.3PL REFL.DAT because lead(IPFV).NPST.3PL similar.M.ACC.SG
interes (NKJP)
business.ACC.SG
‘Naturally, they help each other, because they have similar businesses’

The present study approaches this problem by focusing strictly on two verb classes which limit the possibility of these interpretations - verbs of motion (cf. e.g. *biegać* in (1)) and verbs of posture (such as e.g. *siedzieć* ‘to sit’).

A profile-based approach (cf. e.g. Gries and Divjak 2009, Glynn and Robinson 2014) will be adopted to address the phenomenon in question. Authentic uses of *sobie* with verbs of motion and posture will be collected along with the corresponding uses of the featured verbs without the marker. To account for its association with informal and interactive registers, SPOKES corpus of conversational Polish (Pezik 2015) will be used in the study. Extracted usage data (approx. 600 occurrences) will be subject to multifactorial annotation, making it possible to discern the features explaining the inclusion of *sobie* marker. The tested features will primary control for volitional and benefactive correlates of the action. The study will also involve the annotation for aspect-related and participant-related variables – both on a semantic and syntactic level (including gender, number, givenness, and, where applicable, pronominality) as well as basic pragmatic and speaker-related features. The annotations will subsequently be used for creating multifactorial quantitative predictive models.

It is expected that the results will facilitate a precise, semantically-focused description of the conditions on the insertion of *sobie* and provide a new insight into the interaction between semantic domains of benefaction and volitionality in Polish. Crucially, thanks to the use of spoken, conversational data, the study will contribute to the development of empirical methods of grammatical description sensitive to interactional characteristics.

References

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