

THE FOUR SEASONS AND THE ACCUSATIVE-LOCATIVE OPPOSITION IN POLISH

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It sometimes appears that the very possibility of a given case usage depends on the lexical content of the declined nominal. For instance, in Polish the prepositionless instrumental can easily mark the time substantive *noc* 'night' in sentences such as *Przyszli nocą* 'They came at/by night-INST SG' or *Pracuje nocami* 'He works at night-INST PL' but it is impossible to find it on the substantive *dzień* 'day' in the same or similar context. When used in an adverbial of time, the instrumental form of *dzień* occurs only in some set phrases, such as *dzień za dniem* 'day in, day out-INST SG' or *dniami i nocami* 'days-INST PL and nights'.

Confronted with certain case uses in Slavic, linguists have often been forced to conclude that it is virtually impossible to separate the grammatical meaning of a case from the lexical content of the case-marked nominal. Commenting on the meaning of the Russian instrumental in his 1936 classic 'Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre', Jakobson (1936 [1990: 357]) states, supporting his observation with examples taken from the poetry of Majakovskij, that 'everything other than peripheral status is given in individual uses of the instrumental by the actual meaning of its referent and by the context, but not by the case form' (my emphasis). In her 1993 book on the semantics of the Czech dative and the Russian instrumental, written from the cognitive semantics perspective of Langacker and his followers, Janda (1993: 142) observes that cognitive linguistics appreciates 'the role of syntactic structure and lexical choice (my emphasis) in disambiguation of case meaning' pointing out that a similar view has been voiced also by Greenberg (1974) and Kilby (1986) among others (Janda 1993: 214).

The opinion that the meaning of an individual case usage is a combination of the meanings of the syntactic structure the case appears in, the case itself, the lexical content of the declined nominal and the linguistic as well as the paralinguistic context of the utterance can hardly be questioned. One can, however, always try to determine the extent of the semantic contribution of each of these elements in the overall meaning of an individual case use and to relate these contributions to the *general*,

prototypical or *potential* meaning postulated for the case in question by the adopted theory of grammatical meaning.¹

The specific aim of this paper is to examine the semantic import of the Polish locative and accusative cases in prepositional adverbials of time which contain nominals denoting the time-of-the-year periods evoked by the names of the four seasons (*wiosna, lato, jesień, zima*) in order to find out why the case distribution pattern is not the same with all four substantives in question. The basic assumption underlying the approach to the semantics of the Polish cases followed here is that shared by both Guillaume's psychomechanics of language and Langacker's cognitive grammar, two schools of cognitive linguistics developed today², namely, that each grammatical form (including case) carries meaning. It is also assumed that the elements which participate in the total semantic build-up of a case-containing expression (be it a nominal or a prepositional phrase) are compatible, i.e., that their meanings are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

The names of the four seasons used in the function of time adverbials exhibit a highly irregular case distribution pattern in Polish. All of them can

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- 1 The term *general meaning* is used by Jakobson (1936 [1990]) in his contributions to the General Theory of Case (1936 [1990], 1958 [1981]) with reference to the common basic meaning of each case (in Russian and in Slavic in general). Jakobson's *general* or '*core*'-meaning approach has been adopted by Wierzbicka (1988) in her work on cases. Linguists pursuing case semantics within the framework of Langacker-inspired brand of cognitive grammar attempt to construct semantic network models for individual cases with particular use-types linked to the central meaning of the case's *prototype* (Janda 1993, Rudzka-Ostyn 1994, 1996). The concept of a single *potential meaning* in tongue for each grammatical form in discourse (including case) characterizes Guillaume's theory of Psychomechanics (see his general description of the Indo-European case meanings in Guillaume 1992).
 - 2 In treating Psychomechanics as a school of cognitive linguistics I am embracing the position represented by Hewson & Bubenik (1997) who view Guillaume's theory as a precursor of the approach to language known today as cognitive (see Vassiliev 1997: ii: 'In this thesis, a system of lexical aspects ... is considered from the point of view of *Guillaumean Psychomechanics, which is a form of cognitive linguistics*' [my emphasis]). In his opening address pronounced at the 1994 VII^e Colloque international de Psychomécanique du langage in Cordoba, Roch Valin pointed out the presence of the question of mental reality of language in the new cognitivist approaches (Valin 1996: 46) thus stressing the possibility of a link between Psychomechanics and the modern schools of cognitive grammar.

employ the prepositionless instrumental (example 1a), the prepositionless genitive of time (example 1b), and the prepositional dative (example 1c). On the other hand, the predictably most natural *w* 'in' + locative structure is found only with the names of the summer, fall and winter (example 2) while the substantive denoting spring indicates the time of the event by means of the accusative preceded by the preposition *na* 'on, at' (example 3). The locative with the preposition *na* can also be used in the function of a time adverbial, but only with the substantive denoting fall (example 4).

- (1) a. Przyjadę do was **wiosną/latem/jesienią/zimą**-INST.
I'll come to you in (by) the spring/summer/fall/winter-INST.
- b. Byłem tam **zeszłej(-ego) wiosny/lata/jesieni/zimy**-GEN.
I was there last spring/summer/fall/winter-GEN.
- c. Miało się **ku wiosnie/latu/jesieni/zimie**-DAT.
It was going on spring/summer/fall/winter-DAT. [literally]
- (2) Przyjadę do was **w lecie/jesieni/zimie**-LOC [***w wiosnie**-LOC]
I'll come to you in the summer/fall/winter-LOC
[*in the spring-LOC]
- (3) Przyjadę do was **na wiosnę**-ACC [***na lato/jesień/zimę**-ACC³]
I'll come to you in (onto) the spring-ACC
[*in (onto) the summer/fall/winter-ACC]
- (4) Przyjadę do was **na jesieni**-LOC [***na wiosnie/lecie/zimie**-LOC]
I'll come to you in (on) the fall-LOC
[*in (on)the spring/summer/winter-LOC]

The data illustrating the distribution of case structures with the season substantives in Polish raise the following questions: (i) Why, in order to place the event during a particular season, does the substantive *wiosna* 'spring' employ the accusative while the other three season substantives use the locative (examples 2, 3)? (ii) Why does the substantive *jesień* 'fall' admit of two locative structures: one with the preposition *w* 'in' and the other with the preposition *na* 'on': *w jesieni* (example 2) and *na jesieni* (example 4)?

The bare instrumental form in (1) suggests that the time period evoked by the season substantive is perceived progressively, as parallel to the pro-

³ The *na* + *accusative* structure is possible with all four season names when the prepositional phrase denotes a period of time in the future. The reading of the examples in (3) would then be: 'I'll come to you for the (period of) spring/summer/fall/winter-ACC.'

gression of the action denoted by the sentence's predicate (Bacz 1993: 421).⁴ The locative structure with the preposition *w* 'in' implies that the action is seen as contained within the time limits set by the limits of the evoked season. The fact that this structure is not used with the substantive denoting spring can be explained by the presence in Polish of formal, literary expressions, such as the one in (5), which employ the locative case with the preposition *w* on the substantive *wiosna* 'spring' to refer to the subject's young age metaphorically as 'the spring of life' (*wiosna życia*).⁵

- (5) Odeszła **w szesnastej wiosnie**-LOC (życia).
She passed away in her sixteenth spring-LOC (of life).

The lack of the *w* + locative structure with the substantive denoting spring is partially recompensated by the occasional occurrence of the formal *o* 'about, around' + locative structure with this substantive in archaic literary Polish (Doroszewski 1980: 850). The original meaning of the *o* + locative structure was that of 'encompassing, enclosing in' (Kempf 1978: 112), so its use as an adverbial of time can be interpreted as denoting containment within the period of time evoked by the name of the season.

It seems to me that a more convincing explanation of the absence of the *w* + locative structure with the substantive *wiosna* and the use of the *na* + accusative instead could be sought in the semantic opposition between the locative and the accusative cases (considered with their prepositions) and in the possible link between the meaning of the accusative case and the 'culture-specific, ethnopsychological' (Wierzbicka 1992) perception of spring by native speakers of Polish.

While the general, basic meaning of the Polish locative with *w* 'in' is that of a static containment within (Bacz 1997), the basic dynamic nature of

⁴ This interpretation of the meaning of the bare instrumental with time substantives finds partial support in the prepositional instrumental with the comitative preposition *z* 'with' found in metaphorical uses, such as the use illustrated by the following sentence from a letter written to a friend, where the parallel between the oncoming event and the dynamic perception of the approaching spring is clear: *Pewnie nadciągniemy do Montrealu z wiosną*-INST 'We'll be coming on [like a storm or as migrating birds] to Montreal along with the spring-INST'. Skorupka (1969: 898) quotes the following example of the comitative instrumental with the substantive *wiosna*: *Z wiosną*-INST *zakwitły bzy*. 'Lilacs bloomed with the arrival of spring-INST / when the spring came.'

⁵ It is interesting to note that although the substantive *jesień* 'fall' can also be used metaphorically to refer to somebody's advanced age in the expression *jesień życia* 'the autumn of life', the metaphorical use of the *w* + locative structure *w jesieni* is not possible in the context of example (5).

the accusative requires that it express a crossing, going through or beyond the limit(s) of the entity evoked by the accusative-marked nominal.

The difference is best seen when the spatial uses of these two cases combined with the same preposition are juxtaposed, as in the often quoted examples of the locative *na stole* 'on the table' and the accusative *na stół* 'onto the table', or in the pair *trzymać w kieszeni-LOC* 'keep in the pocket-LOC' and *włożyć w kieszeń-ACC* 'put in(to) the pocket-ACC'. Seasons can be perceived (and consequently, 'conceived', i.e., visualized in the mind or conceptualized) as discrete chunks of time, and the speaker's attitude towards these conventional time-periods is reflected in the grammatical form he chooses when employing the names of the seasons in discourse. There is no doubt in my mind that to the inhabitants of northern and central Europe, with its moderate climate and the clearly distinguished four seasons, the perception of spring is different from the perception of the other seasons. Spring is the time people wait for; it signifies the end of the long period of fall and winter and marks the rebirth of life. This impression of waiting and longing for the arrival of spring is apparently very strong in the minds of the speakers of Polish for it has found reflection in the grammatical form which emphasizes the idea of reaching, coming into that period of time when the name of the season is evoked to identify the time of the event denoted by the predicate. The locative conceptualization of a season evokes a neutral image of an event occurring inside the given time period; the impression of waiting and longing for that time is not present. The accusative provides a better means of expressing the period of spring for it renders the idea of crossing the end-limit of winter and attaining mentally the awaited period of spring. The accompanying preposition *na* combines the senses of the English prepositions *in/on* and *for*, as seen in the following line from a song (example 6), which can have two complementary interpretations rendered by the possibility of a double translation of the preposition *na* in English.

- (6) Dziewczyny, bądźcie dla nas miłe **na wiosnę-ACC**.
 Girls, be nice to us in/for the spring-ACC.
 ('Girls, be nice to us when/while the spring is here'.)

The preposition *na* is preferred to the preposition *w* when an image of an unlimited surface rather than that of a three-dimensional container is evoked (Bacz 1997: 394-395). The image of the fall in the two locative examples in (7): one with the preposition *na* and the other with the preposition *w* is different in that in example (7a), *na jesieni-LOC*, the predominant impression of the season is that of an unconstrained, open-ended period.

In example (7b), *w jesieni-LOC*, the season is viewed as a more or less defined, discrete period of time.

- (7) a. Cebulki tulipanów należy wykopać **na jesieni-LOC**.
Tulip bulbs need be taken out of the soil **in the fall-LOC**.
- b. **W jesieni-LOC** należy wykopać cebulki tulipanów.
In the fall-LOC tulip bulbs need to be taken out the soil.

Why does the substantive *jesień* 'fall' admit of an open-ended, seemingly unlimited image, manifested in the possibility of the *na + locative* occurrence in discourse, while the other season-names bar the locative structure with *na* (example 4)? The answer, again, appears to lie in the specific, ethnocultural perception of fall which characterizes speakers of Polish. By comparison with the other three seasons, the period of fall, with its long, grey evenings and boring, never-ending periods of rain is perceived as a time that lasts and lasts and never seems to end. The other seasons pass much faster. This subjective impression is reflected in language in the possibility of two locative conceptualizations with the substantive *jesień* 'fall' and the impossibility of the *na + locative* occurrence with the names of the spring, summer and winter (**na wiosnie/lecie/zimie-LOC*)

The above reflections on the reasons behind the apparently irregular case distribution pattern found with the names of the four seasons in Polish confirm the common-sense observation about the meaning of cases made at the beginning: that the occurrence of a given case structure is strongly dependent on the lexical content of the case-marked substantive and on the paralinguistic, cultural perception of that content by the speakers of a given language. The analysis of the locative and the accusative data with the Polish season substantives used in the function of time adverbials has also shown that the basic meanings postulated for these two cases are compatible with the Polish cultural perception of the four seasons as manifested in the case structures employed with the substantives which evoke these seasons.

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