

**Conceptual metaphors
in linguistic metalanguage
– Polish case names**

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Abstract

Polish linguistic metalanguage comprises some terms of figurative character, apparently determined by metaphorical thinking, i.e. by construing one, abstract notion in terms of another, more concrete, accessible to sensory perception. Some of these terms are calques from Latin and preserve the mappings involved therein, but otherwise more refined and independent inspirations behind the names of linguistic categories can be recognized, especially in regard to the terms for the seven Polish cases.

Key words

case, grammar, metalanguage, metaphor, semantic roles

**Métaphores conceptuelles
dans le métalangage de la linguistique
– les noms des cas dans la déclinaison polonaise**

Résumé

Dans le dictionnaire de la terminologie linguistique utilisée en polonais, on peut remarquer des mots à caractère figuratif dont la signification semble s'appuyer sur le procédé métaphorique, c'est-à-dire sur la construction de la conception d'un phénomène abstrait avec une conception d'un phénomène plus concret, perceptible par

les sens. Certains de ces termes ont été calqués du latin avec leurs valeurs métaphoriques de départ, d'autres ont été créés, paraît-il, à partir des associations métaphoriques originales qui n'avaient pas été copiées ou qui avaient été développées de manière novatrice. Cela concerne surtout les noms des sept cas polonais.

Mots-clés

cas, grammaire, métalangage, métaphore, rôles sémantiques

Metafory konceptualne w metajęzyku lingwistyki – nazwy przypadków w polskiej deklinacji

Abstrakt

W słowniku terminologii lingwistycznej używanej w języku polskim rozpoznać można wyrazy o charakterze figuratywnym, których znaczenie wydaje się być oparte na myśleniu metaforycznym, tj. na budowaniu koncepcji zjawiska abstrakcyjnego w oparciu o inną koncepcję, zainspirowaną zjawiskiem bardziej konkretnym, poznawalnym za pośrednictwem zmysłów. Niektóre z takich terminów zostały przekalkowane z łaciny z zachowaniem oryginalnych odwzorowań metaforycznych, jednak są też takie, które, jak się wydaje, zostały utworzone na podstawie oryginalnych, nieskopiowanych lub nowatorsko rozwiniętych skojarzeń metaforycznych. Dotyczy to szczególnie nazw większości z siedmiu polskich przypadków.

Słowa kluczowe

metafora, metajęzyk, przypadek, role semantyczne, składnia

1. Polish linguistic nomenclature

The present paper is an extended version of a text written on the basis of a presentation delivered during the 50th Linguistics Colloquium in Innsbruck, Austria, in September 2015. It

has been inspired by a consideration of the terminology used in Polish to talk about various linguistic phenomena. It must be emphasised that this terminology is predominantly native, and did not emerge as a result of a simple adaptation of the Latin linguistic glossary, which itself was principally composed of translations from Ancient Greek. Some languages, like English, used the adaptation method to establish its linguistic metalanguage, which is why the conceptual motivations behind particular terms may have become recognizable only to those with some command of Latin. Polish grammarians engaged in the study of their native language have not followed the same easy route. They have, on some occasions, created calques of Latin terms to describe certain phenomena, but have also devised a large number of their own, native words to refer to grammatical categories found in the language. Doing so, they apparently employed the strategy of thinking about certain abstract linguistic phenomena in terms of something else, more concrete. Thus, in accordance with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) claim that not only literary but also casual and technical language is abundant with evidence of the fact that human thinking is to a good degree metaphorical in nature, a closer look at Polish grammatical terminology reveals that it often applies figurative construals when fathoming the intricacies of the language.

Therefore, as has been indicated, Polish linguistic nomenclature is principally Polish. The present paper is focused on metaphorical mappings apparently underlying Polish linguistic vocabulary, specifically case names. The theoretical framework employed is based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) idea that figurative expressions are but instantiations, external manifestations of conceptual metaphors, in terms of which human thought is structured. A most important point made by the proponents of the theory, also relevant to the present study, is the observation that the general tendency recognized in metaphorical thinking construes abstract (target) domains in terms of concrete, mundane phenomena and experiences (source domains). Applying this assumption to the subject matter of

the present work means that such elusive, unspecific, abstract notions as general semantic roles performed by entities participating in conceptualized scenes, which case forms are indicative of, are understood in terms of common, well-known material objects or physical activities, as appears to be suggested by the case names marking those roles.

2. The Polish case system

The role of case in Polish is similar to that recognized in other languages that possess this grammatical category, i.e., it is indicative of the semantic role performed by the referent of a noun assuming a given form, and, especially, to mark it as figure or ground in the conceived scene described by a linguistic expression. Therefore, it should be pointed out that, in accordance with the general assumptions of cognitive linguistics, case is not considered to be merely a matter of form determined by syntactic rules of government and agreement, but, rather, a semantic phenomenon, a conventionalized means to represent a specific mental construal, i.e., meaning. Polish has seven case forms which mark the most common, in a way prototypical semantic roles performed by conceived entities (construed as *things* in the sense described by Langacker 1987) which are referred to by respective nouns. The case in Polish is marked not only on nouns and pronouns but also on determiners and adjectives.

The case terms in Polish are, as in Latin, morphologically complex words composed of a derivational suffix (*-ik* or *-acz*), whose semantic function is similar to that of the Latin *-ivus* 'ive', i.e., to mark a lexeme as a member of the grammatical class of nouns. It is the meaning of the root morphemes that is symptomatic of the application of metaphorical mappings in the process of coining the terms to name specific word forms. This meaning is closely connected with the character of the semantic roles recognized to be performed by entities referred to by nouns in specific case forms. Considering it may therefore be helpful in reconstructing the motivations behind coin-

ing a specific term to refer to a specific semantic role, i.e., the name of a case.

Before the actual case terms are discussed with regard to their meaning, it should be indicated that the actual declensional forms determined by the same case may vary considerably from one nominal expression to another not only due to the fact that, just like in Old English, the Polish nouns, marked for different grammatical genders (masculine, feminine and neutral), decline with regard to numerous different patterns. It is also possible for two nouns of the same gender inflected for the same case to adjoin different inflectional case suffixes. This is due not only to morphology, but it may also be the meaning of a noun that decides about a case form. For example, masculine animate and masculine inanimate nouns are inflected according to distinct patterns; also inflectional forms may differ depending whether a given, the very same, word is used as a common noun or as a proper name.

2.1. The nominative – the “naming” case (*mianownik*)

The Polish term *mianownik* (derived from the noun *miano* – ‘name’) is a calque of the Latin *nominativus*, and seems to instantiate, similarly as in Latin, the conceptual metaphor: EXISTING IS BEING NAMED. This mapping, also involved in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of language as the shaper of ideas, seems to be well-established in European culture, and is reflected in the philosophical thought of Aristotle, who did not differentiate between *real* and *nominal* definitions (cf. Grzegorzczkova 1996: 14). That conflation of concepts appears to have derived from the realist Aristotelian philosophy of identifying category universals in things (*in re*). Therefore, the philosopher’s alleged belief that defining the name of an entity, i.e., the meaning of the word referring to it was tantamount to defining the entity itself, indicates that the metaphor EXISTING IS BEING NAMED must have been a constitutive one for him. Evidence of the same mapping re-appears later in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where naming is concurrent with

creation (calling into existence). Thus, in the Bible, the Book of Genesis (1.7-9) presents the works of God in the following way:

[...] So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God *called* the expanse "sky."

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.

God *called* the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters He *called* "seas." And God saw that it was good. [...]

Also, in the later course of Biblical events, when God introduces the first human into the world He has made, He puts Adam in charge of it by respecting the names the man would give to all creatures he was superior to, having been created "in [God's] own image". Again, the assumption of the concurrence of calling into existence and naming can be observed in the following fragments of the Book of Genesis.

[Genesis 2:19] So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would *call* them; and whatever the man *called* every living creature, that was its *name*.

[Genesis 2:20] The man *gave names* to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

It may be concluded that the privilege of naming was granted to Adam to make him aware of the various phenomena of the world he was to live in, and to enable him to understand them on his own terms. In this way, bearing names, these phenomena became part of Adam's reality. Although the language of Eden is unknown, it may be hypothesized that the words that Adam coined to distinguish things were nouns and that those naming nouns occurred in their basic, i.e., nominative forms.

The nominative is always enumerated as first in a system of cases, which is iconic because this form is assumed by the

subject, i.e., the head of a sentence; it is also the citation form of nouns in dictionaries. Moreover, the nominative seems to be language universal, as all languages, also those that lack declensions and other inflections in general, name things and use nouns for this purpose, which must assume a certain form, even if it is always steady. Thus, every instance of using this base form in the course of linguistic communication can be understood as a little act of creation, giving rise to a conception in the mind of a language user. The Latin and the Polish case terms alike seem to refer to this act. Concomitant to naming, i.e., calling a conception into existence is putting it, as figure (topic, theme), in a newly opened mental space – to make it eligible for being commented upon by the predicate. The fact that the nominative form is assumed by the subject of a sentence referring to a cognitive figure, i.e., the most outstanding element of a conceptualized scene, about which some information is provided, supports the general assumption of cognitive linguistics that form is interpretive to meaning (rather than the other way round, as assumed in the early models of generative grammars).

2.2. The genitive – the “filling up” case (*dopełniacz*)

The Polish term *dopełniacz* (derived from the verb *dopełniać* ‘fill up’) seems to involve a metaphorical mapping broader than the one instantiated in the Latin name of the same case, as *genitivus* is the origin-marking case (*genus*). The Polish term highlights the fact that this specific form is assumed by nouns which provide completing information about the nominative-marked subject/head (of which the specification of origin is a type). The metaphorical mappings that seem to have engendered the Polish term for the genitive case are: A CONCEPTION IS A CONTAINER; INFORMATION IS CONTENT; SUPPLYING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS FILLING UP A CONTAINER.

The role of a noun in the genitive is to supply its meaning to complete (fill up) the semantic information provided by the head noun referring to the cognitive figure specifying, among

others: origin, e.g., *ludy **Afryki*** ‘the peoples of Africa’, relation (including possession), e.g., *królowa **Anglii*** ‘the queen of England’; *pies **Baskervillów*** ‘the hound of the Baskervilles’; ownership, e.g., *dom **Jana*** ‘John’s house’; amount, e.g., *funt/torba **jablek*** ‘pound/bag of apples’; *dużo/moło **pieniędzy*** ‘much/little money’; absence, e.g., *brak **wody*** ‘lack of/no water’. To say that the meaning of a genitive-marked noun is but a complement of the meaning supplied by its antecedent (subject, head noun) undoubtedly amounts to downgrading its relevance in the description of a specific cognitive input, whereas considering the above-specified examples leads to the conclusion that it is the modifiers that supply more detailed and important information. The semantic role of a head noun seems to consist in providing a conceptual scaffolding to support (in the form of a container with little content) the meaning supplied by the genitive-marked modifier. This scaffolding metaphor (recognized by Lakoff) has been thoroughly described by Ungerer and Schmid (1996: 95, 144).

It is interesting to observe that a noun in the genitive case can function as a logical subject in negative sentences reporting absence or insufficiency, such as ***Marii** nie ma w domu* ‘Mary is not home’; *Nie ma **czasu** do stracenia* ‘There is no time to waste’; or ***Pieniędzy** jest mało* ‘There is little money’. In such instances the container metaphor still seems to be involved, even though the genitive marked noun cannot “fill up” the information provided by the absent nominative one. Since what is at issue in such cases is total absence or insufficiency, the noun meant as a complement takes on the role of the sentence head representing the, in a way, faulty cognitive figure within the scene it describes. It is, therefore, like a simple arithmetic operation; adding to zero is possible, but the result is equal to the addition, and adding to almost nothing leads to a very similar outcome.

2.3. The dative – the “target” case (*celownik*)

The Polish term for the dative case, *celownik*, whose root is the noun *cel* ‘target’, highlights an aspect of the relevant set of metaphorical mappings that is different from the one referred to in Latin: DIRECTING AN ACTION IS SENDING; THE GIVER IS A SOURCE and THE RECIPIENT IS A TARGET. The Latin *dativus* involves the stem *datus* ‘given’ and, indeed, the verbs that prototypically govern this case are “verbs of giving”. Therefore, the term is based on the conception of an object set in purposeful, one-directional motion – from the giver to the recipient.

The Polish term does not refer to the object “given”, as in Latin, but to the target of schematic (physical or non-physical) motion, i.e., the recipient (target) of the action. The “recipient” is prototypically an entity physically or potentially gaining control over the object of the action, as in *Jan dał/wysłał **Marii** kwiaty* ‘John gave/sent flowers to Maria’, but it can just as well be the target of an action not involving physical spatial progress, though, nevertheless, involving one-directionality, as in *Opowiedziała **dzieciom** bajkę* ‘[She] told the children a story’; *Obiecaliśmy **córcę** nowy komputer* ‘[We] promised a new computer to our daughter’; *Pokazała **nam** swój dom* ‘[She] showed us her home’; *Zrobił **nam** kawał* ‘[He] played a joke on us’.

Therefore, the Polish name of the case form in question is different to that of Latin in terms of its interpretation of the prototypical, schematic scene of transfer of an entity from a source to a target. This interpretation gives priority to the final destination of the path covered by an object, rather than the object itself.

2.4. The accusative – the “taking” case (*biernik*)

The Polish term for the accusative case – *biernik* (derived from the verb *brać* ‘take’, ‘grasp’, or the adjective *bierny* ‘passive’, ‘that can be taken’, ‘takeable’) highlights the passive partici-

pant involved in an unidirectional relation, and seems to be based upon the metaphor: BEING AFFECTED IS BEING TAKEN (GRASPED).

The metaphor is different to the one involved in the Latin *accusativus*, which is derived from the verb *accusare* ‘to accuse’. However, the presently used name of the fourth Latin case is the result of a medieval mistranslation of the original Greek word Αἰτιατική, which more correctly should be *causativus* – a derivative of *causare* ‘to cause’, i.e., the causative case, as it was originally called by the Roman grammarian Priscian (cf. the explanation provided by WNWDAL). Thus, the Latin term highlights (or was meant to highlight) an entire, schematically understood, action of one entity (agent) affecting another entity (patient), while the Polish one directly refers to the change of the state of one participant – the patient. The Polish term, thus, reveals a re-interpretation of a general scene focusing on its more detailed aspects than the Latin one.

2.5. The instrumental case (*narzędnik*)

The term *narzędnik* is derived from the noun *narzędzie* ‘tool’, ‘instrument’. The case that it names has no exact counterpart in Latin, and its form is assumed in Polish by nouns whose referents perform the semantic role of a means accompanying in accomplishing some action, e.g., *Otworzył drzwi **kluczem/ kopniakiem*** ‘[He] opened the door with a key/a kick’; *Policjant tropił przestępcę **z psem*** ‘The policeman tracked the criminal with a dog’; *Dorobił się **oszustwem*** ‘[He] made money by fraud’; *Weszli **frontowymi drzwiami*** ‘[They] entered by the front door’; *Przyszła **z mężem*** ‘[She] came with her husband’. Thus, the metaphor apparently instantiated by this Polish case term is A MEANS (METHOD) TO DO SOMETHING IS AN INSTRUMENT (TOOL). A place of an activity may also be construed as an instrument “participating” in it by determining its direction or manner, as in: *Szli **ulicą*** ‘[They] walked down the street’, *Przybyli **morzem*** ‘They arrived by the sea’, which is a more active role than that of a mere location.

2.6. The locative case (*miejsownik*)

The term *miejsownik* is a derivative of the noun *miejsce* ‘place’, and, accordingly, refers to the case form generally determined by the semantic role of location. Like the instrumental (*narzędnik*), it has no exact counterpart in Latin, and in Polish refers to the noun form following locative prepositions. The inspiration for the term cannot be compared to that behind the name of the Latin sixth case, as *ablative* is derived from the verb *ablego* ‘send away’, and this form is in Latin applied to nouns to express removal, deprivation, direction from, as well as source, causation, agency (cf. WNWDAL). It seems, therefore, that *ablativus* is a “hold-all” case combining a number of different semantic roles, many of which are distributed among other Polish case categories.

As suggested by the name of the case, nominal expressions assuming this form prototypically refer to physical, spatial locations, e.g., *w mieście* ‘in town’; *na stole* ‘on the table’; *przy płocie* ‘by the fence’; but also to mental ones, i.e., to “places” where thoughts are “held”: *w myśli* ‘in the mind’; *w pamięci* ‘in memory’; *w poważaniu* ‘in esteem’. It is also assumed by nouns referring to objects of mental relations symbolized by nouns following the preposition *o* ‘about’: *Myślą o wyprowadzce* ‘[They] are thinking about removal’; *Zapomniał/Pamiętał o spotkaniu* ‘[He] forgot/remembered about the meeting’; *Lubię filmy o zwierzętach* ‘[I] like films about animals’. Apparently, the prepositions preceding this case form generally refer to locations, physical or mental. The name of the case was probably determined by the semantic role prototypically assumed by nouns representing physical locations, following spatial prepositions, but it may also involve the conceptual metaphor THE MIND IS A CONTAINER (LOCATION) FOR IDEAS described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This assumption agrees with the idea of *mental spaces* understood as thought structures dynamically opening up as we think and talk, i.e., as it were, mental locations in which thoughts occur (cf. Fauconnier 1985).

2.7. The addressing case (*wołacz*)

The term *wołacz* is derived from the verb *wolać* ‘yell’, ‘call’, ‘summon’. Since nouns in this case form are used exclusively in appeals (the vocative marker only occurs in nouns of singular number), as in, e.g., the poem by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz: ***Kobieto! Puchu marny! Ty wietrzna istoto!*** ‘Woman! Down sleazy! You pox being!’, or in the Polish version of the popular song *Frère Jacques*, *Frère Jacques*, i.e., ***Panie Janie, Panie Janie***. The etymology of the corresponding Latin term, *vocativus*, is similar, since it is derived from the verb *vocare* ‘call’, of which *wolać* is the Polish equivalent. It could be claimed, therefore, that the metaphor that inspired the term for the case in question is ADDRESSING IS CALLING/SHOUTING TO SOMEONE.

It must be stated, however, that, out of all the considered case terms, *wołacz* and *vocative* seem to be the least metaphorical, if metaphorical at all, as nouns in this form are literally used in addresses, either to real people, e.g., ***Mario, Janie, posłuchajcie*** ‘Mary, John, listen’ or to personified entities, as in another quote from Mickiewicz: ***Litwo, ojczyzno moja!*** ‘O Lithuania, my country!’, or in Cicero’s famous exclamation *O tempora! O mores!*

3. Conclusions

Grammatical terms seem to have been engendered by cognitive strategies generally used by humans to cognize the world and to express their knowledge in language. Metaphor appears to lie at the foundation of comprehension in general, and the comprehension of language is no exception. The Polish (and Latin) case terms have apparently arisen as a result of thinking about the abstract, general, prototypical semantic roles that the referents of nouns in particular forms perform within conceptualized scenes in a metaphorical way. Construing those roles (target domains) in terms of everyday, concrete, physical objects and activities (source domains), might have

inspired the terms for case forms of nouns referring to the phenomena performing those roles when such terms were coined by grammarians.

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