

Mental scanning of events: Temporal and aspectual properties of participial modification in Polish and English

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The focus of the present paper is the analysis of participial constructions as used postnominally and prenominaly in English and Polish. Differences between Polish and English in this respect are demonstrated to pertain to the distinct temporal-aspectual preferences in the two languages and embrace distinct pre- and post- modification behaviour of the relevant constructions (e.g. Eng. a (half)-*eaten sandwich - (z)jedzona kanapka, Pol. a cooked meal - gorący gotowany i.e. ugotowany posiłek [perfective aspect] but not in the sense of gotowany posiłek 'a meal being cooked' [durative aspect], as used in Polish; a dancing girl as differing from a girl dancing, etc.). Their meaning and form distribution are taken to be a function of both conceptual content of an expression and its construal (Langacker 2000:45-46) as e.g. in a smoking man versus a man smoking... or a girl seen... as opposed to ?a seen girl as contrasted to similar meanings in Polish, showing distinct usage patterns. It is assumed that alternate profiles of expressions can evoke the same conceptual content, with the profiles determined by varying degrees of event boundedness in this case, and the way they interact, while it is precisely the differences in the expression construal that underlie language- and context-specific temporal, aspectual and other semantic properties.

The point to discuss is an asymmetry (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2008) between the profile of an Event semantically conceptualized in terms of a finite clause (sequential in its construal) and that expressed by a complement (or eventually a modifying) construction of a non-finite type (conceptually either left as sequential to varying degrees or else reified or attributised). What will be presented in more detail is the structure of modifying constructions of the participial type in English and Polish in terms of Cognitive Corpus Linguistics methodology. The asymmetry is a consequence of juxtaposing of two (or more) events as used in the respective finite clauses as opposed to an event, similar in its conceptual content, but whose meaning is modulated in terms of a more nominal or a more adjectival category. Participial modifiers can participate in final clauses as weakly-grounded or non-grounded forms. In such constructions the participial event (represented in the modifier) is either attributivized with reference to the modified nominal, (it is most frequently used prenominaly in such cases), or left in its more verbal shape - more loosely bounded - and then most often following the noun. The semantic consequences refer to the parameters determining mainly temporal and aspectual properties of the action. The degree of reification and attributisation varies between English and Polish (it can also change in one language in constructions with the same conceptual content and different construal) and is evident in a number of morphosyntactic parameters and their interrelationship. The parameters are of three basic type. They are (1) the nominal (articles and gender, case, number in inflectional languages) as opposed to verbal (person, tense, aspect, mood) grammatical categories, (2) the position of the modifier with respect to the modified noun and (3) the presence of the complementary sentence elements such as the original direct object or adverbial(s).

The focus of the paper are asymmetries in the semantic interpretation of participial modifiers on the examples generated from natural language corpora, BNC - for English, and the NKJP (National Corpus of Polish) corpus for Polish in the context of different event conceptualizations in these constructions. The major differences discussed, relating to time and aspect conceptualization, refer to the character of mental scanning (Langacker 1987, 1991) of a particular scene, and potential changes, involving temporality, that take place in it (van Wright 1963, Verkuyl 1993, Jaszczolt 2009).

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