

The Role of Pragmatic and Linguistic Information in Temporal Ordering in Polish Discourse (Polish-specific Ontology of Aspectual Categories)

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We will investigate the role of linguistic and pragmatic information in the interpretation of temporal discourse in Polish. It appears that more specified aspectual/temporal character of Polish verbal predicates overrides the pragmatic/world knowledge inferences in narrative discourse to a much greater extent than in the identical fragments of English and that users of Polish need to apply obligatorily additional linguistic devices (rhetorical tools) to obtain the same temporal interpretation of discourse as in English counterparts. In order to account for differences between semantic interpretation of temporal discourse in Polish and English we will propose a Polish-specific ontology of aspectual categories based on their contingency properties, dynamic aspectual network driven by aspectual operations and coercion (context-sensitive aspectual shifts) along the lines of Moens and Steedman (1984) and Caenepeel (1989). The strong argument for developing such Polish-specific classification of aspectual categories arises for instance from the difference in morphological realization of restricted states in contingent/non-contingent discourse contexts in Polish and in English as well as the interesting ambiguity displayed by secondary imperfectives in quantified contexts which distinguishes them from primary imperfectives. Generally it has been assumed by researchers such as Kamp and Reyle (1993), Partee (1984), Hinrichs (1986) that reference time is anaphoric and events introduce new reference times into a temporal discourse and therefore create a temporal update whereas states do not and therefore introduce background temporal information. Interestingly, it has been observed by Moens and Steedman (1984), Caenepeel (1989) Lascarides and Asher (1993) that temporal relations must be calculated on the basis of semantic content, knowledge of causation and knowledge of language use, as well as sentential syntax and compositional semantics, as it follows from examples in (1), (2) and (3):

(1) When John left, Mary was crying.

(2) When Mary was crying, her mother was upset.

(3) When John left, Mary's mother was upset.

It is wrong to infer that Sue's mother got upset because John left which means that temporal ordering is not most directly related to linear dimensional conception of time. Polish temporal discourse displays the same contingency dependence in this context, however we are going to provide evidence that in many other contexts the dynamic aspectual network in Polish needs further analysis. Moens and Steedman (1984), Caenepeel (1989) and Lascarides and Asher (1993) observe that sentences in (4) and (5), are problematic for the purely temporal analyses of movement in narrative discourse in English.

(4) When they built the 39th Street bridge...

...a local architect drew up the plans

In English, the drawing up of the plans is for reasons to do with knowledge of the world, situated in the preparatory phase of building. In Polish, aspectual linguistic devices override the pragmatic inference in the analogical sentence and the drawing up of the plans is interpreted within the asserted time of the event of building, not before. We need to apply an additional linguistic device namely the temporal connective *before* to obtain the same temporal interpretation as the one derived by means of pragmatic reasoning in English. Similarly, Lascarides and Asher observed that defeasible reasoning, causal knowledge underlies aspect-driven interpretation of (5) in English.

(5) Max fell. John pushed him.

In Polish counterpart of this sentence, most informants claim that such order is odd and the backward temporal movement is possible only if we apply either rhetorical device *because* or pause and strong explanatory prosodic contour.

Selected References:

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