

A NOTE ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE ARTICLE
IN ENGLISH AND WORD ORDER IN POLISH

Part I

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The aims of the following discussion are two. The first, and more general one, is to show how the English article is related to word order in Polish. The more particular but no less important, is to demonstrate that, contrary to widespread and advocated beliefs word order in Polish is not free and that it plays a role in anaphoric processes¹.

The present note is considerably limited in scope. It is impossible in one short report to describe and explain all problems involved here. An additional difficulty is the lack of practically any materials discussing the problems of *definiteness* and *indefiniteness* in Polish. The paper is limited in at least three respects:

a) Almost no theoretical background or explanation is provided.

The author fully agrees with Werner Winter (1965) that it is necessary to go through "the drudgery of painstaking collection of data before developing theories".

b) Pronouns, genericness and suprasegmental features have been excluded from the discussion. They require separate studies. The intonation assumed for all sentences here is that of a normal declarative type unless specified otherwise.

c) Only simple sentences are considered.

The description of the *article* in English will not be given for two reasons: the available descriptions can be found in Stockwell (1968); in agreement with

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what has been said in point a) above, out of the available descriptions we will choose the one which will best fit the facts. Different solutions are not excluded.

There would seem to be in Polish three ways in which the definite/indefinite distinction is accomplished:

- a) pronouns,
- b) intonation,
- c) word order.

Very little can be found in Polish grammars about word order and its functions. For example, in Szober (1967, p. 320) we find only a few sentences about the problem. I will quote his description almost in full as it is closely connected with the present note (translation into English is my own).

"In the chain of speech or conversation the natural word order in sentences is arranged in such a way that first come words pointing to details already familiar to us from the preceding sentences, or from the external situation; last in the sentence come usually words describing a new detail. A word or a phrase which describes details binding the thought expressed in the sentence either with the external situation in which the sentence is uttered, or with the preceding thoughts of the speech or conversation may be called the identifying member of the sentence (...) A word or a phrase which introduces new details is the differentiating member of the sentence... In the process of mental activities first comes the process of identification, i.e. the formulation of the received perception or reproduced idea (single or collective) in terms of the already known ideas, and only then is it followed by a distinction of details individually connected with the given perception or idea. Since in Polish the word order is free, not fixed by any established linguistic habit, we move to the front the words functioning as the identifying part, no matter what their syntactic function is; the words constituting the differentiating part are moved to the end of the sentence, again no matter what their syntactic function is. So, for example, the sentence *Mickiewicz był największym poetą polskim* [Mickiewicz was the greatest Polish poet] can be uttered in two ways depending on the circumstances. If we use it in the chain of speech or conversation whose subject is Mickiewicz, the word order is: *Mickiewicz był największym poetą polskim*, since the idea of Mickiewicz is the starting point here, i.e. the identifying part of the thought expressed in the sentence. The same sentence used in the course of speech or conversation whose subject is great poets, sounds: *Największym poetą był Mickiewicz*, since the starting point here, i.e. the identifying part of the thought expressed in the sentence is the notion of great poets, and Mickiewicz is a detail differentiated in the category of that notion".

The only criticism that can be raised against this statement is that it is based on the example which contains definite noun phrases only. Hence the change in the word order seems to be merely stylistic.

To make my presentation simple I will proceed from a description of the

simplest structures to more complex ones. At the end of this paper I will suggest some points of interest and indicate problems that will have to be solved in connection with the subject presented here. Word by word translations of Polish examples are provided. The following abbreviations are used: Nominative=Nom, Dative=Dat, Accusative=Acc.

Let us consider two sentences (2) and (3) consisting of S(ubject) and V(erb) only, one with S—V, the other with V—S order. The difference can be seen best if they are preceded by an initial sentence (1).

(1) W pokoju siedziała dziewczyna.

In room was sitting girl (Nom)

(2) Chłopiec wszedł.

Boy (Nom) entered

(3) Wszedł chłopiec.

Entered boy (Nom)

Both (2) and (3) are well-formed and grammatical, and yet only (3) can follow (1) to constitute a sequence. Likewise we cannot have a sequence (4) - (5). Only (4) - (6) is possible here.

(4) W pokoju siedział chłopiec.

In room was sitting boy (Nom)

(5) Wyszedł chłopiec.

Went out boy (Nom)

(6) Chłopiec wyszedł.

Boy (Nom) went out

Since (4) says that there was only one boy sitting (we may add the numeral *jeden* 'one' to make it clearer) in the room and the word order in (5) makes the noun indefinite and thus noncoreferential with the noun in (4) the whole situation becomes absurd.

The two examples allow for a formulation of a preliminary and tentative rule: final and initial sentence positions are reserved for indefinite and definite interpretations respectively.

It may be claimed that a noun in final position may have a definite interpretation as well, for example:

(6) Zasnął chłopiec.

Fell asleep boy (Nom)

There seem to be at least two situations in which (7) can be used. First, as a sequence sentence to something like (8)

(8) W pokoju siedziała dziewczyna i chłopiec. Dziewczyna

In room was sitting girl (Nom) and boy (Nom). Girl (Nom)

zażyła środek nasenny. ((7) Zasnął chłopiec)

took pill sleeping. Fell asleep boy.

with the implication that it was not the girl who fell asleep but the boy, although he had not use the sleeping pill.

Secondly, as an answer to a question (9)

(9) Kto zasnął?

Who fell asleep?

In both cases, (8) and (9) we have to do with a contrastive stress on the noun which, then, has a definite interpretation. Since the problems of intonation with respect to definiteness and indefiniteness are outside the scope of the present paper and are discussed elsewhere (Szwedek, this volume) I will not discuss them any further.

Let us now proceed to some more complex cases involving two nouns in the same clause. With a direct object the examples are as follows:

(10) Kobieta wzięła książkę.

(Woman (Nom) took book (Acc))

(11) Książkę wzięła kobieta.

(Book (Acc) took woman (Nom))

The difference between them can be brought out best if they are placed in a context. (10) can appear only after something like (12)

(12) Do sklepu weszła kobieta.

(Into shop went woman (Nom))

And only (11) can follow (13)

(13) Na stole leżała książka.

(On table was lying book (Nom))

(12) followed by (11) is incorrect if we are talking about the same woman. Likewise, (13) cannot proceed (10) if the same book is meant.

The elements of (10) and (11) can appear in other arrangements:

(14) Kobieta książkę wzięła.

(Woman (Nom) book (Acc) took)

(15) Książkę kobieta wzięła.

(Book (Acc) woman (Nom) took)

(16) Wzięła kobieta książkę.

(Took woman (Nom) book (Acc))

(17) Wzięła książkę kobieta.

(Took book (Acc) woman (Nom))

Sentences (14 - 17) seem to have three features in common:

(a) They never constitute a single sentence, but enter into larger units, for example:

(18) Kobieta książkę wzięła ale nie była zachwycona.

(Woman (Nom) book (Acc) took but not was happy)

(19) Książkę kobieta wzięła ale nie była zachwycona.

(Book (Acc) woman (Nom) took but not was happy)

(20) Wzięła kobieta książkę i poszła do domu.

(Took woman (Nom) book (Acc) and went to home)

(21) Wzięła książkę kobieta i poszła do domu.

(Took book (Acc) woman (Nom) and went to home)

(b) They all seem to have contrastive stress on the verb.

(c) Both nouns in (14) - (17) are definite. This seems to depend on (b). An example of a sentence with two objects is

(22) Chłopiec dał kotu piłkę.

(Boy (Nom) gave cat (Dat) ball (Acc))

Out of the possible combinations of the elements of (22) only those will be discussed which seem more frequent. Such infrequent structures as

(23) Dał piłkę chłopiec kotu.

(Gave ball (Acc) boy (Nom) cat (Dat))

(24) Chłopiec piłkę kotu dał.

(Boy (Nom) ball (Acc) cat (Dat) gave)

will not be considered.

The structures which seem to me more frequent than (23) and (24) are the following:

(25) Chłopiec dał kotu piłkę.

(Boy (Nom) gave cat (Dat) ball (Acc))

(26) Chłopiec dał piłkę kotu.

(Boy (Nom) gave ball (Acc) cat (Dat))

(27) Chłopiec piłkę dał kotu.

(Boy (Nom) ball (Acc) gave cat (Dat))

(28) Chłopiec kotu dał piłkę.

(Boy (Nom) cat (Dat) gave ball (Acc))

(29) Kotu chłopiec dał piłkę.

(Cat (Dat) boy (Nom) gave ball (Acc))

(30) Kotu piłkę dał chłopiec.

(Cat (Dat) ball (Acc) gave boy (Nom))

(31) Kotu dał piłkę chłopiec.

(Cat (Dat) gave ball (Acc) boy (Nom))

(32) Kotu dał chłopiec piłkę.

(Cat (Dat) gave boy (Nom) ball (Acc))

(33) Piłkę dał chłopiec kotu.

(Ball (Acc) gave boy (Nom) cat (Dat))

(34) Piłkę dał kotu chłopiec.

(Ball (Acc) gave cat (Dat) boy (Acc))

(35) Piłkę kotu dał chłopiec.

(Ball (Acc) cat (Dat) gave boy (Nom))

(36) Piłkę chłopiec dał kotu.

(Ball (Acc) boy (Nom) gave cat (Dat))

The frames in which these sentences can be tested for the definiteness or indefiniteness of nouns are the following:

- (37) Na podwórzu bawił się piłką chłopiec.
(In courtyard played ball (Instr) boy (Nom))
- (38) Na podwórzu bawił się chłopiec z kotem.
(In courtyard played boy (Nom) with cat)
- (39) Na podwórzu bawił się kot piłką.
(In courtyard played cat (Nom) ball (Instr))

We will find that (37) can be followed only by (26), (27), (33) and (36), that is by those in which the new (indefinite) noun is in the last position. The same with (38) which can be followed only by (25), (28), (29) and (32). (39) can be followed by (30), (31), (34) and (35).

Note that sequences like (40)

(40) Na podwórzu bawił się kot piłką. Chłopiec dał piłkę kotu.
are at least ambiguous if not incorrect. First, *chłopiec* cannot appear in the first position unless he has been mentioned before. Secondly, *kot* in the second sentence is not understood as coreferential with *kot* in the first sentence. If it were it would appear in the first position as in (30).

Sentences with adverbials of place or time like (41) and (42)

(41) Kobieta wyszła na ulicę.
(Woman went out on street)

(42) Na ulicę wyszła kobieta.
(On street went out woman)

behave in a similar way. With (43)

(43) Widziałem w oknie kobietę.
(I saw in window woman(Acc))

only (41) can be used as a sequence sentence.

Given (44)

(44) Do domu, który obserwowałem, wszedł mężczyzna.
(Into house which I was watching went man(Nom))

and two sequence sentences (45) and (46)

(45) Mężczyzna wyszedł o 3 : 00.
(Man (Nom) went out at 3 : 00)

(46) O 3 : 00 wyszedł mężczyzna.
(At 3 : 00 went out man(Nom))

we will easily find that only (45) can follow (44); (46) is impossible if we are talking about the same man.

There are some interesting points here:

(a) The shift of the time adverbial in (45) to the first position does not change the interpretation of the noun from definite to indefinite

(47) O 3 : 00 mężczyzna wyszedł.

(At 3 : 00 man(Nom) went out)

A change of (46) to (48)

(48) Wyszedł mężczyzna o 3 : 00.
(Went out man(Nom) at 3 : 00)

renders a sentence which must contain a contrastive stress on one of the elements. The position of the stress determines the interpretation.

(b) The change of word order discussed above does not affect the interpretation of sentences with time adverbials of duration. In fact such a change is inconceivable with a simultaneous change of intonation, for example

(49) Mężczyzna szedł godzinę.

(Man(Nom) walked hour)

(50)* Godzinę szedł mężczyzna.

(Hour walked man(Nom))

The few facts that I have presented here allow only for two indisputable but trivial conclusions and one interesting but tentative one. The two trivial conclusions are the following:

I) contrary to the general belief word order in Polish is not free.

II) it is used as one of the ways to express the definite/indefinite distinction (i.e., to some extent, coreferentiality or noncoreferentiality) which in English is indicated by the article.

The interesting but tentative conclusion is that

III) nouns with indefinite interpretation appear in sentence final position only. Nouns with definite interpretation appear in positions other than final. This is valid for sequence sentences. In certain circumstances (e.g. contrastive stress) position seems to be irrelevant for the definite/indefinite distinction.

To conclude this sketchy and superficial description I would like to point to some problems that will have to be solved if a comparison of the article in English with its Polish equivalents is to be complete:

(a) word order shift in other constructions (e.g. questions).

(b) the relation of word order to pronouns and intonation. I think it would be particularly interesting to see which word order arrangements cannot appear without a contrastive stress (as, for example, (14) - (17) above)

(c) the relations between the pronominal and article functions of some pronouns (e.g. *ten* 'this', *jakiś* 'a, some').

(d) genericness and its relation to the definite/indefinite distinction.

(e) the influence of modifiers, quantifiers, etc. on the definite/indefinite distinction.

(f) the definite/indefinite distinction of nouns in adverbial phrases and its relation to word order shifts.

(g) dependency of the definite/indefinite interpretation on the position of a noun in relation to other nouns and to the verb.

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