NOUN OBJECTS IN POLISH AND IN ENGLISH

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As a syntactic item in Polish and in English, the object is of sufficient importance to merit separate attention. Therefore, a comparison of objects in the two languages may prove useful for both pragmatic and theoretical purposes. This brings forth the question of identifying the object in the languages under consideration. English differentiates the object from other sentence elements by position. A noun phrase that occupies the place immediately after a transitive verb is considered an object (Thomas 1967: 34, 121; Zandvoort 1962: 199 and Scheurwegh 1961: 11). In Polish it is not position that assigns noun phrases to the category of object but case. Noun phrases that appear as objects complementing verbs assume the oblique cases whose choice is determined by a given verb. Contrary to English, a Polish verb that can be complemented by an object can be intransitive as well. Polish and English also differ in the kinds of objects they recognize. While the former distinguishes only two objects — the direct and indirect object, the latter, besides recognizing these two, also distinguishes the prepositional object and the objective complement. This fact makes it obvious that there cannot be a one-to-one correspondence between the languages in question with respect to the object. The present paper will be concerned with a discussion of the kinds of objects in both languages and the relationship between them. As, however, noun phrases in either language that serve as objects comprise various parts of speech, each having its syntactic peculiarities, this paper has been confined to signalling certain problems pertinent to noun objects only.

The relationship between the predicate and its noun object cannot be presented adequately by one formula for the two languages. In English this relationship may be rendered as follows:
Noun objects in Polish and in English

Polish requires a different formula, namely

**VERB + noun object in the common case**

Polish requires a different formula, namely

**VERB + noun object in the genitive**

**VERB + noun object in the dative**

**VERB + noun object in the accusative**

**VERB + noun object in the instrumental**

because, as has been said earlier, Polish verbs determine the case of objects
that complement them. It should be added that the verb-object order of the
formula for Polish does not exclude other positions that the object can occupy.
The present arrangement of the formula has been adopted because the predicate-object order is the neutral order in Polish. The English learner of Polish is then not likely to have serious difficulties with the position of noun objects in
his target language. A greater problem will arise when it comes to cases. To
make the correct choice of the case, the learner of Polish must learn which cases
are assumed by noun objects with individual verbs. This problem does not
confront the Polish learner of English as such inflexion is absent from the structure
of English. Still, he may be prone to other mistakes: instead of placing the
object in an English sentence immediately after the verb, he will insert it into other positions permitted by the Polish word order (e.g. after the adver-
bal modifier or before the predicate).

What has been said so far has been of a general nature. Problems pertaining
to particular kinds of objects in Polish and English will accordingly be
dealt with under the headings of direct object, indirect object, prepositional
object, and objective complement.

**DIRECT OBJECT.** Both Polish and English recognize this type of object. To
identify it, English employs the positional criterion. A noun (or a noun-headed
construction) that appears immediately after the verb is considered a direct
object when the noun is by itself, as only the direct object can occur alone in
English (Reszkiwicz 1968: 31). The position immediately after the verb is also
occupied by the direct object when it appears with a verb that requires an objetive complement. Of two nouns complementing such a verb, the first is the
direct object. (Francis 1958: 349) the other is the objective complement.

When two nouns complement other verbs, the second will be the direct object
(Kufner 1969: 43; Scheuweigles 1961: 16; see also Josper 1965: 257; Francis
1968: 351 and Reszkiwicz 1968: 33), the first being the indirect object.

Needless to say, only transitive verbs are being considered here. Another
criterion that serves to identify the direct object is what may be called a 'subject-
convertibility' test, whereby only that object which becomes the subject of a
given sentence once it has been changed into the passive is counted as the direct
object. The application of the test to English is limited because the indi-
rect object, as will be seen later, reacts positively to this test in a number of
sentences.

If the subject-convertibility test is of secondary importance in English,
in Polish it is considered the major criterion which serves to indicate the direct
object (Szober 1969: 310; Doroszewski 1964: 194 and see Wierzbowski 1962:
121). This implies that direct objects can complement only transitive verbs in
Polish as well. Since Polish verbs require their objects in the oblique cases,
those serve as another criterion of identification. The direct noun object in
Polish may take one of the following three cases, depending on a given verb:
the accusative, the genitive, and the instrumental.

The direct object in the accusative is by far the most common with verbs.
An exhaustive list of these verbs, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

The genitive is assumed by the direct object when the object is used (Doro-
szewski 1964: 194 - 5):

a) partitively or quasi-partitively as in kupilem mięsa (genitive), pullzy
   na scenę (genitive).

b) with a verb in the negative
   nie nam zastrzelić (genitive)
   Hania nie napisała wypracowania (genitive)

c) with verbs of negative meaning such as przeczyć, zakazując, zabraknąć,
zapominać, chybić, wiadać, potrzebować etc.
   zakazałem uczniom palenia (genitive)
   Piotr zapomniał pieniędzy (genitive)

d) with impersonal verbs such as przybywać, uzywać, brakować, wystarczyć.
   ludzi (genitive) na świecie przylgać

e) with verbs denoting feelings e.g.; żałować, niemawdzić, bać się.
   boję się niedzwiedzi (genitive)

f) with perfective verbs beginning with prefixes do- and na- as in najęć się,
   nazęp, doczekać się.
   najedłem się strachu (genitive)

g) with some other verbs: chcieć, przepuścić, ządać, bronić, chronić, pilnować,
   strzec, etc.
   bronimy ojczyzny (genitive)
   żądamy spraw (genitive)

The direct object in the instrumental appears with such verbs as rzucić, kierować, włączyć, dowodzić, powodować, pogardzać, lekceważyć, ponieważ, rzucać, trząść, obrać and the like (Doroszewski 1964: 195).

rzucił muolím królewsie (instrumental)
chłopiec rusza nogą (instrumental)

Such intricacies as shown above are absent from English where noun ob-
jects have only one case. However, the English direct object may enter con-
structions that do not seem to have an exact counterpart in Polish.
The direct object in an English sentence she smiled her joy will hardly ever appear as one in Polish. She smiled her joy is tantamount to she expressed her joy by smiling. The English verb here assumes the meaning of “expressing by...ing” (Jespersen 1965: 234) as for example:

Mary laughed her thanks he beamed enormous satisfaction I breathed my astonishment

In Polish the presence of the direct object in such constructions will depend on the verb in the Polish rendering: she sang her joy can be rendered as 

kiedyś śpiewała swoj radostī but she laughed her joy cannot be translated as 

wszystczal swą radosć (since it would mean she laughed at her joy). A separate study covering the types, possibly a list, of verbs that admit the direct object in such a construction as well as other ways of rendering the construction into Polish would be useful for learners of English and Polish.

Sometimes the object repeats the meaning, often the form, of the verb it complements e.g. he lived a double life. This is termed “cognate object” and can be found in Polish and in English but the two languages differ in this respect. All cognate objects in English belong to the direct object and complement transitive verbs. A number of corresponding verbs in Polish, though, are intransitive and either incapable of entering the cognate-object construction e.g. the verb in to fight a fight cannot be rendered into Polish and with the intransitive verb walczyć (to fight) but another verb must be used, thereby reducing the noun in the Polish rendering to the status of an ordinary direct object: to fight a fight will be tocząć walkę (the cognition being absent); or if an intransitive verb in Polish appears with a cognate form, the latter is treated as an adverbial manner e.g. 

wszeźć wiatrów dziećmi (to die a violent death), żyć podwójnym życiem. Certainly, some transitive verbs in Polish admit cognate objects which are then regarded as direct objects e.g.: 

także jakim taniec (to dance a dance), pisać pisano (to write a writ) (Heinz 1961: 40-41).

A direct-object construction that is lacking in Polish is represented by a combination of to have - a direct object as in to have a smoke, to have a drink, to have a swim etc. The combination denotes a single performance of the action expressed by the noun (Scheurweghs 1961: 13; Zandvoort 1962: 201). The construction will be rendered into Polish by a perfective verb, to have a ride — przejechać się, to have a smoke — zapalić.

In certain sentences such as to ask John a question it is necessary to admit a construction with two direct objects on the grounds that either of the objects that complement a given verb can be considered a direct object when it occurs alone with the same verb (Jespersen 1965: 296-6).

strike a boy (dir. obj.) a heavy blow (dir. obj.)
strike a boy (dir. obj.)
strike a heavy blow (dir. obj.)
ask John (dir. obj.) a question (dir. obj.)
ask John (dir. obj.)
ask a question (dir. obj.)
* see index of abbreviations

In Polish, pairs like to ask John and ask a question cannot always be rendered with the same verb. To ask John in pytac Janka but to ask a question will be 

zadawa pytanie. To ask John a question must be translated as zadać Jankowi pytanie, which will be looked upon as mere sequence of an indirect (Jankowi — dat.) and a direct object (pytanie — acc.) because Polish nouns in the dative are not considered direct objects. The form Jankowi may only function as an indirect object as will be seen below.

It might be of interest to find out what extent the interferences of English operates here, that is, whether the English learner of Polish will tend to produce Polish sentences like *Pytać pytanie or *Pytać Janka pytanie as the renderings of English sentences of the type to ask a question or to ask John a question.

INDIRECT OBJECT. The category of indirect object is present in the structures of Polish and English. However, there is a significant difference between the two languages. For one thing, only two objects are usually distinguished in Polish, the direct object and the indirect object (Slobin 1969: 310; Derockowski 1964: 193 and Wierzbowski 1962: 121). The latter cannot be made the subject of a passive sentence, though it may assume the same cases as the direct object. This does not lead to confusion because when the indirect object appears in one of the direct-object cases, it complements an intransitive verb which cannot take a direct object or it is accompanied by a proposition, of which the direct object is incapable. For that matter, the indirect object in Polish can assume all cases except the nominative and be accompanied by propositions.

The indirect object in English appears only in company with the direct object which it always precedes (Jespersen 1965: 287; Kühner 1969: 43 and see Scheurweghs 1961: 16; Francis 1958: 551 and Reszkiewicz 1966: 33). In this case the English indirect noun object corresponds to the Polish indirect noun object in the dative e.g.:

1. he sent the boy (indir. obj.) a book (dir. obj.)
   posadzil chłopcu (dative, indir. obj.) książkę (dir. obj.)

2. the committee gave the writer (indir. obj.) a reward (dir. obj.)
   komitet dał nagrodę (dir. obj.) podziwia (dative, indir. obj.)
Example 2 shows that the dative indirect object in Polish does not need to precede the direct object. Unless the learner of Polish realizes that the case determines the function of the noun and masters the dative-case endings, he may face some difficulties in determining which object stands for the indirect object as the interference of his native language will prompt him to apply the positional criterion.

The Polish learner of English may also be affected by the interference of his own language. He may be prone to disregard either the rigidity of the indirect — direct object sequence in English or fail to use the to-phrasal for the indirect object, which is obligatory after some English verbs (Grzebielniowski 1964: 58; Scheurweghs 1961: 17).

The Polish indirect object in the dative does not serve only as a rendering of the indirect object in English but also appears in the possessive function (Klemensiewicz 1963: 42-3). Sentences such as koledze (dat.) smart ojciec or wadla broata (dat.) z rąk rewolwer can just as well have the form wadla ojciec kolegi (gen.) (my friend's father died) and wadla z rąk broata (gen.) rewolwer (I took a gun from my brother's hands). Nouns in the dative in such sentences can be rendered into English only by means of the Saxon Genitive or of-adjunct.

Some Polish verbs that indicate the physical state or condition not determined by the will of the speaker also require the indirect object in the dative, for example: rodzicem (dat.) brakuje pieniędzy (my parents lack money), dzieciom przez się spią (dat.) (children want to sleep). As such construction is lacking in English, English learners of Polish may find it difficult to master.

A difference between Polish and English that will strike learners of either language is that the indirect object in English can be converted into the subject of a sentence in the passive. This property is absent from Polish.

1a. the best student has been granted a reward
   subject retained dir. obj.

2a. a soldier was given a slave-girl
   subject retained dir. obj.

This can be rendered into Polish only with the retention of the indirect object in the dative:

1b. najlepszymu studentowi została przyznana nagroda
   dat., indir. obj.
   subject

2b. najlepszymu studentowi przyznano nagrodę
   dat., indir. obj.
   - przyznali, acc., dir. obj.

2c. żołnierzowi została dana niezwołnica
   dat., indir. obj. - dali
   acc., dir. obj.

It should be noted, though, that sentences 1b and 2b may equally be the renderings of English sentences a reward has been granted to the best student and a slave-girl was given to a soldier. The direct object in Polish can be retained if a verb is used in the active voice: 1c. przynali przynano, 2c. dali or dano, the indirect objects in the dative being kept as well because the grammatical subject is either contained in the verbal form (dali, przynali) or absent altogether if the impersonal form of a given verb is used (dano, przynano). If the English learner of Polish attempted to transfer into his target language the property of the English indirect object whereby it can appear as the subject in the passive, the sentences he would produce e.g. żołnierz zostal dany niezwołnicy or najlepszy student zostal przynany nagrodą would be ungrammatical.

As has been stated earlier, the indirect noun object in Polish can also assume cases other than the dative and be accompanied by prepositions. The cases are determined by prepositions which in turn are required by verbs. Thus the Polish indirect object partially falls outside the domain of the indirect object in English and corresponds either to the English prepositional object or to the prepositional phrase.

**Prepositional Object.** The prepositional object can be spoken of when a verb followed by a preposition and a noun is equivalent to a single transitive verb with its direct object. The prepositional object is then treated as a kind of direct object (Thomas 1967: 125-7; Scheurweghs 1961: 18-19 and Zandvoort 1963: 201), capable of being changed into the subject in the passive.

He applied for a licence.
A licence was applied for by him.
We sent for a doctor.
A doctor was sent for by us.
She turned on the light.
The light was turned on by her.

English prepositional objects will correspond to Polish indirect objects with prepositions which determine the case of the object, sometimes to direct objects if the corresponding verb in Polish is a single transitive verb, e.g.:

- the lake abounds in fish — jeziorno obfituje w ryby (acc.)
- they approved of the idea — zaaprobowali pomysły (acc.)

Combinations of a preposition with a noun that do not comply with the definition of the prepositional object are regarded as prepositional phrases in English (Thomas 1967: 127; Scheurweghs 1961: 14, 19 and Zandvoort 1962: 204). These include phrases as in I came with John or he was followed
by the police. Corresponding Polish phrases (przeszedłem z Jankiem, byłem dawniej przez policję) are included into the category of indirect object.

**Objective Complement.** Certain transitive verbs in Polish and English such as naać, mianować, ogłosić, wznosić, wybracić, wstawić, and to consider, to feel, to find, to make, to appoint, to elect can be complemented by both a direct object and another object which shares the same structural referent with the direct object. In English the other object is called the objective complement (Zandvoort 1962: 203; Scheurweghs 1981: 27) and occupies the position after the direct object (Reszkiewicz 1968: 37 and Francis 1988: 355). Nouns that are used as objective complements can appear either without a preposition or may be introduced by as.

We consider Mr. Brown a good doctor.
They elected his brother president.
He appointed the teacher secretary.
We chose Dick as our leader.

What is represented by the objective complement in English, is regarded in Polish as belonging to the indirect object (Süber 1969: 310; Doroszewski 1964: 195) or as a separate object (Klemensiewicz 1963: 47 where the term 'dopelnienie orzekające' or predicative object is used). M. Pisarkowa contends that the Polish counterpart of the English objective complement should be considered a subtype of what she calls 'określenie predykatywne' or predicative modifier (Pisarkowa 1965: 21, 26-7). Nouns that are considered predicative modifiers assume the instrumental case without a preposition or are introduced by the prepositions jako, za, na, w after which they assume the accusative. This can be represented by the following formula (Pisarkowa 1965: 102-3):

\[
\text{predicate + accusative direct object + predicative modifier}
\]

\[
\text{predicative modifier = a) noun in the instrumental}
\]
\[
\text{b) jako + noun in the accusative}
\]
\[
\text{c) za + noun in the accusative}
\]
\[
\text{d) na + noun in the accusative}
\]
\[
\text{e) w + noun in the accusative}
\]

**dyrektor mianował Kowalskiego swojym zasadą]** (instr.)

**pred. modifier**

**na komendanta (prep.+acc.) wybraliśmy Janka**

**pred. modifier**

**otwieram jako aktystę (prep.+acc.)**

**pred. modifier**

**koledzy uważał Piotra za maniaka (prep.+acc.)**

**pred. modifier**

The predicative modifier should not present any difficulties to learners of Polish. Once they have mastered the cases assumed by nouns in this construction and the prepositions introducing the nouns, they will recognize a predicative modifier, no matter what its position in a sentence may be, as seen in the above examples.

* * *

The present discussion, which was meant to signal rather than exhaust some problems pertaining to noun objects in Polish and in English, has shown that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the languages under consideration with respect to the noun object, which has been summed up in the figure below.

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**INDEX OF ABBREVIATIONS**

acc. = accusative; dat. = dative; dir. = direct; gen. = genitive; instr. = instrumental; obj. = object; pred. = predicative; prep. = preposition, prepositional.

**REFERENCES**


Klemensiewicz, Z. 1963. Źródła składni polskiej. Warszawa: PWN.


