

Recalcitrant nature of Object Experiencers in Polish

Object experiencers have been the object of study for many years now. The extensive analysis by Beletti and Rizzi (1988) proposed to treat those verbs as unaccusative. This approach was later revisited by Pesetsky (1995), who provided arguments against the wholesale unaccusative treatment of object experiencer verbs, introducing a finer-grained semantic division among them. Recently, Landau (2005, 2009) has come up with an analysis which at first blush reconciles the two earlier treatments. The crucial part of the analysis concerns the status of verbal passives. As is well-known, a verb which allows verbal passives cannot be unaccusative. This stems from the facts first noted by Marantz (1984), who observed that just as passive morphology absorbs the external theta role, vacuous dethematization is impossible. Following a thorough cross-linguistic study, Landau concludes that languages fall into two types with regard to the presence of verbal passives, the first type exemplified by languages such as English, Finnish or Dutch, which possess verbal passives for eventive verbs only; the second type represented by Italian, French or Hebrew, which have no verbal passives at all. However, this neat typology seems to run into problems in Polish. It appears that Polish, which shares some properties of each of the two groups, falls out of the proposed classification. On the one hand, verbal passivization in Polish seems to yield grammatical results (see (1-2) below in the data section). But according to Landau's generalization, which states that "verbal passives of non-agentive ObjExp verbs will only be available in languages allowing either pseudopassives or (oblique) quirky passives" (2005: 48), Polish cannot be lumped together in the same category with English or Dutch as neither of these two strategies for passivization is attested. The reason for such a state of affairs may have much deeper roots. Contrary to what has been widely claimed in the literature on object experiencers, the nature of case on the experiencer in Polish does not seem to be inherent. In fact, there is a strong body of evidence that it has to be structural. For one thing, the Accusative case on the experiencer does not resist syntactic suppression. As is well known, Genitive of Negation affects structural case in languages such as Polish or Russian. Interestingly enough, Russian object experiencers retain their Accusative under Genitive of Negation (see (2) below after Legendre & Akimova 1993, ex. 40), which is an argument in favor of their inherent case status. The same is not true about Polish, where Genitive of Negation supersedes the Accusative, thus putting into question its inherent nature (4). Another fact corroborating the structural nature of Case on the Experiencer comes from reflexivization facts. As stated in Landau (2005: 34), "[r]eflexive *si/se* may absorb accusative or dative, but not oblique case". This explains why ObjExp verbs do not reflexivize in Italian ((5) below after Belletti & Rizzi (1988)), which is claimed to have oblique case, hence not lending itself to absorption. Given what has just been said, it would be a legitimate prediction, then, that in Polish, which purportedly has structural Accusative on object experiencers, reflexivization is a common process. Indeed, this is true, as shown in (6). All these facts clearly indicate that Landau's proposal cannot be maintained for Polish. It is evident that a refinement is necessary in the treatment of Object Experiencers. Tentative conclusions will be offered in the final section of the paper.

Data section:

- (1) Wieści o kryzysie właśnie teraz wyjątkowo niepokoją obywateli.
news about crisis just now exceptionally worry citizens
- (2) Obywatele są teraz niepokojeni wieściami o nadciągającym kryzysie (choć ledwie co
citizens are now being worried news about forthcoming crisis (even though they have
byli niepokojeni doniesieniami z rynku wschodniego).
just recently been worried about news from the eastern market
- (3) a. * Ètot šum ne pobespokoil ni odnoj devoPki.
that noise.NOM not bothered not one girl.GEN
'That noise did not bother a single girl'
- b. * Ego neudacca ne ogorPila materi.
his failure.NOM not upset mother.GEN
'His failure did not upset mother'
- (4) a. Ten hałas nie zaniepokoił ani jednej dziewczyny.
this noise-NOM not worried any single girl-GEN
'This noise did not worry a single girl'
- b. Jego porażka nie zdenerwowała matki.
his failure-NOM not upset mother-GEN
'His failure did not upset his mother'
- (5) * Gianni si preoccupa.
Gianni si worries
'Gianni worries himself'
- (6) Jan martwi się.
John worries się
'John worries himself'

Selected references:

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