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**Polish perfective generics**

## 1 Introduction

Perfective aspect in Polish expresses reference to a single, completed event.\* Given this, it is unexpected that perfective verb forms may appear in statements that express generalizations about events. The present paper argues that this violation of the “atomicity constraint” is only apparent, for a fundamental reason: Perfective generics do not assign properties that reflect how things are in the world. Instead, they assign properties that follow from the kinds that the things in the world are members of.

The paper is constructed as follows: In section 2 I describe the basic empirical facts about Polish generics. Section 3 introduces Klimek-Jankowka’s (2008, 2012) Greenbergian approach according to which perfective generics are true “in virtue of” an implicit property, which is associated with the subject expression and implies the property denoted by the perfective verb form. In section 4 I refute the applicability of Greenberg’s (2002, 2003) theory on perfective generics with proper name subjects (called “dispositional generics” by Klimek-Jankowka). In search of a more appropriate explanation, section 5 introduces Krifka’s (2012) fundamental distinction between descriptive (“about the world”) and definitional (“about the language”) generics. I argue that perfective generics with count singular subjects may be analyzed as definitional generics, whereas perfective generics with proper name subjects may not. Section 6 takes stock of the puzzling case of the latter, i.e. dispositional generics: How to make sense of the fact that these generics are about the world on the one hand, but are perfective on the other hand? In section 7 I present an argument to show that the implicit property involved in the interpretation of dispositional generics is actually not a precondition for the truth of the explicit property assignment, but should rather be viewed

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as an implication that follows from the truth of the dispositional generic. In section 8 I will propose that these implications follow from the interlocutors' shared knowledge of rules, which I relate to "k-properties" in the sense of Prasada et al. (2013). In section 9 I summarize my proposal, stating the hypothesis that perfective morphology in Polish generics always signals that the verbal property is a k-property. Section 10 discusses further empirical observations, and I will show how the proposed hypothesis can account for them. Section 11 concludes the paper.

## 2 Genericity in Polish

Polish uses imperfective verb forms to express generic statements. This is illustrated in (1) and (2):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) *Jan pije mleko sojowe na śniadanie.*  
 J. drinks.IPFV milk soya on breakfast  
 'Jan drinks soya milk for breakfast.'
- (2) *Maria pali papierosy.*  
 M. smokes.IPFV cigarettes  
 'Maria smokes.'

But Polish also uses perfective generics. Consider (3) and (4):

- (3) *Jan pomoże w potrzebie.*  
 J. helps.PFV in need  
 'Jan will help you in need.'
- (4) *Maria nie wypije taniego wina.*  
 M. not drinks.PFV cheap wine  
 'Maria will not drink cheap wine.'

This fact raises a number of questions. Why are there two morphological options? There is an intuitive difference in interpretation, which is reflected in the respective translations given above. But what exactly is this difference about?

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the examples that I use in this paper are taken from Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2012), sometimes with slight (but of course harmless, e.g. the change of the proper name) modifications.

Why is perfective aspect appealed to, given that there is the imperfective option, which seems more natural in generic statements? At least from a theoretical point of view, indeed, perfective verb forms are unexpected in generics. As Klimek-Jankowska (2008:318) puts it: “Perfective habituals [...] constitute a problem for most theories which associate habituality with the inherent semantics of the imperfective aspect”.

All of the examples (1) to (4) have a proper name as their subject. Besides, there are Polish perfective generics with count singular subjects:

- (5) *Dżentelmen otworzy drzwi kobietom.*  
gentleman opens.PFV doors women  
'A gentleman opens doors for ladies.'
- (6) *Ortodoksyjna muzułmanka nie odstoni twarzy przy posiłkach.*  
orthodox muslim-woman not uncover-PFV face  
at meals  
'An orthodox woman will not uncover her face during meals.'

In the following section, I will introduce the analysis that Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2012) has proposed for Polish perfective generics.

### 3 Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2012)

Following Greenberg (2002, 2003), Klimek-Jankowska proposes a single semantic representation for both imperfective and perfective generics in Polish with a modalized universal quantifier, whereby the difference in interpretation arises from the different worlds quantified over.

The starting point for her proposal is the intuition that perfective generics are true in virtue of some unspoken characterizing property of the subject referent. The truth of (7) seems to require that Jan is a helpful person, and the truth of (8) seems to require that Maria has courtly manners.

- (7) *Jan pomoże w potrzebie.*  
J. helps.PFV in need  
'Jan will help you in need.'                      ← Jan is a helpful person

- (8) *Maria nie wypije taniego wina.*  
 M. not drinks.PFV cheap wine  
 ‘Maria will not drink cheap wine.’ ← Maria has courtly manners

In view of this observation, Klimek-Jankowska calls perfective generics with proper name subjects “dispositional generics” – a term that I will adopt in this paper.

Imperfective generics, by contrast, do not seem to be connected to an “in virtue of”-property. The truth of the imperfective utterance (9) does not require Jan to be a helpful person. What is required is that, on sufficiently many occasions, Jan has proved to have the property of helping in need. Nothing, however, is thereby said about his character.

- (9) *Jan pomaga w potrzebie.*  
 J. helps.IPFV in need  
 ‘Jan helps in need.’

Similarly, the imperfective generic (10) does not communicate that Maria has courtly manners or something of this kind. What is stated is a purely empirical generalization derived from her never having been seen drinking cheap wine.

- (10) *Maria nie pije taniego wina.*  
 M. not drinks.IPFV cheap wine  
 ‘Maria does not drink cheap wine.’

Thus, unlike the dispositionals (7) and (8), the generics (9) and (10) express what is sometimes called inductive generalizations (Carlson 1995; Cohen 1999; Gorishneva 2011). Klimek-Jankowska uses the term “descriptive generics”, and so will I from now on.

As noted above, Klimek-Jankowska assumes a unique Greenbergian semantics for perfective and imperfective generics. W.r.t. (7) and (9), the common semantic representation is as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- (11)  $\forall w'[R(w;w')]$   
 $\rightarrow [\forall e[\text{do-sth-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')]$   
 $\rightarrow [\text{help-you-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')]]$

<sup>2</sup> In the following presentation of Klimek-Jankowska’s account I simplify a bit, but the simplification does not affect the gist of the proposal.

The interpretive difference between imperfective (“descriptive”) and perfective (“dispositional”) generics is considered to follow from the content of the accessibility relation “R”. In the former case, the accessibility relation selects all the worlds appropriately accessible from the actual world  $w$ . This set includes the worlds in which the circumstances of such events in the actual world hold as well. Accordingly, for descriptive generics, the semantic representation specifies as follows:

- (12)  $\forall w'$ [the circumstances of  $e$  in  $w$  hold in  $w'$  as well]  
 $\rightarrow [\forall e[\text{do-sth-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')]$   
 $\rightarrow [\text{help-you-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')]]$

In the case of dispositional generics, by contrast, the accessibility relation picks out the set of worlds in which the “in virtue of”-property is true of Jan:

- (13)  $\forall w'$ [Jan is helpful in  $w'$ ]  
 $\rightarrow [\forall e[\text{do-sth-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')]$   
 $\rightarrow [\text{help-you-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')]]$

## 4 A problem for Klimek-Jankowska’s account

There is a problem for Klimek-Jankowska’s proposal relating to the source of the “in virtue of”-property: Greenberg’s original account is concerned with generics whose subject phrase is syntactically projected from a common noun. Greenberg’s theory specifically applies to English indefinite singular generics as opposed to bare plural generics. Consider, for instance, (14) as opposed to (15):

- (14) *A boy does not cry.*  
 (15) *Boys do not cry.*

Greenberg’s (2002) claim is that indefinite singular generics can only express “in virtue of”-generalizations. The question of how to calculate the relevant “in virtue of”-property is answered by Greenberg along the following lines (cf. Oosterhof 2008:40):

- (16) i. “in virtue of” properties must be associated with another property denoted by the NP quantified over  
 ii. A property P can only be “associated” with another property Q if it follows from our beliefs, norms and stereotypes about the actual world that every individual Q has the property P

The pieces of background knowledge (“beliefs, norms and stereotypes”) that the interlocutors have to share for (14) to be accepted as a true statement may be represented as follows:

- (17) i.  $Q: \textit{boy} \rightarrow P: \textit{tough} \rightarrow P': \textit{not-cry}$

Simply speaking, the idea visualized in (17) is that the property of not crying can be truly predicated of any boy because it is known that the property of being a boy implies the property of being tough, which by itself implies the property of not crying.

The Greenbergian approach is applicable to Polish count singular generics like (18) in a straightforward way.

- (18) *Chłopak nie rozplacze się bez powodu.*  
 boy not cry.PFV without reason  
 ‘A boy will not cry without reason.’

A concern arises when we move on to dispositional generics. The problem is that in these cases there is no NP to denote Q such that Q could be associated with P (no “NP quantified over”). Recall that the subject of a dispositional generic is usually a proper name (*Jan, Maria,...*), as in (19):

- (19) *Jan nie rozplacze się bez powodu.*  
 J. not cry.PFV without reason  
 ‘Jan will not cry without reason.’

Klimek-Jankowska’s proposal aims at covering two types of examples: those represented by (18) and the ones represented by (19). However, since a proper name by itself supplies no property, it is at least not obvious how to transfer Greenberg’s theory to dispositional generics. Thus, Klimek-Jankowska’s (2012:33) claim that when a perfective generic is uttered, “the speaker has in mind and the listener accommodates some law-like characteristics of the subject in virtue of

which the generalization is true” seems reasonable as far as count singular generics are concerned. But in how far does it make sense for dispositionals? On which basis does the listener accommodate in these cases? I will come back to this point in section 7 below.

## 5 Descriptive and definitional mode of speaking

Krifka (2012) disagrees with Greenberg as to the contrast between (14) and (15). For him, the two utterances represent “two different kinds of generic statements with fundamentally different semantic representations” (Krifka 2012:3).<sup>3</sup> Krifka proposes to distinguish between a descriptive and a definitional mode of speaking:

The fundamental difference between definitions and descriptions appears to be this: Descriptions presuppose that the language is fixed, and is the same for all participants in conversation. Using this shared language, the participants can communicate about the world. In contrast, definitions communicate about the language that is being used. The speaker wants to introduce a new term, or impose a certain understanding of existing terms.

(Krifka 2012:3)

(15) represents the descriptive mode of speaking. The speaker utters this sentence presupposing agreement on the intensions of the predicates in the language used. She wants to tell the hearer about a fact, specifically about an empirically justified generalization. If the hearer accepts the generalization as a true proposition, this will, as usual, exclude the set of worlds incompatible with that proposition from her model of common ground.

(14) by contrast to (15) represents the definitional mode of speaking. Here the speaker presupposes agreement with the hearer about the facts holding in the world. The speaker’s aim is to inform the hearer about the interpretation of a predicate in their shared language. Specifically, she asserts a narrower extension of the predicate *boy* than she believes the the hearer to have. If the hearer accepts

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<sup>3</sup> Page numbers quoted according to the manuscript available at [http://amor.cms.hu-berlin.de/~h281613x/Publications/Krifka\\_DefinitionalGenerics.pdf](http://amor.cms.hu-berlin.de/~h281613x/Publications/Krifka_DefinitionalGenerics.pdf). Note by the way that, if Krifka was right, Klimek-Jankowska’s unified treatment of Polish dispositional and descriptive generics would lose its theoretical grounding.

the proposition as true, she will adjust her model of common ground accordingly.<sup>4</sup> From the interpretations that she considered to be possible for the predicate *boy* up to then will she cancel those that are incompatible with the newly associated property.

In this paper, I will argue that Krifka's distinction is crucial for understanding aspect choice in Polish generics. My starting point is the fact that the referential event argument of a perfective verb form in Polish is subject to an atomicity condition (Klimek-Jankowska 2012:41). Given this, it seems natural to assume that perfective aspect in Polish is semantically not suited to express "about the world"-generalizations. Therefore, if we encounter a Polish perfective generic with a descriptive subject nominal, this will have to be a definitional generic. The relevant cases to illustrate this fact are (5) and (6), repeated here with a slight modification:

- (20) *Prawdziwy dżentelmen otworzy drzwi kobietom.*  
 real gentleman opens.PFV doors women  
 'A true gentleman opens doors for ladies.'
- (21) *Prawdziwa Ortodoksyjna muzułmanka nie odsłoni  
 twarzy przy posiłkach.*  
 real orthodox muslim-woman not uncover-PFV  
 face at meals  
 'A true orthodox woman will not uncover her face during meals.'

The claim that the perfective generics (5) and (6) represent cases of definitional genericity is supported by the fact that these statements trigger a silent *prawdziwy/-a* accompanying the subject nominal, which is explicated in (20) and (21). This adjective arguably serves to emphasize that the utterance is about the correct use of the nominal it modifies. Its impact may be paraphrased as "a gentleman who deserves being called a gentleman".

Note that expressing definitional statements is not the exclusive domain of perfective aspect in Polish. Also the imperfective may be used in that function, in addition to its ordinary descriptive generic use. The *prawdziwy/-a* modifier may be used for disambiguation, as it fixes the definitional mode of speaking:

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<sup>4</sup> Krifka (2012) conceives of the common ground as a pair  $\langle I, W \rangle$ , whereby  $W$  is a set of possible worlds (the worlds compatible with the factual content of the common ground) and  $I$  is a set of appropriate interpretations (the interpretations that the interlocutors accept as reasonable).



- (22) *Prawdziwy dżentelmen otwiera drzwi kobietom.*  
 real gentleman opens.IPFV doors women  
 ‘A true gentleman opens doors for ladies.’
- (23) *Prawdziwa Ortodoksyjna muzułmanka nie odsłania  
 twarzy przy posiłkach.*  
 real orthodox muslim-woman not uncover-IPFV  
 face at meals  
 ‘A true orthodox woman will not uncover her face during meals.’

Up to now, we only saw examples of perfective definitional generics with subject nominals describing animate entities. The examples below show that there are inanimate subjects as well:

- (24) *Joga pomaga na zimową depresję.*  
 yoga helps.IPFV on winter depression  
 ‘Yoga helps against winter depression.’
- (25) *Joga pomoże na zimową depresję.*  
 yoga helps.PFV on winter depression  
 ‘Yoga will help against winter depression.’

And so, following Krifka (2012), I expect there to be two “fundamentally different” varieties of generic statements. On the one hand, there are generic statements about the world, i.e. descriptive generics. On the other hand, there are statements about the language used, which are generic per se, i.e. definitional generics. As for Polish generics with a count singular subject, we saw that the imperfective version may and the perfective version must be read as a definitional generic.

## 6 Dispositional generics

Let us now turn to Polish dispositional generics. According to Krifka (2012:7), definitional generics require a topic which qualifies as a plausible definiendum. The subject of a count singular generic (e.g. *dżentelmen*) is well suited to fulfill this function. Not so the subject of a dispositional generic. In the cases that we have seen so far the subject always was a proper name (*Jan, Maria*). A proper name does not qualify as a definiendum, at least if we assume what is standardly assumed, i.e. that proper names are referential and not descriptive. This renders an

analysis of these generics as “statements about language” unlikely. Dispositionals are about the individuals Jan, Maria or whatever is named by the subject term, and therefore they are statements about the world.

Dispositionals thus seem to pose a severe problem. On the one hand, we assume that perfective verb forms are excluded from “about the world”-generics because these involve a quantification of the denoted event which is at odds with the atomicity constraint on perfective aspect. On the other hand we assume that dispositional generics cannot be “about the language”-generics because their subjects do not deliver a “definable” topic. What, then, are they?

Let us have a closer look at the examples discussed by Klimek-Jankowska. For most of them it holds that the perfective verb form is flanked by linguistic material that enforces a generic interpretation of the predicate.<sup>5</sup> This is illustrated in (26) to (28). The a-examples, which are adopted from Klimek-Jankowska, display dispositional generic readings. In the b-examples I have minimally modified the VP to the effect that, out of the blue, these sentences are no longer interpreted generically (at least not unequivocally so). This effect can be shown by insertion of the temporal adverbial *jutro* (‘tomorrow’). This adverbial fixes an episodic future reading. As expected, it is tolerated in the b-examples, but not in the a-examples.

- (26) a. *Jan (#jutro) pomoże w potrzebie.*  
 J. tomorrow helps.PFV in need  
 ‘Jan will help you in need (tomorrow).’  
 b. *Jan (jutro) pomoże w biurze.*  
 J. tomorrow helps.PFV in office  
 ‘Jan will help you in the office (tomorrow).’
- (27) a. *Jan (#jutro) nie rozplacze się bez powodu.*  
 J. tomorrow not cries.PFV without reason  
 ‘Jan will not cry without reason (tomorrow).’  
 b. *Jan (jutro) nie rozplacze się u dentysty.*  
 J. tomorrow not cries.PFV at dentist  
 ‘Jan will not cry at the dentist (tomorrow).’

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<sup>5</sup> The observed bias is no absolute condition for realizing a perfective generic. Klimek-Jankowska’s example to illustrate this is (4). This is different from the situation in Russian where perfective generics appear only with “inherently generic” predicates, as in the famous *On rešit ljubuju zadacu* (cf. Zaliznjak & Šmelev 1997; Šatunovskij 2009, Rassudova 1968). Whether and to what extent the account developed in this paper carries over to Russian (or other Slavic languages, e.g. Bulgarian, cf. Gorishneva 2011, 2012) is a matter of future research.

- (28) a. *Jan (#jutro) nie zaakceptuje poglądów*  
 J. tomorrow not accepts.PFV opinions  
*innych ludzi.*  
 other people  
 ‘Jan will not accept other people’s opinions (tomorrow).’
- b. *Jan (jutro) nie zaakceptuje poglądów*  
 J. tomorrow not accepts.PFV opinions  
*tych ludzi.*  
 these people  
 ‘Jan will not accept the opinions of these people (tomorrow).’

The felt need to fix the generic reading of a perfective dispositional in out-of-the-blue contexts arises, obviously, because otherwise this interpretation would “slip away” giving way to an episodic reading. I propose that the strong bias toward an episodic interpretation follows from two facts that come together in Polish dispositional generics. First, the subject refers to an individual, which, as noted above, determines the descriptive (“about the world”) mode of speaking. Second, as also noted above, perfective sentences cannot express descriptive generalizations. The puzzle is: Why can perfective “about the world”-generics nevertheless exist? Below I will offer a solution which may be summarized as follows: Definitional generics operate on the information about the kind of thing referred to by the definiendum. Dispositional generics are not definitionals, but they exploit knowledge about kinds in basically the same way as definitionals do. This commonality is what licenses the use of perfective aspect in both cases.

## 7 The law-like structure

Recall from above that Klimek-Jankowska identifies law-like structures as constitutive for the meaning of perfective generics:

In uttering a perfective generalization, a speaker has in mind and a hearer needs to accommodate some background law-like evidence in virtue of which the generalization is true.  
 (Klimek-Jankowska 2008:327)

On her account of dispositionals, the law-like structure is supplied by the ‘in virtue of’-property, as shown in (29) (cf. Klimek-Jankowska 2008:331):

(29) a. *Jan pocieszy cię w potrzebie.*

J. comfort.PFV you in need

‘Jan will comfort you in need.’

b. [[(29a)]] $w, g=1$  iff

$\forall w'[(\text{Jan-has-high-empathy-in-}w')$

$\rightarrow \forall e[\text{do-something-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')$

$\rightarrow \text{comfort-you-when-you-are-in-need}(e, \text{Jan}, w')]]$

In this case, the “in virtue of”-property is *have high empathy*. This property applies to the subject referent Jan forming the proposition *Jan has high empathy*. Since quantification is restricted to those worlds  $w'$  in which this proposition is true, the proposition figures in a “law-like structure”: it serves an antecedent condition that needs to be taken into account before universal quantification is evaluated.

As noted above, there is a problem with this account. Let us ask: On the basis of what does the hearer accommodate the “in-virtue-of”-property? In the case of Polish count singular generics like (20) and English indefinite singular generics there is a plausible candidate: the property denoted by the subject nominal. Consider (18), which I repeat here for convenience:

(30) *Chłopak nie rozplacze się bez powodu.*

boy not cry.PFV without reason

‘A boy will not cry without reason.’

Both speaker and hearer know that being a boy is associated with other properties, e.g. with the property of being tough, being rude, loving football etc. Note that it therefore cannot be this “association” relation that would be in need of accommodation by the hearer. What needs to be accommodated is something else, i.e. a causal (law-like) relation between one of these familiar boy properties and the property which forms the predicate of the generic sentence. Accommodation here means that the hearer has to choose the one property associated with *boy* that suits best to establish such a causal relation to the property of not crying. The chosen property is the “in virtue of”-property.

In the case of Polish dispositional generics, however, the subject names no property that could provide associated properties out of which to determine the “in virtue of”-property. The subject is just a proper name, *Jan*. Consider (31) (=19):

- (31) *Jan nie rozplacze się bez powodu.*  
 J. not cry.PFV without reason  
 ‘Jan will not cry without reason.’

One might want to object that the hearer knows that Jan is a boy (because Jan is a boy’s name) and that it is this property that serves the basis for determining the “in-virtue of”-property by analogy to (30). This cannot be the crucial factor, however, because if we change *Jan* to, say, *Maria* or *Gerhild*, the resulting dispositional is no less acceptable than (31).

Another rescue of the Greenbergian approach might be to assume that the interlocutors know of numerous properties of Jan (say, among others, the properties of being tough, being tall and driving a Mercedes), and that it is one of these that the speaker has in mind as the “in virtue of”-property. However, this attempt likewise fails. Let us see why.

At least in principle, the properties associated with a nominal property like *boy* necessarily belong to the shared knowledge of speaker and hearer. This is “the standard precondition for all lexicalized communication” (Givón 2001:461). Not so the properties associated with a person like Jan. It may well be that the hearer has no information at all about the person that the speaker is talking about (except that he or she is a person). Consider the following:

- (32) *Ależ chętnie poznam Cię z moją koleżanką Maria.*  
 but with\_pleasure familiarize you with my colleague M.  
*Ona naprawdę bardzo sympatyczna.*  
 she really very nice  
*Powinieneś jednak wiedzieć: ona nie wypije taniego wina.*  
 you\_should however know she not drinks.PFV cheap wine  
 ‘It will be my pleasure to introduce you to my colleague Maria. She is very nice indeed. But you should know: she does not drink cheap wine.’
- (33) *Oj, co teraz mamy robić? Najlepiej wezwiemyjego*  
 EXCL what now we\_should do best call.PFV my  
*brata Jana. On podniesie nawet czołg.*  
 brother J. he lifts.PFV even tank  
 ‘Uj. What to do now? The best will be to call my brother Jan. He will even lift a tank.’

In (32), the hearer is obviously not familiar with Maria (although he would like to be). I have argued that, accordingly, there is no chance for the hearer to establish an appropriate “law-like proposition” to bridge between being Mary and not

drinking cheap wine, which is necessary on Klimek-Jankowka's analysis to let the use of the perfective make sense. Nevertheless, the perfective generic does make sense, it even sounds very natural. Similar in (33), where Jan is newly introduced to the hearer as the right person to solve the problem that the interlocutors are facing. Not knowing Jan, the hearer knows of no property to associate the required "in virtue of"-property with. And still the dispositional generic is absolutely sound. I conclude that Maria being a demanding person is not a presupposition that the hearer is required to accommodate for enabling a truthful assignment of the property of not drinking cheap wine to Maria. Instead, Maria's being demanding is an inference that the hearer is invited to draw on the basis of the asserted truth of Maria not drinking cheap wine. The same with brother Jan's being a problem solver in (33).

In the case of dispositional generics the apparent "in virtue of"-property is actually a property that the speaker assigns to the subject. She does so by asserting a generalization, the truth of which qualifies as evidence for the assigned property to hold. Klimek-Jankowska's claim that Polish perfective generics "can only be obtained in scenarios in which a speaker has in mind and a listener accommodates some law-like characteristics of the subject in virtue of which the generalisations they express are true" (Klimek-Jankowska 2012:33) is therefore in need of modification. It is not the case that the speaker wants the hearer to accommodate an implicit property in order to license the assignment of the overtly expressed property. It is rather the other way round: the speaker assigns the overt property in order to lead the hearer to infer the implicit property.

## 8 Definitional generics and kind knowledge

What is the "law-like structure" involved in the interpretation of Polish dispositional generics? In the previous section I argued that it cannot be the "in virtue of"-proposition that Klimek-Jankowska proposed. In this section I will present my own answer. I will start with a reflection about the nature of definitional generics.

Krifka (2012:10) observes that successful definitional generics require their subject expressions to "pick out a [...] kind on which species-based generalizations [can] be expressed". Consider the contrast between the following two statements, uttered in front of a camel enclosure in a zoo:

- (34) a. *A camel survives without water for about two weeks.*  
 b. *??An animal in this enclosure survives without water for about two weeks*

Krifka (2012:11) also notes that the predicate is required to “run in the kind” identified by the subject nominal, otherwise the definitional generic will be bad. “Which predicates can be understood as running in a kind depends on the kind itself” (ibid.), as the following contrast illustrates:

- (35) a. *??A madrigal is popular.*  
 b. *A hero is popular.*

These facts suggest that the “interlocutors know beforehand which expressions [...] can be plausibly understood as expressing something essential that may be turned into a definitional property” (ibid.). I propose to pin down Krifka’s observation as follows: definitional generics presuppose knowledge about the k-properties projected by the kind that is identified by the subject nominal which is to be defined.

The notion of kinds projecting k-properties stems from the works of Prasada and colleagues (Prasada & Dillingham 2006, 2009; Prasada 2012, 2013; Prasada et al. 2013).<sup>6</sup> These authors make a case for what they call the dual function of concepts. What is meant is explained in the following quote:

Concepts are mechanisms by which we think about things. For example, the concept DOG provides the means for thinking about indefinitely many distinct things as being a given kind of thing (e.g. dog). Furthermore, it also provides the means for thinking about the kind dog itself.

(Prasada 2013:3235)

As is already suggested in this quote, these two functions do not exist independently of each other. Instead, the conceptual representation of the kind is considered to serve as the basis for thinking about the particulars:

[A] kind concept such as DOG is, at its core, a generative mechanism which has the capacity to generate indefinitely many representations each of which represent an instance of the kind.

(Prasada 2013:3237)

For this to be possible, any kind must be associated with a specific set of properties in a principled way. These are the “k-properties” (“k” is, of course, reminiscent of “kind”). Having four legs would be a k-property associated with the kind dog, being wet would not – even if every existing dog happened to be wet:

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<sup>6</sup> Henceforth, I will refer to these works collectively as “Prasada et al.”.

[T]he kind projects a [...] structure which provides the means for representing the properties that have a principled connection to the kind (k-properties) as aspects of being that kind of thing.

(Prasada 2013:3237)

To recapitulate: An individual may be assigned numerous properties. Whereas episodic properties (“t-properties” in Prasada et al.’s terms) are properties that the individual has in virtue of the actual circumstances that it happens to be in, k-properties are properties that the individual has in virtue of belonging to a certain kind that “projects” these properties.

The generative mechanism behind kinds “leads us to expect that all instances of a kind will possess their k-properties by virtue of being the kinds of things they are” (Prasada & Dillingham 2009:434). Therefore, the notion of a kind projecting k-properties may be thought of as the kind implying a set of rules. Adopting Cohen’s (2001) logical form of rules, I state the set of rules about the kind referred to by *gentleman* as follows.<sup>7 8</sup>

- (36) {!( $\forall x$ [realize( $x$ ,  $\cap$ gentleman)  $\rightarrow$  open-doors-for-a-lady( $x$ )]),  
 !( $\forall x$ [realize( $x$ ,  $\cap$ gentleman)  $\rightarrow$  walk-closest-to-the-curb( $x$ )]),  
 !( $\forall x$ [realize( $x$ ,  $\cap$ gentleman)  $\rightarrow$  help-a-lady-with-her-coat( $x$ )]),  
 !( $\forall x$ [realize( $x$ ,  $\cap$ gentleman)  $\rightarrow$  pay-gaming-depts( $x$ )]),  
 !( $\forall x$ [realize( $x$ ,  $\cap$ gentleman)  $\rightarrow$  rise-when-a-lady-enters( $x$ )]),  
 ... }

Thus, I take definitional generics to be “definitional” in the sense that these utterances serve to add another item to the list of rules associated with the kind that the subject expression (the definiendum) identifies. So what is the “law-like structure” involved in Polish dispositional generics? My answer to be made precise below is: a rule in the field of kind knowledge.

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<sup>7</sup> The kind referred to by *gentleman* is a “social kind [...] defined by reference to a set of shared ideals rooted in the medieval chivalric code of conduct” (Krifka 2014:11). I represent kinds by means of Chierchia’s (1998) “cap”-operator. The operator symbolized by the exclamation mark “maps a [conditional] formula to the rule it describes if there is such a rule, and is undefined otherwise” (Cohen 2001:198).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <http://aplus.com/a/23-behaviors-of-a-gentleman-for-2015>.



## 9 The claim

In accordance with the discussion above, I will now present an alternative account of Polish dispositionals. The idea is to relate the “law-likeness” intuition to a rule which is grounded in kind knowledge. Here is my claim:<sup>9</sup>

(37) **Hypothesis about Polish perfective generics:**

In generic contexts, perfective morphology serves to indicate that the VP-property is to be interpreted as a k-property.

Given this hypothesis, it is predicted that any uttering of a perfective generic will imply the existence of a kind that is relevant for interpretation, i.e. the kind that projects, among other k-properties, the property denoted by the VP of the respective sentence. The interpreter (hearer) is accordingly invited to seek for a suitable kind that projects the explicitly expressed property, and the kind membership of the subject referent is what the speaker wants to convey.

The hypothesis just stated raises the question of how to test whether a property is a k-property. As noted above, determining a kind  $\cap P$  that projects the VP-property Q is tantamount to identifying a rule which says that, if something is an instance of  $\cap P$ , it will have the property Q by virtue of being the kind of thing it is (cf. Prasada & Dillingham 2009). Building on Cohen (1999:198), I suggest a direct mapping between (definitional) generics and rules: A generic sentence is used to express that a rule is in-effect, and a rule is in-effect just in case the corresponding generic sentence is true. Accordingly, if we agree on the truth of the English utterance (38a), we can be sure that there is the socially accepted rule (38b).

(38) a. *A gentleman opens doors for ladies.*

b.  $!(\forall x[\text{realize}(x, \cap \text{gentleman}) \rightarrow \text{open-doors-for-a-lady}(x)])$

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<sup>9</sup> It is tempting to link the use of perfective aspect in generics to its use in non-generic future statements, the common denominator being something like non-factuality. In this vein, Gorishneva (2011) proposes to relate perfective aspect in general to a “conviction about the truth of the statement expressed”, and that “in statements about dispositions the conviction of the speaker is based on knowledge about essential properties of entities”. I share Gorishneva’s intuition, and I wish to point out that my analysis is not at odds with this idea.

Whether the property Q denoted by the VP of a Polish dispositional generic is a k-property can therefore be checked by looking for a true English indefinite singular generic whose VP likewise expresses Q. With respect to the utterances (26a) to (28a), the test yields positive results:

- (39) a. *{A true friend/ A samarian} helps in need.*  
 b. *{A man/ A boy} doesn't cry (without reason).*  
 c. *A gourmet doesn't drink cheap wine.*  
 d. *An egoist doesn't accept other peoples opinions.*

So our hypothesis seems to make correct predictions with respect to dispositional generics. But not only that. If we translate these rule-expressing sentences into Polish, perfective verbforms will be used:

- (40) a. *Prawdziwy przyjaciel pomoże w potrzebie.*  
 b. *Chłopak nie rozpłacze się bez powodu.*  
 c. *Smakosz nie wypije taniego wina.*  
 d. *Egoista nie zaakceptuje poglądów innych ludzi.*

Since I conceive of rules as k-predications about a kind, this pattern is obviously also in line with hypothesis (37).

And so, I arrived at the following generalization: A Polish dispositional generic will be uttered successfully only if the verbal predicate matches a property that appears in the consequent of one of the rules associated with a kind. By taking into account the respective rule, the hearer will be led to identify the subject referent of the dispositional as a member of the kind.

## 10 More predictions of the present analysis

Klimek-Jankowska (2008:329-330) makes a number of fine-grained empirical observations. In this section, I will discuss them one by one and show how the proposed hypothesis (37) accounts for these facts.

The observation that I begin with is the following. The perfective sentences in (41) have salient episodic readings if they are presented out of the blue. Utterance (41a) strongly implies that the wife's car is broken at the moment of speech, and (41b) suggests an exceptional occasion on which Trump is free to help at home.

- (41) a. *Jan nie naprawi żonie samochodu.*  
 J. not repairs.PFV wife car  
 ‘Jan will not repair his wife’s car.’ (episodic reading)
- b. *Donald Trump posprząta w domu.*  
 D. T. cleans.PFV in house  
 ‘Donald Trump will do the housework.’ (episodic reading)

The very same sentences take on generic interpretations, however, if they appear in the contexts given in (42). (42a) may well be uttered in a situation in which Jan’s wife’s car is running great, and (42b) does not seem to imply that Trump helps at home only in exceptional cases.

- (42) a. *Jan ma dwie lewe ręce.*  
 J. has two left hands  
*On nie naprawi żonie samochodu.*  
 he not repairs.PFV wife car  
 ‘Jan is all thumbs. He does not repair his wife’s car.’ (generic reading)
- b. *Chociaż Donald Trump jest prezydentem,*  
 although D. T. is president  
*on posprząta w domu.*  
 he cleans.PFV in house  
 ‘Although Donald Trump is president, he does the housework.’ (generic reading)

Klimek-Jankowska (2008:330) suggests that the generic readings in (42) obtain “because context states explicitly that they [the generic interpretations; OMR] follow from a background law-like proposition from which they can be indirectly inferred”. At least with respect to (42a), this suggestion is problematic. The problem is that there simply is no *explicit* contextual reference to a “law-like proposition” saying that if someone is technically disabled, he will not repair his wife’s car. Rather, such a rule would have to be inferred by itself.

Does the analysis proposed in this paper offer an alternative explanation for (41a)? It seems to follow from my hypothesis that perfective aspect serves as a signal that *nie naprawi żonie samochodu* is to be interpreted as a k-property. As explained above, this means that this property is to be treated as being projected by a kind, which has to be reconstructed. A reconstructable kind should figure as subject referent in a true definitional generic involving the same predicate. However, as far as I can tell, it is impossible to find a (supposedly) true definitional generic that has this predicate. We can conclude that there is no rule in effect that

could support the generic reading of (41a), the overt predicate can be no k-property, and the episodic reading is predicted. The problem is that, by the same kind of reasoning, the generic reading would be excluded in (42a) as well, *contra* fact. So at first sight it seems that my account fails.

This conclusion is premature, however. Note that the predicate in (41a) involves negation. What if the relevant predicate to look for a k-property is not *nie naprawi zonie samochodu*, but rather its non-negated version, *naprawi zonie samochodu*? Indeed, a (supposedly) true definitional generic for the non-negated predicate *can* be found:

- (43) *Dobry mąż naprawi żonie samochodu.*  
 good husband repairs.PFV wife car  
 ‘A good husband will repair his wife’s car.’

The hypothesis (37) may account for the oddity of (41a) also if the sentence is read as a negated generic, and here is how: Under this construal, the sentence would express that Jan lacks the k-property of repairing his wife’s car. It lies in the nature of k-properties, however, that they automatically apply to any member of the kind unless there is some special reason that renders this or that particular member an exceptional case. In the words of Prasada & Dillingham (2009:434), we can “expect that all instances of a kind will possess their k-properties by virtue of being the kinds of things they are, while allowing for the possibility that some instances may lack k-properties *for reasons other than their being the kinds of things they are.*” (emphasis orig.). Thus, if (41a) expresses the lack of the k-property of repairing his wife’s car, this must be for a reason other than his being the car owner’s husband. The problem with (41a) is, then, that no such reason is provided. And here is where the “rescuing effect” of the context given in (42a) comes into play. This context supplies exactly what is needed for motivating the conclusion that Jan does not repair his wife’s car: a reason why he does not, *although* he is the husband.

The situation with (41b) is slightly different, although it eventually makes the same point. Since we know that Trump is president, and since (44) is, arguably, a true definitional generic, (41b) will be understood as the denial of the application of the k-property of not cleaning at home.

- (44) *Prezydent nie posprząta w domu.*  
 president not cleans.PFV in house  
 ‘A president does not do the housework.’

As we just saw, however, the denial of a k-property requires providing a reason as to why the otherwise expected k-property does not apply. Since (41b) does not offer any such reason, the sentence refrains from actualizing the generic reading.

(42b) likewise specifies no reason as to why Trump should not have the respective k-property projected by the kind  $\cap$  president, i.e. not cleaning up at home. There is, however, the adversative clause, which signals that Trump's attitude towards the mentioned property deviates from the norm (cf. d'Avis 2013). The addressee gets informed that there is a reason for the k-property to not apply in the case of Trump (the reason itself is left implicit though). This way, the pragmatic obstacle rendering a generic reading impossible in (41b) is deleted, and the sentence can be read as a negated generic. It expresses that Trump does not bear the otherwise expected k-property of not cleaning up at home.

Klimek-Jankowka's observation that Polish perfective generics come without an "enough presupposition", as she calls it, can also easily be accounted for by the proposed hypothesis. A k-property characterizes the property bearing individual not because the individual has proved on sufficiently many occasions to "deserve" the property. If it had, the respective cases would be cases of inductive generic readings (empirical generalizations). Instead, the k-property assignment is, by definition, licensed by the individual's kind membership (recall section 8).

Another observation by Klimek-Jankowska concerns the examples under (45).

- (45) a. *Krowa Mary {daje /<sup>??</sup>da} mleko.*  
 cow M. gives.IPFV gives.PFV milk  
 'Cow Mary gives milk.'
- b. *Nasza kura {znosi /<sup>??</sup>zniesie} jajka.*  
 our hen lays.IPFV lays.PFV eggs  
 'Our hen lays eggs.'

Since giving milk is, intuitively, an inherent property of a cow (as well as laying eggs for a hen), it is surprising at first sight that the perfective versions are dispreferred (as generics) in these cases. To cope with that observation, Klimek-Jankowska (2008:332) stipulates that "perfective habituals serve as markers of an evidential mechanism of indirect inference", and that it is this "additional restriction" that is not met in (45). This explains the data because, after all, each of (45) "expresses a known fact which does not need to be inferred" (Klimek-Jankowska 2008:333).

The alternative analysis that I propose in the present paper does not need to resort to additional constraints to explain (45). According to (37), perfective morphology is used as an advice to the addressee to reconstruct a kind to which the subject entity belongs. This kind membership is what the speaker wants to convey. Accordingly, it will have to have the status of new information. Since in (45), the kinds to which the respective subject entities belong ( $\cap$ cow,  $\cap$ hen) are explicitly named, the perfective versions of these sentences are predicted to be uninformative.

This being said, consider (46). This sentence, which expresses the so-called “capacity reading” (Krifka et al. 1995), makes a good perfective generic. But isn’t the kind membership named here, too?

- (46) *Ten samochód osiągnie prędkość do 200 km/h.*  
 this car reaches.PFV speed until 200kmh  
 ‘This car goes 200 kmh.’

There is a crucial difference to the cases in (45). While it holds that as a rule every cow gives milk and every hen lays eggs, it does not hold as a rule that every car goes 200 kmh. This indicates that the kind to be inferred in (46), i.e. the kind that projects the denoted k-property, is not the explicitly named kind  $\cap$ car, but rather some subkind of it. Therefore, unlike the perfective versions of (45), (46) does not face the problem of being uninformative.

## 11 Conclusions

In this paper, I have proposed to analyze Polish count singular perfective generics as definitional generics. As such, these generics are not about the world but about the language, more specifically, about the interpretation of the singular nominal that forms the subject of the sentence. Not being about the world, these generics are immune to the atomicity constraint that otherwise excludes perfective aspect from the expression of genericity. In other words: If a count singular generic has a perfective verb form, this will be an unequivocal indicator of definitional genericity. Uttering a definitional generic, the speaker invites the hearer to update her model of common ground by adding a rule to the kind that the expression of the definiendum identifies.

The case of Polish dispositional generics is even more intriguing. I have argued that dispositional generics are “about the world”-generics, and that the use of perfective aspect is therefore *prima facie* unexpected. For this reason, the

hearer will normally resort to a non-generic interpretation. However, to say that an interpretation is unexpected is not to say that it is excluded. The particular discourse may suggest a generic understanding of the sentence. It will even require a generic reading, if the perfective verb form is flanked by material that renders a non-generic interpretation impossible. In such cases, the hearer will treat the perfective on analogy to perfectives in count singular generics. This amounts to interpreting the perfective verb form as a k-property. Since k-properties imply a kind from which they are projected, the inference is invited to include the subject entity into the set of members of the underlying kind. I have argued that this categorization is what the speaker uttering a dispositional generic eventually wants to convey.

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