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On Concealed Properties in Polish Perfective Generics

1. Introduction

In two intriguing papers, Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2012) has proposed an account of Polish generic sentences whose subject is a proper name and whose predicate is a present tense perfective verb form. (1) gives an example:

- (1) *Janek przeżegna się przed kościołem* (*,ale na msze nie chodzi*).
Janek cross.PFV REFL before church but on mass not go.IPFV
'Janek makes the sign of the cross in front of a church, but he doesn't go to Mass.'

Generics like the one in (1) are analysed as forming a natural class with generics like the one in (2), which likewise have a perfective predicate, but which have a bare singular nominal as subject expression.

- (2) *(Prawdziwy) katolik przeżegna się przed kościołem*.
true catholic cross.PFV REFL before church
'A (real) catholic makes the sign of the cross in front of a church.'

According to Klimek-Jankowska's theory, the common denominator between (1) and (2) is that both represent 'in virtue of'-generics in the sense of Greenberg (2002, 2003). The idea is, briefly put (more on that below), that the subject expression is in each case associated with a concealed property, which plays a crucial role in the interpretation of the sentences because it figures in a law-like structure present in the interlocutors' background knowledge and therefore licenses the predication of the explicit property (i.e. *przeżegna się przed kościołem* in the examples above).

That (1) and (2) are 'in virtue of'-generics sets them aside from another kind of genericity, i.e. descriptive generalizations over eventualities, manifesting themselves in Polish in the use of imperfective aspect:

- (3) *Janek żegna się przed kościółem.*
 Janek cross.IPFV REFL before church
 ‘Janek makes the sign of the cross in front of a church.’

Henceforth, I will use the following terminological labels. Cases like (1) will be referred to as “dispositional generics”, cases like (2) will be called “definitional generics”, and for cases like (3) I will use the term “descriptive generics”.

In this paper I agree that dispositional generics involve a concealed property in interpretation. I also agree that there is a close relationship between dispositional generics and definitional generics, which motivates the common use of perfective verb forms and which dissociates them from descriptive generics. I disagree, however, that the interpretation of sentences like (2) would involve a concealed property. Instead I will argue that a definitional generic is the *explication* of the law-like structure of background knowledge, the antecedent property of which constitutes the concealed property in dispositional generic statements. Moreover, I will argue with respect to dispositional generics, contra to Klimek-Jankowska, that the association between the proper name and the concealed property is not presupposed, but rather asserted content.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 I remind of how imperfective/descriptive generics are analyzed in the literature, viz. as generalizations over sufficiently many events. Section 3 describes the intuition, which is absent with imperfective generics, that the truth of a perfective generic has an underlying principled cause. Section 4 recapitulates, very briefly, Greenberg’s (2002, 2003) theory of ‘in virtue of’-generics, and section 5 shows how this theory is applied to Polish dispositional generics by Klimek-Jankowska. It is argued that the applied theory does not entirely fit the phenomenon. In section 6 I point to a potential problem that arises from this misfit. In section 7 I then address a real data problem that Klimek-Jankowska’s theory faces, and in section 8 I discuss the solution that Klimek-Jankowska has offered to cope with this problem. In section 9 I propose a revision of Klimek-Jankowska’s theory to overcome the problems discussed before. The section is divided into three subsections. First, I emphasize the involvement of background rules in the interpretation of perfective generics (9.1). Then I argue that definitional generics are direct expressions of background rules (9.2). Finally, I discuss the role that background rules play in dispositional generics (9.3). Section 10 shows that my account predicts there to be two kinds of contexts in which dispositional generics may reasonably be used, and that this provides a natural explanation for the apparent problem discussed before in section 7. Section 11 concludes the paper.

2. Imperfective generics express descriptive generalizations

The verbal predicate of a generic sentence in Polish may be coded by imperfective aspect as well as by perfective aspect. Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2013) considers imperfective generics to express statistical generalizations, “made on the basis of a number of actual instances which allow us to conclude that there is some pattern or more specifically that the generalization is not limited to the actual instances only” (Klimek-Jankowska 2008:236).¹ Consider (3) above as an example. Accepting (3) as a true statement means taking it for real that Janek has on sufficiently many occasions made the sign of the cross in front of a church.

Since generics like (3) “make generalizations about patterns that appear in the world” (Krifka 2013:6), the term “descriptive generics” appears well-suited to designate this category. Another frequently used term is “inductive generics” (e.g. Carlson 1995, Cohen 1999, Gorishneva 2011).

Note that the statistical bias toward the expressed property (which renders the utterance true) need not be “principled” but may be caused by accidental circumstances.

- (4) *Janek pije tanie wino (bo teraz nie ma pieniędzy na Janek drinks.IPFV cheap wine because now not has money on dobre wino).*
 good wine
 ‘Janek drinks cheap wine (because he has no money for good wine at the moment).’

It is in this respect that Polish imperfective (descriptive) generics differ from perfective generics, to which I turn now.

3. Perfective generics express “principled generalizations”

The generalizations perfective generics express are felt to be “principled”. The following sentence, for instance, does not give a sound generic statement:

- (5) *Janek wypije tanie wino.*
 Janek drinks.PFV cheap wine
 ‘Janek drinks cheap wine.’

1 This is reminiscent of Carlson’s (1995: 225) wording who speaks of generalizations “where the base of the generalization is some observed set of instances; after ‘enough’ instances have accumulated, the generic form can be truly asserted”.

We may assume that anybody (who drinks wine) will prefer good wine over bad wine if both options are available. Therefore, drinking cheap wine is nothing that we would expect a (normal) person to do for a principled reason. Since a principled reason is what perfective generics require, (5) sounds odd as a generic. Now consider (6), which is the negation of (5). For that sentence it is possible to determine a property that someone may have for a principled reason. There even is a certain latitude in the retrieval of the underlying reason. It may, for instance, be that someone does not drink cheap wine because he or she has courtly manners (cf. Klimek-Jankowska 2008: 328), or because he or she is a gourmet. Since there is a possible principled reason available, (6) is acceptable as a generic statement.

- (6) *Janek nie wypije taniego wina.*
 Janek not drinks.PFV cheap wine
 ‘Janek does not drink cheap wine.’

To pin down these intuitions, Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2013) proposes that the interpretation of a perfective generic sentence involves the processing of a concealed property besides the property which is explicitly expressed by the perfective verb form. The idea is that the availability of the concealed property is mandatory for the generic use of a perfective sentence as it is this property which supplies the “principled reason” for the overtly expressed generalization. With respect to (6), this approach suggests that Janek does not drink cheap wine (property 1) because he is, for instance, a gourmet (property 2). The proposal implies, accordingly, that there is a close tie between the truth of (6) and the truth of (7). The precise nature of the tie is the core topic of this paper.

- (7) *Janek jest smakoszem.*
 Janek is gourmet
 ‘Janek is a gourmet.’

As noted in the beginning of this paper, Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2012) proposes to identify concealed properties in Polish perfective generics with so-called ‘in virtue of’-properties in the sense of Greenberg (2002, 2003). Therefore a brief recapitulation of Greenberg’s theory is in order.

4. ‘In virtue of’-generics

Greenberg’s (2002, 2003) theory aims at accounting for the difference between indefinite singular generics and bare plural generics in English. (8) shows a minimal pair:

- (8) a. *A boy does not cry.*
 b. *Boys do not cry.*

The gist of Greenberg's (2002, 2003) proposal may be summarized as follows: Bare plural generics like (8b) may be used to express descriptive generalizations. In contrast to that, indefinite singular generics like (8a) lack the capacity to express descriptive generalizations. They only express 'in virtue of'-generalizations, which means that they can be truly asserted only if there is a relevant property in virtue of which the generalization is justified.² The question of how to calculate the relevant 'in virtue of'-property is answered by Greenberg along the following lines (cf. Oosterhof 2008:40):

- (9) (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

As can be seen, determining the 'in virtue of'-property requires the existence of "another property", which is delivered "by the NP quantified over". In (8a), this "other property" is the property of being a boy, delivered by the NP *a boy*. A property that qualifies for serving as 'in virtue of'-property in that example would be, for instance, the property of being tough. We may depict the pieces of background knowledge that the interlocutors have to share for (8a) to be accepted by them as a true statement in the following way:

- (10) Q: *boy* → P: *tough* → P': *not-cry*

Simply speaking, the idea visualized in (10) 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 (is associated with) the property of being tough, which in turn implies (licenses the assignment of) the property of not crying.

Note that Greenberg's original approach is not designed to cope with dispositional generics, i.e. "principled generics" having a proper name (or other individual-referring) subject. We should therefore pay special attention to Klimek-Jankowska's way of applying the Greenbergian theory to dispositional generics.

2 Bare plural generics may also be used to express 'in virtue of'-generics.

5. Dispositional generics as ‘in virtue of’-generics

Consider the dispositional generic in (11), which is Klimek-Jankowska’s prime example.

- (11) *Janek pomoże w potrzebie.*
 J. help.PFV in need
 ‘Janek will help you in need.’

Klimek-Jankowska analyzes (11) as involving the ‘in virtue of’-property of having high empathy (cf. Klimek-Jankowska 2008:331). If this is correct, (11) should, on analogy to (10), be true in virtue of the existence of the “property chain” depicted in (12).

- (12) Q: *Janek* → P: *have-high-empathy* → P’: *help-you-in-need*

The implication from the ‘in virtue of’-property P to P’ constitutes the “background law-like evidence” that is identified by Klimek-Jankowska as a *conditio sine qua non* for Polish 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)

Accordingly, upon interpreting (11), the hearer successfully accommodates the required background rule (P → P’). Recall from (9) that, on Greenberg’s original account, the retrieval of the background rule is warranted because the following conditions are met:

- (13) (i) The property explicitly mentioned by the predicate expression matches the consequent property P’ in a background rule, whereby
 (ii) the antecedent property P of this rule is associated with property Q, where Q is the property explicitly mentioned by the subject expression.

Given this, notice an obstacle for retrieving the rule when the subject is a proper name: unlike common nouns, proper names have no lexical content. There therefore is no linguistically given relationship between the subject expression and P:

- (14) (i) The property explicitly mentioned by the predicate expression matches the consequent property P’ in a background rule, whereby
 (ii) the antecedent property P of this rule is associated with property Q, where Q is a property implicitly associated with the individual explicitly mentioned by the subject expression.

Klimek-Jankowska's analysis of (11) is summarized in (15): What is asserted is the truth of the proposition ψ . This does not exhaust the meaning of the perfective generic, however, as the message necessarily also involves a presuppositional part, made up of the propositions φ and χ . The former is a "law-like" proposition, the latter is the "association" of Janek with the antecedent property of φ . Both φ and χ are presupposable, as the truth of each "follows from our beliefs, norms and stereotypes about the actual world" (see (9)). In case that proposition χ does not belong to the common ground, the addressee has to accommodate it.

(15)	φ	\forall . have-high-empathy(x) \rightarrow help-in-need(x)	presupposition part
	χ	have-high-empathy(Janek)	
	ψ	help-in-need(Janek)	assertion part

6. A potential problem

Above we saw that the application of the 'in virtue of'-analysis to dispositional generics necessitates an adjustment of Greenberg's assumptions in order to maintain an associative tie between Q and P. Something along the lines of (14ii) has to hold. Now, in view of (14ii), it seems legitimate to assume that dispositional generics require contexts in which the hearer already knows that the given proper name is associated with property P (just like definitional generics require that the hearer already knows that the subject common noun is associated with P). This is not the case, however; a dispositional generic may be fully appropriate even in an introductory setting, where the hearer is for the first time acquainted with knowledge about the (bearer of the) proper name:

- (16) A: *Kim jest ta Maria? Czy możesz mi coś o niej powiedzieć?*
 who.INS is this Maria PRT may.2SG me something about her say
 'Who is Maria? Can you tell me something about her?'
- B: *Tak. Mogę ci powiedzieć na przykład, że Maria przed każdym kościołem się przeżegna.*
 yes may.1SG you say for instance that Maria before every church REFL cross.PFV
 'Yes. I can tell you, for instance, that Maria crosses herself in front of every church.'

Although A does not know anything about Maria, and although B knows that A does not know anything about Maria, B is in a situation to successfully utter a perfective generic to characterize Maria. Let us assume, for the sake of the argument and in analogy to (12), that the relevant “property chain” involved in (16) is $Q: \textit{Maria} \rightarrow P: \textit{strictly-religious} \rightarrow P': \textit{make-the-sign-of-the-cross-in-front-of-a-church}$. Does the fact that A has no background knowledge to ground the implicature $Q \rightarrow P$ run against (14ii)? Is this a problem for Klimek-Jankowska’s analysis? Not really.³

The relevant common ground to which the proposition expressed by *Maria przed kaźdym kościołem się przeżegna* should be added is not the common ground as it was before the utterance. *That* common ground does indeed not contain the proposition *that* Maria is a strictly religious person. The relevant common ground for (16) is rather the common ground as it is changed by the utterance itself, thus taking into account the inferences drawn by A (von Fintel 2008: 11, see also Stalnaker 2002). All that Klimek-Jankowska would therefore need to claim to defend her approach is that A manages to adjust the common ground by drawing the relevant inference that Maria has the property of being strictly religious.

Although the above made argument is not conclusive, it should be noted that Greenberg’s analysis is stretched beyond its limits when applied to dispositional generic sentences. To make it work properly, it is necessary to assume not only that the hearer has to determine a background rule as a precondition for letting the sentence update the common ground (this is still in line with Greenberg’s original proposal). On top of that, it is necessary to also assume that the hearer has to determine a property of the bearer of the proper name *as a precondition for the fulfillment of the precondition* for letting the sentence update the common ground.

7. A real problem

We saw that, by treating dispositional generics as ‘in virtue of’-generics, Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2012) is committed to the assumptions that there is a presuppositional association between the bearer of the proper name and the concealed (‘in virtue of’-) property and that, at least on some occasions, the hearer has to accommodate the respective proposition. So far I have only provided weak evidence against these assumptions. In this section I provide a more serious counter-argument. Compare (17) with (18):

3 Here I changed my mind on what I wrote in Mueller-Reichau (2017). Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for convincing me to be more cautious on this point.

- (17) *Nasza Balbina rozpłacze się przy drobnostkach.*
 our Balbina cry.PFV REFL at trivialities
 ‘Our Balbina starts crying for no apparent reason.’
- (18) *Nasza beksa Balbina rozpłacze się przy drobnostkach.*
 our cry-baby Balbina cry.PFV REFL at trivialities
 ‘Our cry-baby Balbina will start crying for no apparent reason.’

The observation is that, while (17) gives a natural dispositional generic, (18) does not. The latter sentence only works as a non-generic statement about an anticipated future event. Within Klimek-Jankowska’s analysis, the lack of the generic reading of (18) is unexpected and requires additional stipulations (see below). Consider (17) first. According to Klimek-Jankowska, the utterance presupposes (i) that there is a background rule saying that a cry-baby starts crying for no apparent reason and (ii) that Balbina is a cry-baby. To accept the sentence, the hearer has to first check for the respective propositions in her model of common ground, and to accommodate where necessary. But given this: Why should explicitly providing the information (ii), as in (18), be an obstacle for the interpretation as a dispositional generic? It should be rather the other way around, that is, (18) should more easily lend itself to a generic construal.

Klimek-Jankowska (2008: 332) addresses the problem just noted, her example being (19). Here, too, the observation is that the sentence is infelicitous as a generic statement.

- (19) *Nasza kura Balbina zniesie jajka.*
 our hen Balbina lay.PFV eggs
 ‘Our hen Balbina lays eggs.’

It is plausible to assume a background rule saying that a hen lays eggs. By attributing *kura* to *Balbina*, (19) therefore directly provides an appropriate ‘in virtue of’-property, appropriate in the sense that it identifies the antecedent property of a background rule whose consequent property matches the explicitly stated predicate. But why, then, is (19) bad as a dispositional generic?

8. Indirect inference?

Klimek-Jankowska (2008) proposes a solution to the problem raised by data such as (18) or (19). Here is how the solution goes (numbers adjusted):

My claim is that perfective habituais serve as markers of an evidential mechanism of indirect inference. Habitual statements in (18) and (19) are statements of facts. They express propositions whose truth follows straightforwardly from the law-like evidence. [...] My explanation of the facts in (18) and (19) is that perfective habituais cannot be used to state obvious facts which follow directly from the definition of a subject. [...] In (18) and (19) we express a known fact which does not need to be inferred, hence the use of the perfective aspect would not serve its purpose of marking the evidential mechanism of indirect inference. (Klimek-Jankowska 2008: 332–333)

I totally agree that (18) and (19) express “facts which do not need to be inferred”, and that this is what runs counter to the purpose of uttering a dispositional generic. The problem is that this does not go together well with the analysis that Klimek-Jankowska proposes for these utterances. According to her analysis, the fact (aka true proposition) that the hearer has to infer when confronted with a dispositional generic, in the case of (19) that Balbina is a hen, is of presuppositional nature. As such it is a precondition that needs to be satisfied before the assertively uttered sentence can serve its purpose to update the common ground. Now the question is: how plausible is a requirement of indirect inference if the goal of the inference is to set the stage for the real purpose of the utterance? I believe that the answer should be: very implausible. If the inference is a presupposition that the hearer is not aware of and, therefore, has to accommodate, nothing should stop the cooperative speaker from supporting the hearer by explicitly (directly) supplying the information to be accommodated.⁴

A related problem derives from the following Russian example, taken from Rassudova (1982: 84):

- (20) *On očen' dobryj čelovek, on vam vsegda pomožet.*
 he very good person he you always help.PFV
 'He is a good person, he will always help you.'

The example may easily be replicated in Polish:

- (21) *Janek jest dobrym chłopakiem, on ci pomoże w potrzebie.*
 Janek is good fellow he you help.PFV in need
 'Janek is a good fellow, he will help you in need.'

4 “Since communication is the point of the enterprise, everyone [i.e. every participant of the communication] will have a motive to try to keep the presuppositions [that each participant of the communication has] the same” (Stalnaker 1978/1999: 85; the square brackets are my additions).

The point is that in (21), the property that licenses the validity of the predicate is presented in no way indirectly; it is explicitly mentioned in the preceding sentence. This is unexpected given the strict constraint of indirect inference proposed by Klimek-Jankowska.

9. Alternative

9.1. Background rules

To overcome the above noted problems, I will now propose a slight but crucial modification of Klimek-Jankowska's theory. Specifically, I will propose that definitional generics do not involve a concealed property the way dispositional generics do, and that the concealed property of dispositional generic utterances does not belong to the presuppositional content (and, thus, is no 'in virtue of'-property), but rather to the assertive content. That examples like (18) and (19) do not lend themselves for a generic reading will immediately follow from this.

The basic idea is in harmony with Klimek-Jankowska's approach. I assume that, when uttering a dispositional generic like (22), the speaker is inviting the hearer to retrieve a law-like structure from background knowledge.

- (22) *Janek pomoże w potrzebie.* (= (11))
 Janek help.PFV in need
 'Janek will help you in need.'

As before, I will call the "law-like structures" involved in the interpretation of perfective generics background rules. For a dispositional generic to be successfully uttered, there has to be at least one supporting background rule (nothing seems to exclude the possibility of there being more than one suitable rule available). With respect to (22), for instance, there is a rule available saying that a person who deserves being called your friend will help you in need. The rule may be spelled out in language, which gives us a definitional generic:

- (23) *(Prawdziwy) przyjaciel pomoże w potrzebie.*
 true friend help.PFV in need
 'A (true) friend will help you in need.'

Note that I do not treat generic sentences like (23) to be 'in virtue of'-generics. Their interpretation does *not* involve implicit background information to be inferred, so here is where I depart from Klimek-Jankowska. Instead I take sentences like (23) to be definitional generics in the sense of Krifka (2012) (which is the up to now silent reason why I call them definitional generics throughout in this paper).

According to Krifka, definitional generics are special in that they do not talk about the world as it is, but about the language as it should be from the point of view of the speaker. What is meant by that will be explained in the next subsection.

9.2. Definitional generics

A *descriptive* generic sentence, which, as we saw above, is coded by imperfective aspect in Polish, is about the world, just like any non-generic sentence is. The speaker utters such sentences presupposing agreement on the intensions of the predicates in the language used. She wants to tell the hearer about a fact, in the case of descriptive generics about an empirically justified generalization (cf. section 2). If the hearer accepts the generalization as a true proposition, this will, as usual, update the common ground by excluding the set of those worlds incompatible with the accepted proposition (Stalnaker 1978/1999: 86. see also Irmer 2011: 57 ff.).

A *definitional* generic sentence is “fundamentally different” (Krifka). Here the speaker presupposes agreement with the hearer about the facts holding in the world, while the speaker’s aim is to inform the hearer about the interpretation of a predicate in their shared language.⁵ To be concrete, consider (24), which I repeat from the beginning of this paper:

- (24) (Prawdziwy) *katolik* *przeżegna się* *przed* *kościółem*.
 real catholic cross.PFV REFL before church
 ‘A (true) catholic makes the sign of the cross in front of a church.’

This is a definitional generic, uttered by the speaker with the intention to introduce or remind of the fact that the extension of the predicate *katolik* is expected to only include individuals having the property of making the sign of the cross when coming across a church.

Definitional generics are normative in the sense of supplying a standard for evaluating individuals or actions in the world. If Janek points out that he is a catholic even though he does not make the sign of the cross in front of every church, he will, in the light of (24), (at best) qualify as a bad member of the category tied to the predicate *catholic*. The normative power of definitional generics is also the reason why the definiendum expression may well be accompanied by attributes like Polish *prawdziwy* or English *true* and the like.

5 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).

Now, as already noted above, my claim is that definitional generics, i.e. perfective generics with a bare singular noun as subject, express rules, which are structures of background information stored in the form of rules and representing “our beliefs, norms and stereotypes” (recall (9)). Such a rule says, roughly speaking, that if an individual x is P , it is also P' . For ease of exposition I represent rules as in (25a), simply as universally quantified conditionals (see Cohen 2001 for a more appropriate logical treatment). Specifically, we may pin down the rule which is expressed by (24) as in (25b), and the one expressed in (23) as in (25c):

- (25) a. $\forall x. P(x) \rightarrow P'(x)$
 b. $\forall x. \text{catholic}(x) \rightarrow \text{make-the-sign-of-the-cross-in-front-of-a-church}(x)$
 c. $\forall x. \text{friend}(x) \rightarrow \text{help-in-need}(x)$

Definitional generics represent the direct way of referring to background rules. Dispositional generics, to which I turn now, represent an indirect way, so to speak. The common denominator is that, whenever a perfective verb form is used to state a generic in Polish, recourse is made to a background rule.

9.3. Dispositional generics

A *dispositional* generic likewise refers to a background rule. The speaker draws the hearer’s attention to the consequent property of the rule, P' ; thereby expressing that P' is true of the subject individual. What is special about dispositional generics is that the hearer, understanding P' to be the consequent property of a familiar background rule, will be led to infer that the antecedent property of the rule, P , is true of the subject referent as well.

The question that arises at this point is: How does the speaker manage to “draw the hearer’s attention” to the consequent property, as I just put it? The answer should be obvious: By using a perfective form instead of an imperfective form, which is the otherwise expected aspectual coding for generics (cf. section 2).

And so, following Klimek-Jankowska (2008, 2012), I take it that the concealed property involved in the interpretation of dispositional generics is the antecedent property of a rule given in the interlocutors’ background knowledge. Where I differ from Klimek-Jankowska is that I analyze the association of the subject referent with the concealed property not as presuppositional meaning. By making this move, I avoid the troubles that I pointed at in section 6. Instead I propose that dispositional generics should be viewed as expressing double-assertions, so to speak. Let me again use (11) for illustration. The new

proposal amounts to saying that the proposition χ does not belong to the presuppositional part of the utterance meaning, but to the assertion part; compare (15) and (26):

- | | | | |
|-------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| (26) | φ | $\forall x. \text{have-high-empathy}(x) \rightarrow \text{help-in-need}(x)$ | presupposition part |
| ----- | | | |
| | ψ | help-in-need(Janek) | assertion part |
| | χ | have-high-empathy(Janek) | |

What is asserted by the dispositional generic (11) is the truth of the proposition ψ . In addition, the meaning involves the presupposition that φ is a true proposition. Besides the explicitly asserted proposition ψ , which can directly be read from the words of the sentence, the message includes the assertion of another, implicit proposition χ . The truth of χ is inferred from the truth of the explicitly asserted proposition ψ on account of the truth of the presupposed “law-like” proposition φ .

10. When the implicitly asserted proposition gets explicated

We may expect speakers of Polish to produce dispositional generics in a discourse where the implicitly asserted proposition gets explicated. There are two possibilities. The first case is when it is at issue whether the *antecedent* property of the presupposed rule is true or false of the subject referent. In that case, a dispositional generic will be used as an indirect way of answering the question of whether or not χ is true. The second case is when it is at issue whether the *consequent* property of the rule holds of the subject referent. Here a dispositional generic serves to answering the question of whether or not ψ is true. The background rule is exploited in two different ways in the two cases. Either the speaker makes use of the causal relation in (27a), or of the one in (27b). In the first case the speaker’s communicative aim is to logically back up the assertion of χ , in the second case the aim is to back up the assertion of ψ :

- (27) a. $\chi = 1$, because $\psi = 1$
 b. $\psi = 1$, because $\chi = 1$

The case of (27a) is illustrated by (28), where the second sentence explicates the assertion implicitly conveyed by the first sentence (the dispositional generic). The case of (27b) is instantiated by (29) where the first sentence explicitly foreshadows the assertion that the second sentence (the dispositional generic) would otherwise implicitly express.⁶

- (28) *Janek pomoże w potrzebie. On jest naprawdę samarytaninem.*
 Janek help.PFV in need he is really samaritan
 ‘Janek will help you in need. He really is a samaritan.’
- (29) *Janek jest samarytaninem. On ci na pewno pomoże w potrzebie.*
 Janek is samaritan he you for sure help.PFV in need
 ‘Janek is a samaritan. He will help you in need for sure.’

Packaging the antecedent predicate and the consequent predicate of the background rule together into one sentence about Janek will lead to a questionable result as a generic, because none of the two strategies in (27) can be made run:

- (30) [?]*Samarytanin Janek pomoże w potrzebie.*
 samarytanin Janek help.PFV in need
 ‘Samaritan Janek will help in need.’

If the speaker wanted to follow strategy (27a), (30) would be inappropriate because the truth of the proposition χ that the speaker wants the hearer to infer from the explicit assertion of ψ is pre-given by the subject compound. Under the second possible strategy (27b), (30) likewise fails, for a similar reason: The speaker cannot base the truth of ψ on the explicit assertion of χ , because the information that Janek is a samaritan is presented as presupposed information. So this is how the revised approach to Polish perfective generics that I presented in this paper accounts for the apparent problem discussed in sections 7 and 8.

11. Conclusion

In this paper, I have addressed the issue of perfective and imperfective generics in Polish. While I had nothing to add to the common treatment of imperfective generics, I have argued for a modification of current analyses of perfective generics. I proposed that dispositional generics in Polish are special in that they express a second implicit assertion besides the explicit one (the one that can be directly read from the words). The successful inference of the silent assertion is warranted by a salient background rule. Perfective morphology is an overt indicator signaling that the explicit predicate which the speaker claims to be true of the subject referent matches the consequent property of a background rule. On the side of the hearer, this invites the inference that the antecedent property

6 I take the predicate *samarytanin* as denoting the property of having high empathy.

of the rule is true of the subject referent as well. I proposed that definitional generics are used to directly express background rules. I have argued against a treatment of perfective generics as ‘in virtue of’-generics, thereby proposing a new relationship between dispositional generics and definitional generics.

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