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## MAY AN EVENT APPROACH BE USEFUL IN DEALING WITH POLISH MOTION VERBS ?

### 1. ON SOME GOOD THINGS TO FIND IN ERRORS

The paper I would like to propose grew out from a larger work on Polish motion verbs and from my own teacher's experience. Like every foreign language teacher, I have an interesting collection of students' mistakes. (1) is an example :

(1) Doszedł do nas biegnąc.

This comes from a translation exercise performed by a bilingual Polish-French student who had to translate the sentence « Il nous a rejoints en courant » (He joined us running). Grammatically speaking, this is correct. However, a native Polish speaker would never put it this way. Semantic components for a description of such a motion event are distributed in a typically French pattern : there is a main verb expressing Motion and a subordinate gerund for Manner of Motion.

(1') Do<sub>[Path]</sub>szedł<sub>[Move+Manner1]</sub> do<sub>[Path]</sub> nas<sub>[Ground]</sub> biegnąc<sub>[Manner2]</sub>

In other words, Path and Manner are expressed separately, while Polish is known to conflate Motion with Manner. Describing a similar situation, a Polish native speaker would say (2) :

(2) Dobiegł do nas.

(2') Do<sub>[Path]</sub>biegł<sub>[Move+Manner2]</sub> do<sub>[Path]</sub> nas<sub>[Ground]</sub>

This general statement may give rise to studies going in different directions, especially those aiming at explanations of contrasts between Polish and French. Actually, the two languages belong to typologically different families : Polish is a satellite framed (Talmy, 1987, 2000) and a high-manner-salient (Slobin, 2004) language, while French is considered as a verb framed (Talmy, 1987, 2000) and a low-manner-salient language (Slobin, 2004).

In the present study exploring frequent Polish learners' errors would rather focus our attention on what comprises specificity of Polish motion verbs. Identifying what is wrong with (1) may help to catch their specific semantic properties. I suggest that (1) presents two types of semantic incompatibilities :

1. The incompatibility between semantic components of a motion event. (1') clearly shows two different Manners of Motion as specified in the clause. *Doszedł* contains the verb root *iść* meaning walking (Manner 1), while the subordinate gerund of *biegać* indicates that the motion is realized as a running activity (Manner 2).

2. The second incompatibility is concerned with the internal temporal organization of the event. *Dojść* in (1) is a telic verb clearly indicating that the endpoint has been attained. At the same time, *biegać* (←*biegając*) remains atelic and does not suppose any direction nor final point of the activity it describes.

These two kinds of incompatibility let us conclude that for a French language student, a motion event like the one described in (1) is clearly partitioned in a main event which is Motion itself, and a Co-event Manner conceptualized as an additional activity. Both are then conceptually separable.

## 2. TWO SUBSETS AMONG POLISH MOTION VERBS

Thus, the question that arises is the one about language specificity in semantic organization of conceptual elements that have to be given in a description of a motion event in L2, which is Polish in this case.

Polish Motion verbs form a large group<sup>1</sup> whose members are put together on the basis of similarity of meaning. Having such an evident semantic resemblance, they still display different grammatical behaviors, especially with respect to Goal argument. Since *jechać* and *jeździć* may or may not take such an argument, *krażyć* and *włóczyć się* never accept it.

In my paper, I would like to pay special attention to a particular subset of this very large set of Polish motion verbs. These verbs are usually treated as aspectual doublets :

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<sup>1</sup> Grochowski (1973), whose analyses focus only on one argument Motion predicates, finds out 42 items. Bojar (1979) quotes 332 verbs and 124 semantic features necessary, according to the author, to describe them.

I.	II.
iść	chodzić
jechać	jeździć
biec	biegać
lecieć	latać
pływać	plwać

Both classes are usually labelled imperfective (for example : Mędrak, 1997). Pyzik (2003) says that the main contrast between the verbs in I and those in II lies on the opposition between directional or determinate motion for the former class and non-directional, non determinate motion for the latter. But such an explanation, thus certainly true, does not permit to identify the nature of some problems that we have to deal with when using Polish motion verbs. Let us draw once again from frequent students's errors :

- (3) a. – Co to znaczy « prywatna droga » ?  
b. - To znaczy, że droga należy do mieszkańców. Albo do jednego z mieszkańców.  
c. - To znaczy, że nie można po niej \*iść<sup>2</sup> ? [...] (iść – class I)  
d. - A czy można po niej \*jechać ?<sup>3</sup> (jechać – class I)

### 3. MOTION VERBS AND EVENT SEMANTICS

It is really hard to explain why *iść* and *jechać* are inappropriate in this particular context using only such notions as directionality and determination. I argue that the main difference between them is in the way verbs I and II describe motion as an event. Verbs belonging to class II seem cognitively richer and semantically more complex than those of class I.

#### 3.1 VERBS OF CLASS I

Let us start with the verbs of class I. They are simpler, because their roots denote motion events in only one way. Verbs I refer to any internal part of a particular event actualized as an individual act, like in (4) :

<sup>2</sup> \* marks inappropriate use of the verb

<sup>3</sup> (3) - What does « private way » mean ?  
- It means that the way belongs to inhabitants, or to one of them.  
- Does it mean that it is not allowed to walk on it ?  
- Is it allowed to drive on it ?

(4) Kiedy leciałem do Rzymu, mieliśmy burzę.<sup>4</sup> (lecieć, I)

Figure 1 illustrates this conceptualization : we use « e » for event, an arrow for the Path component and « F » for the Figure moving on the Path.

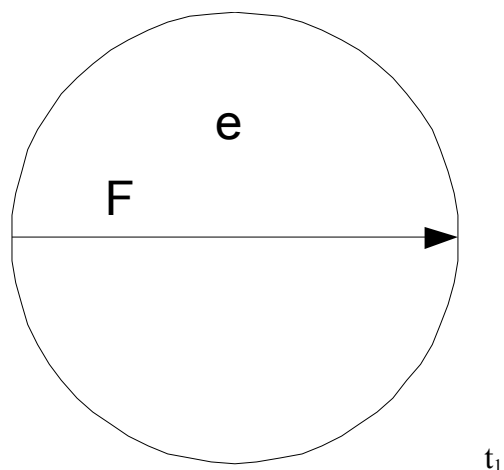


figure 1

Some current uses of verbs I, especially those with immediate future value, like the one in (5) may be explained through such a conceptualization :

(5) No i Piotr leci do Los Angeles na eksperymentalną terapię<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.2 VERBS OF CLASS II

As Talmy (1987, 2000) remarked for *float*, verbs of class II are in fact lexical doublets able to describe two types of events.

They may conflate Motion and Manner of Motion, like in (6) and (7) :

(6) Tomasz i Jan chodzą do szkoły<sup>6</sup> (chodzić – class II)

(7) Tramwaj wodny pływa z Gdyni do Helu<sup>7</sup> (pływać – class II)

In such a case, verbs II often have an argument specifying a portion of Path : Goal in (6), Source and Goal in (7). Event is then conceptualized as a plural event (e in the figure 2)

<sup>4</sup> (4) When I was flying to Rome, we had a thunderstorm

<sup>5</sup> (5) So that Piotr is going to fly to Los Angeles for an experimental therapy.

<sup>6</sup> (6) Tomasz and Jan go to school

<sup>7</sup> (7) Water tramway sails from Gdynia to Hel

formed by a series of particular count events (e1, e2, e3). There is no more reference to the particular position or placement of Figure on the Path of motion, but every event of the series is seen as a whole of the same kind, like in figure 2 :

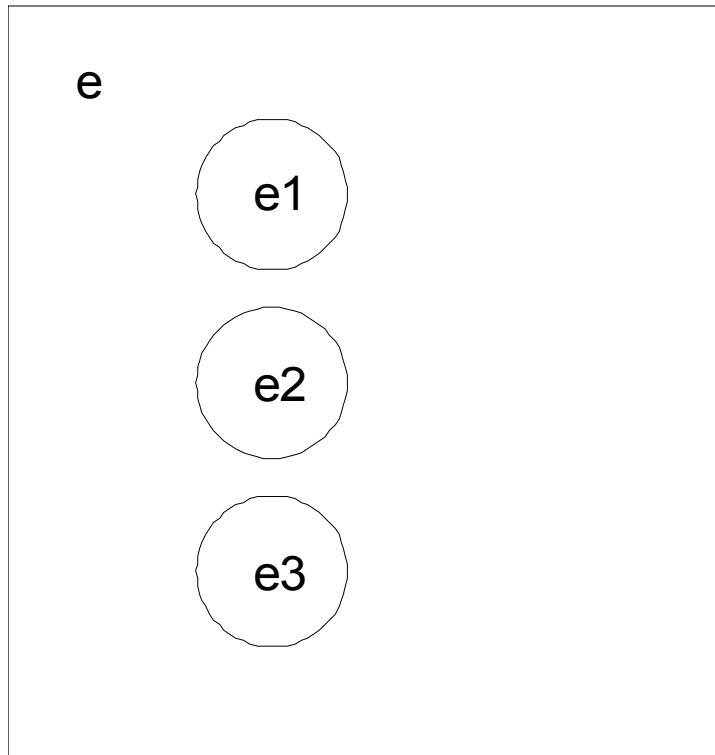


figure 2

This plurality is the reason of iterative interpretations of verbs II. Then, in some contexts, iterativity may give rise to a generic reading of the sentence.

In some syntactical configurations, verbs II may also refer to another kind of motion event. In this case, they do not appeal to the Goal argument rather referring to what Talmy calls a « relation between an object and a medium », like in the example (8) below :

(8) Lubię sport, więc dwa razy w tygodniu biegam i pływam<sup>8</sup>.

The motion event is then conceptualized as a mass object with neglected directionality, as Figure 3 illustrates it :

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<sup>8</sup> (8) I like sport, so twice a week I run and swim.

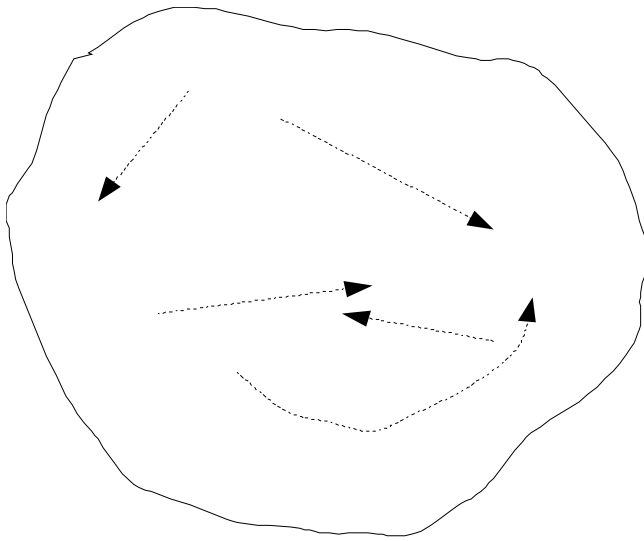


figure 3

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Treating verb phrases in terms of event descriptions permits us to understand the nature of errors presented in (1), (3c) and (3d). *Isć* (3c) and *jechać* (3d) refer to the motion event illustrated in figure 1, while the context requires the conceptualization as shown in figure 3. The aspectual incompatibility in (1) flows from different properties of events referred to by *dojść* (count event, as in figure 1) and *biegać* (mass event, like in figure 3). *Dojść* derived from *isć*, presents a modified description of the motion event than the one contained in the root. But the Event approach seems also fruitful in the research on effects produced by prefixes and other adjuncts, since we treat them as quantifiers operating on different kinds of event arguments, but this must make a subject for another paper.

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