

COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN POLISH – CORPUS BASED APPROACH

Although Polish comparative constructions were subject to several studies (inter alia Bondaruk 1988, Greszczuk 1988, Kallas 1997), a thorough examination via machine-readable corpus reveals new facts. In our talk we shall examine these constructions in Middle Polish. In that period there were four constructions indicating unequal intensity of compared features:

These consist of an adjective or adverb in comparative degree and:

- *niż* + nominative
- *nad* (lit. ‘above’) + accusative
- *od* (lit. ‘from’) + genitive
- *jak* (lit. ‘as’) + nominative

In early 17th Century the two use of *od* and *jak* was very limited, not exceeding 10% of the occurrences, a century later however *od* become as frequent as the two others.

If the language has at its disposal more than one means of expressing a meaning, most often each of these tend to occupy a different “niche”, that is they tend to show different distribution among collocations, genres etc. At first glance the four constructions in question are fully synonymous. However bearing in mind that it is extremely unlikely that in a given language there are fully interchangeable elements we hypothesise that there is a number of factors influencing the choice of the marker of comparison. These are:

- the part of speech of the compared feature (adjective vs adverb)
- the part of speech of the comparans (noun vs pronoun)
- the meaning of the compared feature
- the register of the text

Of course these are only tendencies, there is no rule which prevents using each of the four constructions in the same context. However the data reveal that adjectives tend to co-occur rather with *od* and *nad*, whereas adverbs are more likely to select *niż*. If the comparandum is a pronoun the comparison is much more likely to be expressed by *od*, or to a lesser extent by *niż*.

Od is particularly connected with learned texts of the 18th Century, as well as correspondence and non-fictional narration (memoirs, travel literature etc), whereas *niż* and *nad* are preferred in belles-lettres, rhetoric, and translations of Bible.

The last factor is the meaning of the unequal feature, eg.: *od* is selected with spatial features, denoting either place *daleko* ‘far’, or size such as *mały* ‘small’, *duży* ‘large’, *nad* with temporal

features *dlugo* ‘for a long time’, or price eg. *drogi* ‘expensive’, whereas *niż* cooccures with features which can be described as speed (*rychło* ‘soon’) or evaluation *dobry* ‘good’.

The data are drawn from the Baroque Corpus of Polish (KorBa, cf. Bronikowska et al. 2016). The corpus comprising ca 12 million running words, is POS tagged and represents Polish texts written between 1600 and 1772. Some 5 000 of occurrences were retrieved with a query followed by a manual inspection. The semantic classification of adjectives and adverbs was based on a following procedure: words with the frequency above a certain threshold were selected; this threshold was chosen so that the sum the selected words covers over 80% of all hits. These items were manually assigned to such classes as physical properties – colour, size, weight (*biały* ‘white’, *krótki* ‘short’, *ciężki* ‘heavy’), time *stary* ‘old’, space relationships (*daleko* ‘far’, *wysoko* ‘high’, *głęboki* ‘deep’), expressing the evaluation (*piękny* ‘beautiful’). (see typology of Nagórko 1987). The classification of texts registers is based on the metadata available in the corpus.

References

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