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### **Review of the Ph.D. Thesis *Benefaction in Polish: An analysis of the interplay with related functions* by Piotr Wyroślak, M.A.**

The dissertation under review is an unusual piece of work combining impressive achievements with considerable shortcomings. It consists of three studies, dealing with the NP<sub>dativus</sub>-PP<sub>dla</sub> alternation, the use of reflexive dativus commodi *sobie/se*, and, finally, subjectless predicative use of *po*-prefixed resultative/passive participle in 3.Sg. neuter in social media messages, such as in *pojechane, pogadane!*. After a general introduction across three chapters, each of these topics is the subject of two chapters. The first is of a more general kind focusing on a general outline of the phenomenon and prior treatment in the scholarly literature as well as the link to benefaction, while the second deals with a corpus-based investigation into the topic. These six chapters are followed with a summary and conclusion that consists of all of 4 pages. This main part of the thesis is followed by a number of appendices documenting the data and scholarly literature as well as two summaries, in Polish and in French.

The introduction discusses the term *benefaction* from a variety of perspectives, concentrating mostly on typological approaches, most significantly the work of Kittilä and Zuniga. Taking departure from this work, the author convincingly shows that the range of elements expressing benefaction in Polish is vast and heterogeneous. The wide range of elements serves as justification for focusing on the three phenomena listed above, not all of which are central in the expression of benefaction in Polish, or even have benefaction at the core of their meaning. Aside from the center, the author contends, the periphery of a category is worth y of attention and closer scrutiny, which he undertakes in the following chapters. Chapter three outlines the author's theoretical approach to functional complexity, which I find wholly convincing and interesting.

This part of the thesis is undoubtedly informative, well-researched and thorough in covering both the general phenomenon as well as the Polish data. However, it makes for rather difficult reading for two reasons that in one or the other form permeates the entire thesis: first, the reader very often refers to the coming chapters in rather opaque references. This is cognitively challenging and a bit frustrating, since the reader is asked to build a mental image of what is to come based on scarce pieces of information that are sometimes either very general or very specific. Second, the author does not clearly evaluate the positions in the literature nor gives a clear synthesis of the overall discussion that would clearly culminate in a definition of the issue adopted for the purposes of this study. Rather, all positions seem to be equally adequate in the authors' view and are left to stand for themselves; no synthesis is offered that would guide the reader. This reviewer was left rather confused at what to make of all the literature. Is it contradictory? Was there any progress? What does the author adopt, what does he discard as irrelevant? What overall issue is left unresolved and will be made a contribution towards resolving in the empirical studies? This is difficult to make out.



Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the variation in marking as referent either as dative or as a PP introduced with *dla* 'for' in Polish. This is an interesting and wide spread variable in the languages of Europe. This is a worth-while and well executed study; however, the caveats above apply: having presented a number of positions in the literature, the author does not attempt a synthesis. The author then focuses on the overlap of these two constructions in the valency frame of Polish verbs, using the *Walenty* data base, followed by a more corpus-driven approach aimed at identifying more cases of overlap. Here the study shows its strength - the analysis is methodologically very sound and yields interesting results. The author succeeds in balancing a bird-eye's view using n-grams and a more qualitative assessment of individual examples. The author points to relevant further research using 'token-based vectors' and such, which would be an interesting next step to take. An important caveat at the end of this part is the lack of a clear summary of the results of this study - merely pointing to the fact that the alternation "does not yield benefactive uses exclusively' and that a 'more nuanced picture ... emerged' is a bit disappointing given the wealth of observations the author has surely made.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with *sobie/se* in the function of what is traditionally called *dativus commodi/incommodi*. I find it a convincing account, even if it is - again - difficult to read. The author posits three main functions, i.e., benefaction, volitionality and normativity management that are mutually not exclusive and arguably present to different degrees in specific instances. This understanding is then put to a test in corpus-based studies: first, a collocation-based study of lexical items that arguably highlight the three main functions above. I find the results both interesting and revealing and supporting the author's analysis of *sobie/se*. I find it commendable that the author reports partially negative results in respect to the profile study.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with resultative participles in *-ne/-te* in social media discourse. Chapter 8 defines the construction and discusses a number of related diatheses constructions, focusing on a perceived contradiction between impersonal constructions and benefactivity. I find the first of these chapters, again, difficult to read since the link between the actual subject of the study and the constructions discussed is rather weak and the author does not evaluate the positions in the literature or presents syntheses across them. A conclusion such as "In sum, while none of the interpretative strategies seems to entail the benefactive character of the situation, none of them actually preclude it" is indeed an almost vacuous statement. One wishes for more concrete examples and a clearer synthesis. Chapter 9, then, involves a number of empirical studies based on Twitter data. I find all of these studies highly interesting and very well executed. The skip-gram as well as the network analyses afford an interesting and revealing perspective on the use of these participles.

**Overall assessment.** I started with the assessment that this is an unusual piece of work. Why? The thesis generally abounds in examples of convincing qualitative analysis, an impressive command of the literature, and expert use of corpus linguistic methods. This leads to insightful analysis and generally many interesting observations and findings.

At the same time, the author fails to draw strong and clear conclusions. The author does not tire of hedging his assessments - the text abounds in qualifications as in "one could argue", "it seems" and other such attenuating statements that make reading difficult. It is not quite clear why this is necessary - the methodology is, generally speaking, sound, and the author at no point makes unwarranted claims. The thesis would greatly benefit if the author streamlined the text to focus on the achieved results.

I have trouble summarizing what I have learned after reading the thesis. Especially, it seems, I did



not learn much about benefaction in Polish - except that it may be expressed by a large number of linguistic constructions. This is reflected in the very short summary and conclusions at the end of the thesis. Indeed, to this reviewer, the treatment of the participles on *-ne/-te* as benefactive seems strained. There is therefore not much that holds these three studies together - rather, they stand largely alone.

It seems to me the shortcomings of the thesis reflect a tension between, on the one hand, the bird's eyes method of corpus linguistic quantitative approaches and, on the other hand, qualitative assessment of individual usages that make it difficult to draw less general conclusions.

Overall, despite all shortcomings, I feel this is an impressive piece of work. In the German system, I would award it the second highest mark, i.e., *magna cum laude*. There is no doubt this study satisfies the requirement of a Ph.D. thesis in Slavic linguistics.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'R' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Prof. Dr. Ruprecht von Waldenfels