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“From the Speaker’s Point of View” – Subjectification as Pragmatic-Semantic Language Change

Abstract

The article demonstrates the importance of subjectification processes in shaping the metatextual layer of language. Using three lexical units (*prawda* ‘true, right’, *pewnie* ‘sure, certainly’ and *szalenie* ‘extremely, madly’) as examples, the author shows how the enrichment of their semantic structure with a subjective component led to the emergence of new propositional functions and ultimately to the establishment of a new meaning. The study is conducted diachronically, drawing on the oldest attestations of the lexemes in question. Based on a contextual analysis, the moment the meanings with a subjective component appeared is identified. The results unequivocally demonstrate that subjectification has its origin in the pragmatic domain, while its consequences are visible on the semantic level. The language material comes from both lexicographic sources and corpora. The analysis shows that subjectification is correlated with formal changes including loss of inflectional endings, loss of morphological properties, recategorization, and syntactic isolation. The paper provides evidence for the need for in-depth comparative diachronic research on subjectification.

Keywords

diachrony, history of the Polish language, language change, historical pragmatics, subjectification, metatextual expressions

Abstrakt

Przedmiotem artykułu jest rola procesów subiektywizacyjnych w kształtowaniu się metatekstowej warstwy języka. Na przykładzie trzech jednostek leksykalnych (*prawda*, *pewnie*, *szalenie*), autorka pokazuje, jak wprowadzenie elementów subiektywnych do ich struktury znaczeniowej wpłynęło na pojawienie się najpierw nowych funkcji

wypowiedzeniowych, a następnie doprowadziło do utrwalenia się nowego znaczenia kodowego. Rozważania są prowadzone w ujęciu diachronicznym, w oparciu o najstarsze poświadczenia badanych jednostek. Na podstawie analizy kontekstowej wskazywany jest moment pojawienia się znaczeń z elementem subiektywnym. Wyniki jednoznacznie wskazują, że subiektywizacja ma swoje źródło w przestrzeni pragmatycznej, natomiast jej konsekwencje widoczne są na poziomie semantycznym. Materiał językowy został wyekscerpowany zarówno ze źródeł leksykograficznych, jak i korpusowych. Analiza pokazuje, że subiektywizacja jest skorelowana ze zmianami natury formalnej, takimi jak utrata końcówek fleksyjnych, utrata właściwości morfologicznych, zmiana przynależności kategoryjnej i izolacja składniowa. Artykuł wskazuje na potrzebę pogłębionych diachronicznych badań konfrontatywnych nad procesem subiektywizacji.

Słowa kluczowe

diachronia, historia języka polskiego, zmiana językowa, pragmatyka historyczna, subiektywizacja, wyrażenia metatekstowe

Introduction¹

The search for the reasons behind language change constitutes the principal endeavour of diachronically oriented linguistics. A cursory review of the linguistic literature from recent decades reveals a substantial body of work dedicated to this objective, work encompassing articles and books. These span both empirical and theoretical studies carried out in Poland and abroad (e.g., Kleszczowa 2015; Król et al. 2019; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Bybee 2015). Obviously, the search does not aim at identifying a single causal factor. Krystyna Kleszczowa emphasizes this property of language and refers to it as equifinality, writing in her discussion of linguistic variability as follows:

A characteristic feature of open systems is equifinality, which means that the final state of a process can result from various initial conditions. This attribute of systems compels us to pay greater attention to the causes triggering the initial conditions of a temporal structure. Linguists typically attempt to pinpoint a single cause, yet linguistic signs are conditioned by a complex web of dependencies stemming from various levels.

(Kleszczowa 2012: 104; translated from Polish)

In the current article, subjectification will be highlighted as one of the factors leading to changes in the function and/or meaning of linguistic expressions. Subjectification typically serves a complementary role, supporting the primary causes.

The analysis does not take into consideration those expressions that have the potential to temporarily adopt, within a given context, a different

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function than their basic one, but focuses on those in which the new meaning stabilizes and then becomes conventionalized, its status often subsequently confirmed in lexicographic works. The discussion will be illustrated with selected examples of expressions at the metatextual level,² where the effects of the process under discussion become apparent.

The article is structured as follows: in Section 1 a brief overview will be provided of the concept of subjectification as described in the literature, with a focus on Elizabeth Closs Traugott’s definition, a definition which is more closely aligned with historical-linguistic research (Section 1). Based on this, research questions will be formulated in Section 2, and then several types of change in the Polish language will be addressed that, in my opinion, should be interpreted as changes motivated by the process of subjectification (Section 3). In Section 4, assuming that changes at the level of semantics or pragmatics (or at their intersection) usually have their formal correlates, it will be demonstrated how subjectification alters the morphosyntactic properties of linguistic expressions.

1. Subjectivity and subjectification in linguistic research: Terminological clarifications

As is commonly accepted, communication involves more than the mere exchange of information. In linguistic messages, alongside the propositional layer, one can distinguish references to the speaker, to the listener, or, more broadly, to the language users. This domain falls within the purview of broadly conceived linguistic pragmatics. The description of markers of subjectivity and their influence on the functional transformations of linguistic expressions constitutes one, though not the sole, area of such research.

Language possesses a wide range of means (prosodic, morphological, syntactic) to convey subjectivity, and this is considered to be its central characteristic. It is realized differently in various language systems – for instance, in Japanese, subjectivity is an obligatory component of the utterance. Remarks on this have appeared in linguistic studies for a considerable time (see Benveniste 1971; Lyons 1977). In an extensive monograph dedicated to subjectivity and subjectification, Edward Finegan, author of the introductory article, referred to it as “a speaker’s imprint” (Finegan 1995: 1). Furthermore, research on expressiveness, emotiveness, and conativity conducted since the beginnings of modern linguistics touches upon the issue of subjectivity in language.

² The definition of metatext does not have an unambiguous form in the literature. Here, that proposed by Kleszczowa (2015: 21–23) is adopted.

The title of the aforementioned monograph clearly highlights the necessity of distinguishing between a static and a dynamic description of language. Concerning the former, one should speak of subjectivity as an inherent linguistic feature that reveals itself in the system directly, albeit outside the propositional content (e.g., through the use of moods). The dynamic perspective is characteristic of diachronic linguistics, which, by definition, focuses on processes rather than states. This means that the mandatory research step to be taken once a phenomenon has been described is to account for the process that led to the occurrence of that particular linguistic fact. For these reasons, in historical research, subjectification³ is more commonly understood as the process by which linguistic expressions acquire semantic components that convey “the speaker’s point of view.” Thus, one could say that subjectification is a diachronic aspect of subjectivity.

In recent decades, interest in this phenomenon has significantly increased. Subjectification is discussed in the context of intensification in language (Athanasiadou 2007), as well as being linked with theories of semantic change (Martines 2015), grammaticalization (Visconti 2009), or pragmaticalization (Schwenter and Traugott 2000). An important text that summarizes and synthesizes previous research on subjectivity and subjectification is that by Narrog (2017), in which the author focuses on presenting the differences between the current linguistic approaches to these phenomena. Depending on the theoretical framework of choice, subjectivity, Narrog writes, can be treated as a linguistic fact belonging to the grammatical plane (the perspective of cognitive grammar), or as one belonging to the realm of pragmatics, based on the concept of performativity, or again, as one belonging to pragmatics but dependent on the speaker’s access to information. Because subjectivity is treated, depending on the methodological framework, as either a grammatical or a pragmatic fact, it is set in opposition to objectivity or intersubjectivity. Naturally, the adoption of a specific understanding of subjectivity affects the diachronic description, that is, the description of the process of subjectification. The latter has gained several definitions in the literature (see López-Couso 2010; Narrog 2017), although in diachronic studies, it is most effective to describe it by highlighting its essential features:

- (i) increase in subjective content or meaning associations of a lexical item
- (ii) increasing constraints on the use of a form in terms of morphosyntactic combinability
- (iii) increasing use in constructions associated with subjectivity
- (iv) increasing use in contexts associated with subjectivity

(Narrog 2017: 34).

³ The distinct term also points to a clear differentiation: subjectivity (synchronic perspective) vs. subjectification (diachronic perspective).

Supported by an increasing number of historical corpora,⁴ the dynamic development of historical pragmatics, which has occurred since the 1990s, has led to a closer examination of all the phenomena that are characterized as processes and occur at the intersection of dimensions that are not always clearly separated, namely semantics and pragmatics (Capone 2016). Certainly, one of the motivating factors behind the growing interest in subjectification is the search for the reasons behind the emergence of the discursive functions of linguistic expressions – a motivation that also underlies this study.

Typically, two possible foundations for language change are identified: the first type primarily results from internal factors, while the second encompasses both internal and external factors. Cognitive, empirical, and perceptual motivations are independent of language, with internal motivation understood as stemming from factors inherent in the synchronic state of a linguistic system. In contrast, external factors involve human action, including the conditions related to language use in a speech community and the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer (Traugott 2010: 11). Consequently, a diachronic (dynamic) perspective on language change should primarily account for shifts in usage, conditioned by both context and the current state of the linguistic system.

In studies focusing on subjectification as a factor driving language change two main conceptual frameworks are recognized: one proposed in the works of Ronald Langacker (1990) and the other put forward by Elizabeth Closs Traugott (1995; 2003; 2010). It is Traugott’s perspective that is more relevant for the current study because she adopts a diachronic approach in her analyses, identifying successive stages of change, and illustrates her discussion by drawing examples from both historical and contemporary material. Her findings will, therefore, be an important point of reference here and it is useful to summarize the most basic:

- on the synchronic level of language, components of three types can be distinguished: propositional (e.g., descriptions of speech acts), textual (means of ensuring textual coherence), and expressive (linguistic means of conveying the speaker’s evaluations and attitudes);
- an expression originating in the propositional domain may develop polysemy in the other two domains (textual and expressive);

⁴ Historical corpora of Polish are meant here, and the largest of those publicly available should be mentioned: the Electronic Corpus of Polish Texts from the 17th and 18th centuries (up to 1772) (KorBa) and the Corpus of the Polish Language of 1830–1918 (F19). There is also a substantial collection of smaller corpora created for specific research projects. Their status varies: they are not always annotated, or the annotations may be inconsistent. Nevertheless, a language historian has access to fairly extensive resources of historical Polish in a digitally processed form.

- in the description of semantic change, three developmental paths (tendencies) must be considered:
 - tendency I: “Meanings based in the external described situation > meanings based in the internal (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive) described situation” (Traugott 1989: 34), e.g., Polish *rzetelny*, originally ‘transparent, obvious’, currently ‘reliable’;⁵
 - tendency II: “Meanings based in the external or internal described situation > meanings based in the textual and metalinguistic situation” (Traugott 1989: 35), e.g., Polish *zaprawdę* ‘indeed’;⁶
 - tendency III: “Meanings tend to become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude toward the proposition” (Traugott 1989: 35), e.g., Polish *verba dicendi*.⁷

In discussions of subjectification, the third tendency is the most relevant. In later works, the term *subjectification* emerges in connection with these types of change, along with a full definition:

Subjectification is the semasiological process whereby SP[eakers]/W[riter]s come over time to develop meanings for L[exeme]s that encode or externalise their perspectives and attitudes as constrained by the communicative world of the speech event, rather than by the so-called “real-world” characteristics of the event or situation referred to.

(Traugott and Dasher 2002: 30)

2. Research questions

Based on the assumptions presented above, an attempt will be made to elucidate the linguistic change that has affected the expressions under investigation. The following research questions will be addressed:

- Which method of working with historical material is the most suitable and serves to pinpoint the beginning of the subjectification process the most clearly?

⁵ A detailed description of the semantic development of the adjective *rzetelny* is presented by Puzynina (2009).

⁶ The development of the particle *zaprawdę* on the basis of a parenthetical featuring a *verbum dicendi* and the preposition *za* in the currently obsolete meaning of ‘as, in the capacity of’ is discussed by Kleszczowa (2015: 119).

⁷ An analysis of semantic shifts in units containing *verba dicendi* (*ktoś twierdzi, że...* ‘someone claims that...’, *ktoś stwierdził że...* ‘someone stated that...’, *ktoś utrzymuje że...* ‘someone maintains that...’, *ktoś deklaruje że...* ‘someone declares that...’, *ktoś zapewnia, że...* ‘someone assures (sb) that...’, *ktoś oświadczył że...* ‘someone announced that...’, *ktoś głosi, że...* ‘someone proclaims that...’) is found in Sępień (2010).

- Which expressions (from which semantic domain) tend to undergo subjectification?
- At what moment can the subjectification process be said to have run its course? What are the determinants of this moment?
- What are (or can be) the formal exponents of a completed process of subjectification?

Naturally, these questions give rise to two hypotheses:

- Hypothesis I: The introduction of subjective components serves as the stimulus for a change that, once stabilized, becomes evident in the invariant semantic structure of a linguistic expression. This justifies characterizing subjectification as a pragmatic-semantic change, as its initial stage takes place on the pragmatic plane, while the results are observable (albeit not always – this depends on the stage of the ongoing process) in the semantic domain.
- Hypothesis II: Subjectification has the nature of a so-called deep change (Kleszczowa 2005).⁸ This means that it leads to lasting transformations in the semantic structure of a linguistic expression, a process which, in turn, reshapes the relationships between expressions, thereby giving rise to new configurations of homonymy or polysemy.

As mentioned earlier, my analyses focus on linguistic expressions/units that initially (i.e., at the beginning of their existence in the Polish language) did not possess a subjective character but belonged to the strictly informational domain.

3. Analysis of selected expressions

The effects of subjectification can be observed in the semantic structure of linguistic expressions that currently belong to different grammatical-functional categories within the metatextual layer of language. Three examples have been selected whose initial categorization varied. They illustrate distinct patterns within the change under discussion; nevertheless, similarities can be identified that suggest the possibility of constructing a generalized model for Polish after the analysis of a broader set of data.

⁸ The distinction between shallow and deep changes is discussed by Kleszczowa (2005). The latter category includes, for example, the emergence of new grammatical genders in Polish, masculine-personal and non-masculine-personal, the loss of the dual number, and the loss of the past perfect tense (e.g., *czytał był* ‘he had read’).

3.1. *Prawda* as a metatextual comment⁹

In examples (1) and (2), *prawda* is interpreted as a metatextual comment (a polar answer in the sense of Enfield et al. 2019), and the uses thereof have been summarized in the following definition: ‘the speaker agrees with what has been stated and considers it to be in accordance with the facts’ (WSJP PAN; translated from Polish).

- (1) *Zgromadzono nas – poprawił Vilbert. – Prawda. Zgromadzono nas.* (WSJP PAN)¹⁰
 ‘We have been gathered – Vilbert corrected. – **True**. We have been gathered.’
- (2) *I jeszcze jedna prawidłowość. Czy zauważyliście, że kiedy idziemy o głodzie i chłodzie, wtedy zawsze zaskakuje nas noc? – Prawda! – zawołali chórem.* (WSJP PAN)
 ‘And [there is] one more regularity. Have you noticed that whenever we walk hungry and cold, that’s when night always catches us by surprise? – **True!** – they exclaimed in unison.’

In both examples, we are dealing with an assertion of the truthfulness of what has been said (‘I say this because I want to express what is true’; the speaker focuses on conveying what is true rather than ensuring that the addressee knows what is true; it is, therefore, not about sharing knowledge but expressing a subjective evaluation). This does not mean that no knowledge is transmitted. As Danielewiczowa writes, “[t]here is no way to speak and remain simultaneously indifferent to issues of knowledge, truth, opinion, judgment, or reflection” (Danielewiczowa 2002: 5; translated from Polish).

There is no doubt that the source of this meaning is the noun *prawda*, which possesses a full set of inflectional forms, cf.:

- (3) *Krzywi świadkowie, iż świadczyli przeciw **prawdzie**.* (SStp, Rozm 713)
 ‘False witnesses, because they testified against **the truth**.’
- (4) *Czso poznał Holbracht między Janem a między Pietrasem, to poznał po **prawdzie**.* (SStp, 1391, Pozn no. 286)
 ‘What Albert adjudicated [in the argument] between Jan and Pietras, he adjudicated in accordance with **the truth**.’
- (5) ***Prawdą** popi tają [...], leż pospółstwu bają.* (SStp, Gałka, line 65)
 ‘Priests conceal **the truth** [...], they tell lies to the common folk.’

⁹ In this section, the only uses analysed are those in which *prawda* appears as a metatextual comment (a polar answer) rather than a tag question appended to the sentence (as in e.g., *To był pana podpis, **prawda**?* ‘It was your signature, **right**?’ (WSJP PAN)). The other metatextual uses of this noun have been discussed elsewhere (Pastuch 2021).

¹⁰ Abbreviations of dictionary titles are explained at the end of the article in the Sources section.

Examples (3), (4), and (5) corroborate the accuracy of the definition drawn up by lexicographers based on Old Polish material: ‘conformity of what is stated or said with reality, with facts, with one’s belief about reality; linguistic content that is in accordance with reality; absence of falsehood)’ (SStp; translated from Polish), which prioritizes conformity with reality, or the reference to reality, rather than to a given act of speech.

16th-century uses already suggest the development of other meanings also based on the noun *prawda*, leading to the emergence of particles (for more on this topic, see Kleszczowa 2015: 94).

- (6) *Dar **poprawdzie** niewielki: lecz ja o to proszę / Chuć moje więcej uważ / nie to, co przynoszę.* (SPXVI, KochZuz ktv)
 ‘The gift, **to tell the truth**, is small, but I ask for this / Value my kindness more / not what I bring.’
- (7) *Ja do tych należę co mało i nic [dostawaję]: [...] **Wprawdzie** udałemci się dorzemiesła, jako barzo pożytecznego, tak niemniej pewnego.* (SPXVI, CiekPotr 64, 25, 27).
 ‘I belong to those who [receive] little and nothing: [...] **Indeed** I turned to crafts as being very useful, yet secure at the same time.’

Examples of this kind fall outside the scope of the present analysis, which focuses on a search for predecessors of the contemporary affirmative answer *prawda*.¹¹ The following examples, also from the 16th century, herald such metatextual uses:

- (8) *Ale prawo w Polsce u nas jest / że bez Króla na wojnę jechać nie mamy. (–) **Prawda jest** / ale niechaj Król we Lwowie albo w Kamieńcu zawsze przez lato z nami leży* (SPXVI, OrzRozm V3, B4, H4v, 14v, K, N4, V2)
 ‘But such is our law in Poland / that we must not go to war without the King. (–) **It is true** / but let the King always camp with us in Lwów or Kamieniec [Podolski] over the summer.’
- (9) *Owo kto złodziejem a morderzem nie jest / w jazdę nie jeżdż. (–) **Prawda jest.*** (SPXVI, OrzRozm K4v).
 ‘Whoever is not a thief or a murderer / should not go on a journey. (–) **That’s right.**’

Examples of this kind should be interpreted as an evaluation of what has been said (‘such is our law in Poland’ – ‘yes, you are telling the truth’), rather than an assessment of the extralinguistic reality. The evaluative response here is the full sentence *Prawda jest*. Ellipsis as a mechanism for constructing responses to polar questions in the form of syntactically independent

¹¹ A discussion of polar answers as a class of parts of speech may be found in Pastuch (2020: 9–12). The Polish term *dopowiedzenie* is used with reference to such lexemes in the latest lexicographical descriptions (WSJP PAN).

elements that function as metatextual comments has been presented in my earlier work (Pastuch 2020), where the polar answer *tak* is discussed, as seen in the examples:

- (10) *Wołajno jeno, rzekł Ksantus: Ezopka: / Azażem ja ci, co jest najlepszego, / Nie kazał kupić, do stołu mojego? / **Tak jest**, odpowi Ezop rezolutny (KorBa)*
 ‘Call in Aesop, said Xanthus: / Did I not order you to buy what is best for my table? / **You did [lit. so it is]**, replies Aesop the quick-witted.’
- (11) *Ja krokiem zwyczajnym idę; czyś się już WmP. sfatygował? **Tak jest**, już poczynam ustawać. (KorBa)*
 ‘I’m walking at a normal pace; have you already exhausted yourself, noble sir? **That’s right [lit. so it is]**, I’m beginning to slow down.’

Similar conclusions are presented by Anders Holmberg in his book on the syntax of *yes* and *no* (Holmberg 2016: 55–57).

In later 18th and 19th-century texts, such an elliptical *prawda* becomes stable:

- (12) *ELVIRA: Ale przecię w Rodryku kochasz, choć go winisz. XYMENA: **Prawda**. (KorBa)*
 ‘ELVIRA: But you love Rodrigo, even though you blame him. XYMENA: **True**.’
- (13) *CZART: Nuże, jeśli sprawiedliwie karze, kto słusznie karze, i zaż sprawiedliwie nie cierpi, kto słusznie cierpi? ZŁO: **Prawda**. (KorBa)*
 ‘DEVIL: Then, does he punish rightly, he who punishes justly, and likewise, doesn’t he rightly suffer who suffers deservedly? EVIL: **True**.’
- (14) *Jakże ci Karolu? – Lepiej – rzekł Karol – ale czy nie pierwszy raz tak jesteś troskliwą, bo coś teraz ciebie nie widać. – **Prawda, prawda** – rzekła Marszałkowa – muszę się przed Xiędzem Przeorem poskarżyć, że nas Ewelinka unika. (F19)*
 ‘How are you, Karol? – Better – Karol replied – but isn’t this the first time you are so caring, because we don’t seem to see you a lot these days. – **True, true** – said the Marshal’s wife – I must complain to the Reverend Prior that Ewelinka is avoiding us.’
- (15) *Damazy: No widzisz Pan, a powiadasz, że to pociecha, gdzie tam, kłopot... zmartwienie!*
*Rejent: Hm, I to **prawda**, ani słowa! ... o! bo i ja jestem ojcem, panie łaskawy ...rozumiem to dobrze ... (KorTeDa, Pan Damazy)*
 ‘Damazy: Well, you see, you say she’s a comfort. Not in the least! [She’s only] trouble ... distress!
 Notary: Hm, and that’s **true**, undoubtedly! ... Oh! Because I am a father too, my dear sir ... I understand it all well ...’

A survey of the material indicates that a similar development is also evidenced by other nouns, such as *zgoda* ‘agreement’ and *fakt* ‘fact’, cf. *faktem jest* ‘it is true, admittedly’ > *fakt*, used when “the speaker admits that it is as it has been said, even if it could have been thought otherwise” (WSJP PAN; translated from Polish). Examples:

- (16) *Trochę się różnimy, fakt – przyznał, łyknąwszy* (WSJP PAN).
 ‘We differ a bit, **it’s true** – he admitted, gulping.’

The same applies to the meaning of *zgoda* glossed as ‘a decision by a certain person that the thing under discussion is good, and that they will not do anything to prevent it from happening’ (WSJP PAN; translated from Polish), see:

- (17) *MORIS – Niech się pan nie obrazi, ale do tego trzeba mieć inny żołądek. Bałkański. MAGNUS – Zgoda, nie mam.* (NKJP)
 ‘MORIS – Please don’t be offended, but you need a different stomach for that. A Balkan stomach. MAGNUS – **I admit it**, I don’t have it.’

- (18) *To może tym razem ty do mnie wpadniesz? [...] – Zgoda. O której?* (NKJP)
 ‘So maybe this time you’ll drop by to see me? [...] – **Very well**. What time?’

Unequivocal references to the act of speaking found in the lexicographical definitions (WSJP PAN) clearly point to metatextual usage marked by subjectivity. In response to what has been said, the speaker refers to that content rather than to the objective reality. Interestingly, the categorial classification of these expressions is not unambiguous: *prawda* and *fakt* are currently recognized as function words and included among metatextual comments, while *zgoda*, has been assigned to the noun category, even though the provided definition suggests metatextual use. This is most likely due to the lower frequency of such use. However, it can be suspected that the latest linguistic data would allow for the identification of *zgoda* as a metatextual unit.

3.2. *Pewnie* as a metatextual comment

A different path in the process of subjectification has been taken by the metatextual comment *pewnie*, which is formally identical to the hypothetical epistemic particle. In SGPP, it received the following definition: ‘the speaker, when speaking about what s/he is saying about that which is being discussed, about which s/he does not know whether it is the case that R, says that s/he knows something about that which is being discussed, which makes it possible to say R’ (SGPP: 45; translated from Polish). Interestingly, the function of a metatextual comment is confirmed in USJP (with the qualification: interjection), whereas it is not recorded in the later WSJP PAN (although one of the examples confirms it: *To pan Polak! – krzyknąłem wstając, by go powitać. – Pewnie, że Polak, i to z samego Poznania* ‘So you’re a Pole! – I exclaimed as I stood up to greet him. – **Of course** I’m a Pole, and I’m from Poznań as well’). In NKJP, on the other hand, there are many examples of such uses as:

- (19) *A dziecko zdrowe? – Pewnie, chłop na schwał, prawie trzy kilo.* (NKJP)

‘And is the child healthy? – **Sure**, a strong lad, almost three kilograms.’

- (20) *Nie dość, że znasz połowę personelu komisariatu rzeczynego, to jeszcze na dodatek bywałeś na tej przystani? – **Pewnie**. Przecież ci mówiłem, że to moje okolice.* (NKJP)
 ‘Not only do you know half the personnel at the riverside police station, but on top of that you’ve also been to that pier? – **Sure**. I told you it’s my area after all.’

The affirmative *pewnie*, which is semantically distinct from today’s epistemic particle, was noted as being obsolete (or falling out of use) by Witold Doroszewski and defined as ‘undoubtedly, without risk, with complete certainty, reliably, for sure’ (SDor; translated from Polish). It represents the following semantic value: ‘the speaker, when saying R about that which is being discussed, says that s/he knows something which is true when it the case that R and that s/he does not know anything that when known prevents them from saying R’ (SGPP: 73). This is the value attributed to the contemporary epistemic particle *na pewno*. In SDor, this meaning is realized specifically by the particle *pewnie*, as illustrated by a 19th-century quotation:

- (21) *Odeślij ten list, moja Mamo, ale tak, żeby **pewnie** doszedł i żeby go przeczytała.* (SDor, Słow., Listy I, 79)
 ‘Send this letter, Mother, but make sure that it reaches its destination [lit. so that it **certainly** arrives], and that she reads it.’

It is evident that this *pewnie* is different from today’s hypothetical particle, as seen in the example:

- (22) *Przyniosłam wałówkę. **Pewnie** jesteś głodny.* (SGPP).
 ‘I’ve brought food. You must be hungry [lit. **Surely** you are hungry].’

The old *pewnie* was a particle of certainty,¹² as confirmed by examples from the 16th and 17th centuries:

- (23) *Albo warz koperwaser z czarnuchą w wodzie / a oną juchą pluskwy polewaj tedyć **pewnie** poginą* (SPXVI, Sien Lek 159, za: Kleszczowa 2015: 117).
 ‘Or boil copperas [i.e. ferrous sulphate] with black caraway in water, and pour that liquid over the bed bugs; then they will **certainly** die.’
- (24) *Bogą się boyćie / y jemu wiernie służćie; On was **pewnie** nie opuści: [...]* (KorBa)
 ‘Fear God and serve him faithfully; He will **certainly** not abandon you.’

Kleszczowa’s (2015: 37–67) research indicates that in the process of functional derivation, adverbs often served as the basis for particles, which in turn developed into polar answers. This applies to epistemic particles of certainty. If we examine the list of these particles in the SGPP, it becomes clear

¹² Certainty particles are a subset of epistemic particles. Such a term is used in both synchronic (SGPP 2014) and diachronic (Kleszczowa 2015: 29, 78, 117, 118, 128, 129, 135) research.

that in current Polish, one can employ them as metatextual comments (polar answers): *ani chybi, bez wątpienia, jak nic, na bank, na mur beton, na pewno, na sto procent, niechybnie, niewątpliwie, z pewnością* (these convey meanings similar to the English *of course, certainly, surely, undoubtedly, without a doubt, you bet*). A native speaker of Polish is capable of producing a mini-dialogue in which each of these particles appear in this role, for example: *Przyjdiesz jutro? – Na mur beton* ‘Will you come tomorrow? – You bet!’; *Będiesz na urodzinach Krysi? – Na sto procent.* ‘Will you be at Krysia’s birthday party? – For sure.’

Following the model of particle development discussed above, it should be assumed that the obsolete particle of certainty originated from the adverb *pewnie* ‘strongly, firmly, unshakably’ (SStp; translated from Polish). Such adverbial usage of *pewnie* can be found in the following citation in SStp:

- (25) *Ktokole ma **pewnie** jeną cnotę, ten ma wszystkie* (SStp, mid 15th cent.)
 ‘Whoever adheres **firmly** to one virtue [lit. firmly has one virtue], has them all.’

In the subsequent step, based on this adverb, a particle usage developed, as seen in *Rozmyślanie przemyskie*:

- (26) *Ktory by człowiek tego sie pokusił albo śmiał skosztować swą uporą [...], ma to **pewnie** wiedzieć [...], iże wpadnie taki [...] w gniew Boga wszechmogącego* (SStp, Reg 724)
 ‘He who would dare to do it [i.e. break a rule] or try [it] in his obstinacy [...], ought to know **for sure** [...] that he will incur [...] the wrath of God Almighty.’

We may also assume that, in accordance with the derivational sequence, the adverb developed from the adjective *pewny* ‘stable, firm, solid, strong, unwavering’ (SStp; translated from Polish), which appears in the following passage:

- (27) *O Krzyżu święty [...], ty jeś **pewna** nadzieja nasza!* (SStp, end of the 15th cent.)
 ‘O Holy Cross [...], you are our **unwavering** hope!’

This interpretation is somewhat complicated by the fact that, as reported by Jakubowicz (2022: 98), the adjective *pewny* also had a short form *pewien* (< **pɔvɛnɔjɛ*) with the meaning ‘someone unspecified, a certain’, which has been noted as a variant in the Old Polish Dictionary (SStp) but lacks confirmation in texts. Therefore, only a comparative analysis could unequivocally indicate the origin of both meanings of *pewnie*. However, if we remain within the realm of the Polish language, the presented argumentation is further supported by the fact that terms like *stały, mocny, and trwały*, given as synonyms for the adjective *pewny*, carry evaluative meaning; they are qualitative rather than relational adjectives. This evaluation pertains to the external world. In contrast, the aforementioned uses of *pewnie* as a polar answer

encode a subjective evaluation of or a reference to an earlier utterance, as seen in examples such as:

- (28) *Wdowiec: Toć się ona będzie dobrze miała! Usarz: **Pewnie!*** (F19)
 ‘Widower: But she will be well! Messenger: **Certainly!**’

We find similar observations in contemporary definitions of the interjection *pewnie*, for example:

We say *pewnie* to confirm emphatically what has just been said. *Przekonałeś ją, żeby chodziła o lasce? – **Pewnie...*** [Did you convince her to walk with a cane? – **Of course...**] *Serio? – No **pewnie.*** [Seriously? – Well, **of course.**]
 (ISJP, emphasis ours; translated from Polish)

pewnie [an interjection] referring to the previous statement and confirming what it communicates; of course: *Mam nadzieję, że mówisz poważnie. – **Pewnie!*** [I hope you’re serious. – **Of course!**]

(USJP, emphasis ours; translated from Polish)

Both definitions emphasize the reference to what has been previously stated, which indicates a change of perspective: the speaker expresses their attitude to the textual, not the external world, which strengthens the likelihood of subjectivity. In this regard, it is similar to *prawda*, as discussed above. It should be added that only a diachronic analysis of the material allowed the identification of the most probable source of the use of *pewnie* as a polar answer.

Prawda and *pewnie*, as discussed above, are oriented towards interaction with the recipient, which confirms that they function as polar answers and manifest themselves in dialogues (see example 28).¹³

3.3. *Szalenie* as an intensifier

The final example is the intensifier *szalenie*, whose contemporary meaning results from the introduction of a subjective component into its semantic structure. To obtain a complete picture of the change that this lexeme underwent, reference must be made to both the adjective *szalony* and the historical adverb *szalenie* ‘foolishly, stupidly’ (SStp; translated from Polish). In this case, we can talk about a completed process of subjectification, since today, such an adverb is not recorded (see USJP, WSJP PAN). While the process of shaping this intensifier has been described elsewhere (Pastuch et al. 2022),

¹³ In accordance with Traugott’s (2012) analysis of the English *no doubt* and *surely*, we might be dealing here with the effects of intersubjectification, which can be interpreted as the final stage of subjectivization. Intersubjectification manifests itself in expressions that direct the speaker’s attention towards the addressee. In these cases (such as the Polish *pewnie* and *prawda* or the English *no doubt* and *surely*), the analysis should be shifted to the discourse level, considering the process of the development of so-called discourse markers.

let us highlight here the fact that it represents a different pattern of subjectification than the previously discussed examples. This is because in the case of *szalenie* the acquisition of a subjective value is exclusively related to an expression of the speaker’s evaluation, without any reference whatsoever to the addressee of the statement.

Intensification is a concept naturally associated with evaluation, which, in turn, is linked to the expressive function of language, emphasizing the speaker’s point of view. In many works which primarily refer to synchronic data, intensification is considered to be an indicator of subjectivity, with its basic function being to present the perspective of the speaker, which is also associated with conveying expressiveness (Athanasiadou 2007; Piórkowska 2017; Sojda 2018).

Polish intensifiers (metapredicative operators) have been comprehensively described in linguistic literature, both from a synchronic (Bałabaniak 2013; Sojda 2022) and a diachronic perspective (Bałabaniak and Mitrenga 2015; Dziwirek 2020; Pastuch et al. 2022). Historical linguistic descriptions point to the gradual loosening of the semantic relationship between an adverb and its etymon (Dziwirek refers to this as “the abandoning of etymology”), which in the end leads (potentially) to the emergence and subsequent retention of intensification as a component of meaning. However, the cause(s) of this loosening are not indicated. In my opinion, the transformation of an adverb into an intensifier is triggered precisely by those uses that emphasize the speaker’s own evaluation. A survey of the historical uses of the adverb serves to confirm this thesis.

The Old Polish Dictionary records an example from the second half of the 15th century which clearly indicates a reference to reckless and foolish behaviour:

- (29) *Mać w doma będąc, chce-li męża pojąć, szalenie czyni [...]* (SStp, 2nd half of the 15th cent.)
 ‘Being at home, if mother wants to marry a man, she acts **foolishly**.’

However, the 16th-century dictionary by Mączyński already provides a context in which we find a subjective evaluation of a meteorological phenomenon:

- (30) *Gdy wiatr szalenie a okrutnie szturmował* (SPXVI, Mącz 489 c)
 ‘When the wind blew **wildly** and cruelly.’

This can be interpreted as a precursor to later intensifier uses. Historical material¹⁴ confirms that the intensifying meaning developed little by little, gradually increasing in frequency: in KorBa, it accounts for only 22% of all

¹⁴ Detailed numerical data on this topic can be found in Pastuch et al. (2022: 308–311).

occurrences, but in F19, intensifier use makes up 87% of all occurrences. The adverb *szalenie* is not recorded in NKJP, a fact reflected in the dictionary based on that corpus (WSJP PAN). Thus, it is reasonable to ask when and under what influence, uses began to emerge that contained subjective evaluation or reference to some pragmatic norm (Laskowski 1977), which would ultimately result in the disappearance of the adverb and the formation of an intensifier. An examination of the material from three corpora (23 occurrences of *szalenie* in KorBa, 15 occurrences in F19, and 2022 concordances in NKJP) and a contextual analysis of the extracted examples allow us to conclude that the number of intensifying uses increases in successive historical periods. In KorBa, adverbial uses still predominate, e.g.

- (31) *Niech wierzy [...], że jako ten major szalenie rzucił się z małą garstką na wojsko [...]* (KorBa)
 ‘Let him believe [...] that when that major rushed **madly** with a small handful against an army [...]

However, the intensifying meaning is already found, e.g.:

- (32) *Źleś to uczyniła, Źeś dom i krewnych swoich opuściła, Lubo cię miłość tak szalenie grzała, Przecięś z tym lotrem odjeżdżać nie miała.* (KorBa)
 ‘You did wrong by leaving home and your relatives, even though love inflamed you so **madly**, you weren’t supposed to go away with that scoundrel.’

As mentioned earlier, the emergence of the intensifier, which is formally identical to the adverb, cannot be considered separately from the adjective, which, in accordance with the Polish word-formation system, serves as the basis for the adverb. Therefore, one cannot rule out an alternative to the deadverbial path of development of the intensifier, i.e. one that would involve formal and semantic derivation from the adjective. However, in this case, only the qualitative senses of the adjective would have to be taken into consideration, such as ‘of significant size or intensity’ (WSJP PAN; translated from Polish) or ‘occurring in very large quantities, enormous, unprecedented, extraordinary; uncontrollable’ (USJP; translated from Polish), while disregarding those related to mental states. This hypothesis is tempting in that the development of qualitative meanings in adjectives is also linked to subjectification (see Pastuch and Mitrenga 2021). Therefore, it seems that the culmination of the subjectification process may be signalled by the emergence of a conventionalized qualitative meaning. However, whereas in the case of the adverb, arguably only one meaning has been retained, namely an intensifying one (which does not necessarily entail its qualitative character), the adjective has developed a new qualitative meaning while simultaneously preserving its etymological one.

4. The formal markers of subjectification in the analysed examples

While the linguistic material above has been analysed from a semantic-pragmatic point of view, it is important to remember that confirmation that subjectification has actually taken place must be sought in the formal changes correlated with it. These are discussed below in connection with the lexical units under analysis, with the caveat that this is not an exhaustive catalogue. It can be expanded or limited depending on the nature of the linguistic material, as well as the typological affiliation and systemic properties of the language from which it originates.

1. ***prawda***: loss of inflectional endings; loss of morphosyntactic properties; recategorization: the original noun became a metatextual comment; repositioning in the sentence: the linguistic element in its new function occurs initially, on the left side of the utterance; acquisition of prosodic autonomy (falling intonation); syntactic independence.
2. ***pewnie***: recategorization: transition to the class of metatextual comments (from the class of epistemic particles of certainty); repositioning in the sentence; prosodic autonomy (falling intonation); syntactic independence.
3. ***szalenie***: loss of morphological properties (gradation); establishment of the intensifier-predicate word order as the neutral order (in contrast to the possible predicate-intensifier order as the marked order); expansion of the word’s collocational potential compared to the underlying adverb. As is known, the range of categories that an adverb can combine with is narrower than in the case of an intensifier, and primarily includes verbs, whereas the possibility to modify adjectives, nouns, or numerals is reserved for specific types of units.

The list above indicates that in most cases, the effects are the same between the analysed examples, confirming that this change has common characteristics. Additionally, contemporary lexicographic data provide further confirmation of these transformations: the noun *prawda I* vs. the metatextual comment *prawda II* (WSJP PAN); the adverb, the particle of certainty or the hypothetical *pewnie* (SPXVI) vs. the interjection *pewnie* (used as a polar answer) (USJP, ISJP); the adverb *szalenie* (SPXVI)¹⁵ vs. the metapredicative marker (intensifier) *szalenie* (WSJP PAN).

¹⁵ The entry for *szalenie* has not been published yet; the available corpus data, http://spxvi.edu.pl/korpus/probka/szukaj?styp=0&term=szalenie&search_in=base&search_in=transcript (accessed 02.03.2023) allow one of the two uses to be considered adverbial, while the other is ambiguous.

Conclusions

Subjectification, when considered diachronically, should be compared to “parallel” changes such as grammaticalization, lexicalization, or pragmaticalization. While these processes have their own specific characteristics and operate on different levels of analysis, they also share common features. An exhaustive study covering all these types of change would require extensive linguistic material. Instead, our goal here was to highlight in individual examples a process that is particularly important in the formation of the non-objective layer of language. An attempt was made to determine which expressions (from which semantic domain) are more “inclined” to undergo semantic changes or shifts due to subjectification. The answer requires further research, but it can be said that diachronic analysis should primarily focus on those linguistic resources which are currently linked with cognition, speaking, or modality (Stępień 2010; Sobotka 2023:130). Another research question concentrated on identifying the moment of completion of the subjectification process. In this case, it seems that a satisfactory answer has been obtained: the subjectification process reaches its conclusion when the new meaning of an expression becomes conventionalized (as in the case of *prawda*), or when the original meaning is replaced by one with a subjective component (as in the case of *szalenie*).

In addition to the specific findings related to the phenomenon under consideration, the analysis also allows for some general observations regarding the methods of historical-pragmatic research. It appears that in cases where we cannot resort to native speaker competence for verification (as is common in synchronic pragmatic studies), the most appropriate method is a contextual one (Traugott 2010), which involves the observation of linguistic behaviour, preferably in texts featuring dialogues. The subsequent steps include a pragmatic interpretation (Levinson 1983: 47–53) and the superimposition of this interpretation onto the semantic content, which is typically determined at an earlier stage.

The examples discussed above demonstrate that speakers’ communicative needs drive linguistic change. This is not a new claim and it has been expressed by many linguists, not only in Poland (Detges and Waltereit 2015). In the cases under discussion, the communicative need was to introduce a component of subjective evaluation into the meaning. As mentioned earlier, we are not referring to linguistic expressions in which the subjective component is an inherent part of their semantics – these involve subjectivity rather than subjectification. In my understanding, subjectification (similarly to lexicalization or grammaticalization) has a diachronic character. It is equally important to emphasize that this process may be one of the factors stimulating

change, but not the sole reason behind it. The multifactorial nature of linguistic change, including change at the semantic level, has been discussed over a considerable period of time.

It is also worth noting that diachronic research on processes leading to the development of discourse markers should be conducted from a comparative perspective.¹⁶ These mechanisms seem to be partially universal, and a parallel analysis of multilingual material could reveal mutual dependencies, such as the influence of biblical texts on the earliest works in national languages.¹⁷

Research at the intersection of semantics and pragmatics also prompts us to ask more general questions pertaining to the most fundamental issues in linguistics, such as whether a change in the function of a linguistic expression entails a change in meaning, i.e. whether it triggers the process of semantic change. Credible answers to such questions should emerge from material-based diachronic research.

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¹⁶ The latest monograph on this topic (Heine et al. 2021) has individual chapters focusing on the development of discourse markers in various languages, but the introductory chapter entitled “The development of discourse markers: An introduction” (1–55) addresses comparative issues. The comparative approach is also present in synchronic studies (see, for example, Rozumko 2021).

¹⁷ I would like to thank Prof. Piotr Sobotka for drawing my attention to this issue.

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