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Functions of nominal vocative forms in Polish and French

Abstract

The article concerns a functional description of Polish nominal vocative forms and their equivalents in French. Due to typological differences, it is difficult to precisely indicate the French equivalents of Polish vocative forms. The most suitable in this respect are – however characterized by functional criteria — nominal forms/terms of address (French *terme d'adresse* or *forme nominale d'adresse*).

The basic function of the Polish nominal vocative forms and their French counterparts is addressing a listener directly as well as appealing to the addressee of an utterance (address function): determining to whom (or, alternatively, to what) an utterance is addressed. This function is accompanied by the intention to establish direct contact with the addressee. Vocative phrases with such an invariant function — the so-called proper appeals — serve the phatic function of language.

Modification of the invariant function occurs in the case of the so-called conventional appeals, well-established polite forms used primarily to signal social relations between interlocutors, as well as conventionalised emotional relations. They are connected only with certain types of utterances: they are used as letter/email salutations, opening formulas for speeches and toasts, and as interludes in longer speeches.

A significant complement to the functional invariant occurs in the case of the so-called predicative appeals. The vocative form then carries additional generic content, thus becoming an expressively marked declarative utterance, that characterises an addressee and is a carrier of emotions and evaluation on the part of a sender.

In practice, it is extremely difficult to unambiguously define the functional character of vocative phrases, while analysing only their form.

Keywords

Nominal vocative form, vocative form function, nominal form of address

The notion of nominal vocative form referred to in the title of the article indicates that the subject of our observation will be language units determined in the Polish language by grammatical properties, and their counterparts in the

French language. While the subject of description in Polish is determined quite precisely, in the contemporary French it is affected by phenomena identified and having their points of references in various spheres of language functioning, such as stylistics, rhetoric, pragmalinguistics and others¹. Grammatical references are far less common here. They are generally related to the indication of Latin sources of the French language (and pointing to grammatical description, also in terms of grammatical terminology — Detrie, 2007: 11—12²). Moreover, we should also take into account the fact that the vocative (French *vocatif*) in French linguistic studies is considered to be a syntactic element (the nominal syntagma) and characterised from this very perspective, which seems obvious as a result of the limited scope of the nominal inflection in French. Dominique Lagorgette draws attention to the twofold understanding of the French term *vocatif*: first of all, as one of grammatical cases in languages with developed nominal inflection and, secondly, as the name of an utterance function (Lagorgette, 2006: 38—41). Therefore, taking all the above into account, we decided to make Polish vocative forms a starting point and a point of reference, and we shall look for their French counterparts.

In Polish linguistic studies, the vocative case is presented as one of the forms in which various divisions and classifications meet and cross. This is what causes “the special situation of the vocative as part of the case system and, on the other hand, among other morphological categories” (Heinz, 1965: 32).

Grammatical tradition situates the vocative within the category of the case of nouns. First of all, due to the nature of the exponents, the vocative is placed in the formal paradigm of the noun. However, already in the 1970s Zuzanna Topolińska (1973: 269)³ pointed to the uncertain formal status of the vocative (as a semantic category), recognising the particular prosodic facet of the vocative phrase — expressive intonation, rather than its morphological form⁴ — as a paramount exponent. More and more often, the vocative is replaced by an inflective form of the nominative case⁵.

¹ Cf. Catherine Detrie’s statement: “*Vocatif, terme d’adresse, apostrophe, autant de désignations d’un même phénomène linguistique, mais qui manifestent souvent non seulement des problématiques disciplinaires différentes, mais aussi des points de vue différents sur le phénomène ainsi dénommé*” (Detrie, 2007: 11).

² Detrie (2007: 11) also draws attention to the inadequacy of the term *vocatif* in the description of the modern French language unto, as she writes, “long-ruined declensions” (French *les déclinaisons étant ruinées depuis très longtemps*).

³ Cf. also: Zarębina (1990: 100) and Jaworski (1992: 96).

⁴ The role of intonation proper for vocative phrases, distinguishing them from the melody of the whole statement, is emphasized by Lagorgette (2006: 39). Gaston Zink (1989/1992: 30—31) points out that, in spoken version of the French language of the Middle Ages, in order to distinguish a phrase addressed to a listener (French *appel*) intonation sufficed (Lagorgette, 2006: 39).

⁵ From many studies on this subject see inter alia Zaleski (1959; 1970); Dulewiczowa (1983); Lubaś (1983); Dunaj (1986); Zarębina (1986; 1990). Guy Serbat (1996) points out that, Latin distinguishes the vocative form only for masculine nouns (including proper names) of the second declension (e / o) (quoted after: Lagorgette, 2006: 38).

From the very beginning, the syntactic status of noun forms in the vocative is debatable. Two radically opposing views meet here. For instance, Jan Tokarski includes the vocative forms in his assessment, assigning them the function of a subject⁶. This has been formulated as a general principle: “If the predicate takes the form of the first or third person, then the subject takes the form of the nominative. However, if the predicate is in the second person, then the subject takes the form of the vocative” (Tokarski, 1978: 110).

Other researchers take the opposite stand: they posit the vocative outside the sentence, treating it as an independent utterance (e.g. Topolińska, 1973: 270; Zarębina, 1986: 373; Laskowski, 1998: 221), as a form which does not belong to syntactic compounds (e.g. Szober, 1959: 387; Zarębina, 1984: 331; Andrejewicz, 1988: 129; Laskowski, 1998: 221). This detachment (French *détachement*) of the vocative phrase from the structure of the French utterance is an important distinguishing factor, which has been highlighted in studies on the subject (e.g. Neveu, 2003; Lagorgette, 2006).

The intermediate standpoint is expressed in recognition of the syntactic separateness of vocative phrases from the sentence structure, but also in recognition of mutual grammatical-semantic interdependencies. The vocative nominal phrase is treated as an element with a different degree of integration with the sentence: from an independent form of address to the development of one of the elements of the sentence (Sieczkowski, 1964: 260) or as an apposition of a special range (Heinz, 1965: 109), finally as an additional element connoting the form of the second person and being connoted by it (Urbańczyk, 1978: 272).

Jerzy Żmudzki (2004: 307) points out the possibility of signalling the degree of functional autonomy of address forms (including vocative ones) by means of “intonational characterisation”: functionally autonomous forms, carrying out independent linguistic activities (speech acts — in pragmalinguistic terminology), are also separated intonationally (and placed in the initial position):

Polish: ***Panie Kaziu***, gdzie są klucze? (English ***Mr Kazio***, where are the keys?)

Polish: ***Panie Kaziu***, proszę mi dać te klucze! (English ***Mr Kazio***, give me these keys!)

Polish: ***Panie Kaziu!?*** (English ***Mr Kazio!?*** — reproachfully)

(Żmudzki, 2004: 305)

In the case of non-autonomous forms of address, there is no separate intonational characteristic:

Polish *Niech pan, panie Kaziu, da mi wreszcie te klucze!*

⁶ Likewise Klemensiewicz (1953: 11); Zaleski (1970: 143).

(English *Mr Kazio, will you give me the keys already?*) — the forms of address used as an intrasentential apposition;

Polish *Gdzie są te klucze, panie Kaziu?*

(English *Where are the keys, Mr Kazio?*) — a form of address as an additional apposition with a sentence-final intonation.

(Żmudzki, 2004: 307)

Distinguishing by intonation, apart from the position in the structure of an utterance (initial position or interjection), is the basis for distinguishing two types of vocative phrases: *calls* or *summons* as well as instances of *address(ing)* (Zwicky, 1974, after Levinson, 1983/2010: 80)

Even supporters of an extremely restrictive approach admit that there is no doubt that there are links, however of an unspecified nature, between the vocative and the finitive phrases (Andrejewicz, 1988: 129). On the other hand, Z. Topolińska (1973: 269) writes directly about the specific congruity of vocative and imperative forms.

Adopting the thesis concerning the syntactical independence of vocative noun phrases, and therefore granting them the status of independent utterances in a text, entails certain consequences. One of them is the necessity to recognize that the presence of a vocative in a text is directly situationally (rather than grammatically) motivated.

We assume that the basic function of the vocative⁷ is addressing the listener directly, an appeal addressed at the recipient of an utterance (in the French language studies, vocative phrases of address are characterised in a similar way⁸: Lagorgette, 2006; Lehmann, 2010); therefore, among the elements constituting the situation of the speech act, we will look for a reference of vocative forms.

We find that vocative forms identify different fragments of the extra-linguistic reality (referred to in the text), or in other words — objects of thought (as Topolińska presents it (1973: 271)) as the second participant in the situation of the speech act. Therefore, it is justified to treat the vocative as a category of deictic nature, a category updating the content of the vocative utterance in relation to the

⁷ Marek Łaziński (2006: 95, 96) introduces the concept of analytical vocative (analytical forms of a vocative) regarding Polish expressions *proszę pana*, *proszę pani*. This does not seem to be the right solution taking into account the traditional (and still valid) reference of the grammatical Polish term *wolacz* (the vocative case).

⁸ The presented characteristics also corresponds to the definition of the apostrophe (French *apostrophe*) included in TLFi: “Fonction grammaticale du mot qui désigne la personne ou la chose personnifiée à qui l’on s’adresse” (<http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/affart.exe?19;s=1286816700;?b=0>; accessed: 7.04.2018).

situation of speaking. In this function it very clearly approaches the forms of the second person (personal pronoun *you*)⁹.

Such a strong connection of the vocative's grammatical forms with the situation of the speech act allows to derive certain implications, which will play quite an important role in the further characterisation of the vocative as a language category. These result from some of the characteristics attributed, by definition, to the elements of the situation of the communication act.

We assume that active participants in a speech act (a sender and a recipient of an utterance) are clearly designated in terms of the so-called category of definiteness (cf. Topolińska, 1981: 172). The lexemes *me* and *you* contain an index that unambiguously defines their reference object (cf. Topolińska, 1984: 306). Therefore, also the vocative phrase referring to an addressee of an utterance is, without any particular additional expressions, unequivocally positively characterised as to its referential quantification¹⁰ (cf. Topolińska, 1973: 270). The presence of the special marker of the category of definiteness would be a signal of a non-referential use of vocative phrase.

Another assumption is that participants of speech acts are individuals (i.e. they are positively characterised by a language category of personality — cf. Topolińska, 1973: 270, 271; Topolińska, 1984: 306). Therefore, an addressee of our appeal, the addressee designated by its content is, also by definition, a person. That is why vocative phrases are primarily constituted by personal names, nicknames, names of human communities (cf. Zarębina, 1990: 99). If, nevertheless, we address an appeal to an impersonal addressee, the very use of the form of a vocative entails a secondary, contextual personalisation. As regards the French language, this has been discussed, for example, in the definition from TLFi (see footnote 8).

Finally, one of the conditions for the emergence of language communication in the most natural form is the co-occurrence of the sender and recipient of an utterance. Similarly, when making an appeal, we assume that it will be received directly by the person to whom it was addressed. Therefore, the natural situation of using a vocative phrase as an appeal, is the situation of direct contact. Violation of this principle leads to utterances of the so-called conventional appeal nature (Topolińska, 1973: 271—272).

The basic, invariant function of the vocative forms is the address function (Sieczkowski, 1964: 240): determining to whom (or, alternatively, to what) an utterance is addressed (Tokarski, 1978: 112). For example, the Polish *Mamo, chce na podwórko!* (English *Mom, I want to go and play outside (in the courtyard)!*),

⁹ The connection of the vocative with the forms of the imperative mood and the forms of the second person of the verb is emphasised by Otto Jespersen (1924/1971: 253, quoted after: Lagorgette, 2006: 38–39)

¹⁰ Z. Topolińska (1973: 270) claims that the positive characterisation of vocative phrases as to their reference quality is similar in type to that of proper names.

Pozwól tu, Zosiu! (English *Would you come here, Zosia?*), *Panie kierowco, jeszcze wysiadamy!* (English *Mister driver, we're in the middle of getting off!*) and respectively the French *Voulez-vous venir ici, madame?*, *Bonjour, Marie*. This function is accompanied by the intention to mobilise the attention of the addressee of an utterance (Topolińska, 1973: 270) and to establish direct contact with the addressee (Dulewiczowa, 1983: 195).

Vocative phrases with such an invariant function — the so-called proper appeals (Topolińska, 1973: 271) primarily serve to establish contact — perform a phatic function. According to Krystyna Pisarkowa (1975: 19), they belong to the so-called terminal and continuing conative signals.

We encounter some modification of the invariant function in the case of so-called conventional appeals, well-established polite forms used primarily to signal social relations between interlocutors, as well as conventionalised emotional relations¹¹, for instance, Polish *Wysoka Izbo!* (English *Ladies and gentlemen of the House!* (in the parliament), *Kochana Babciu!* (English *Dear Grandmother!*), and respectively French *Monsieur* (opening phrase of a letter), *Cher collègue*, *Cher papa!*, *Ma chère maman!* They are connected only with certain types of utterances: they are used as opening formulas for letters, speeches and toasts, and as interludes in longer speeches.

A significant complement to the functional invariant occurs in the case of so-called predicative appeals (cf. Topolińska, 1973: 274). In addition to the basic address functions, the vocative form then carries additional generic content, thus becoming an expressively marked declarative utterance, that characterises an addressee and is a carrier of emotions and evaluation on the part of a sender (Giaufret, 2016). For example, Polish *Żegnaj, wierny przyjacielu!* (English *Goodbye, my faithful friend!*), *Ty fujaro, znowu się ubrudziłeś!* (English *You drip, you smudged yourself again!*) and respectively French *Adieu, cher camarade, adieu; Mon cher Guy; Ce salaud, quel salaud!*

In practice, it is extremely difficult to unambiguously define the function of vocative phrases solely by analysing their form. Although Z. Topolińska (1973: 271—274) gives some formal determinants of the vocative phrases used in the function of appeals of various types, however, perhaps due to the close connection of the vocative with the context of communication act, the interpretation of such phrases is based primarily on the situationally-conditioned reading of a sender's intentions. For example, the phrase *Wysoka Izbo!* (English *Ladies and gentlemen of the House!*) depending on the situation of use and the intentions of a sender, may be treated as either a proper appeal (a phrase to listeners — deputies drawing their attention) or a conventional appeal (a conventionalised interlude in a parliamentary speech).

At this point, we should also mention the rather blurred line between vocative forms and exclamations.

¹¹ Irena Dulewiczowa (1983) in such a situation refers to the address use of a vocative phrase.

The subjective character of the vocative also brings it closer to the forms of mood, and the connection to the situation of the speech act — to the category of person.

Undoubtedly, it is also impossible to limit the vocative within the category of case.

It seems that we can assume that the grammatical forms of the vocative, besides the forms of the imperative mood, the forms of the second person of the verb and of the personal pronoun *you*¹², some derivatives (e.g. hypocoristic personal proper names and personal common names¹³) are grammatical means of making an appeal. An appeal treated here as a special kind of speech, a kind of Bakhtin's speech genre¹⁴.

Definitely heterogeneous and going beyond the scope of the inflective category of the case, the character of the vocative as a more general language category, must be reflected in a comprehensive and multi-faceted description. Despite significant formal differences (typological) — reduced nominal inflection in French — in the functional plan of the described phenomenon, we can observe far-reaching analogies.

Discrepancies, reflecting cultural differences, are not the subject of this article.

¹² Cf. footnote 7.

¹³ Cf. The remarks by Anna Wierzbicka (1969: 184) on the special status of the vocative of hypocoristic derivatives of personal names.

¹⁴ "The genres of speech include both short replicas of everyday dialogue [...], and ordinary everyday stories – accounts [...], and a short standard military command, and detailed, elaborate order, and a variegated repertoire of official documents [...], and a diverse world of journalistic presentations [...], but the genres of speech also include various forms of scientific presentations, and all literary genres (from proverbs to multi-volume novels)" (Bakhtin, 1979: 238; after: Wierzbicka, 1983: 127).

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