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HOW MUCH NONSENSE IS THERE IN “NONSENSE” ACTUALLY? A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

SUMMARY: The article addresses the issue of nonsense, in a detailed and comprehensive manner scrutinised in the book *Nonsens i zjawiska pokrewne. Studium semantyczne* [Nonsense and Related Phenomena. A Semantic Study] (Wolk, 2014). The aim of the present text is to juxtapose elements that make it possible to determine convergences and divergences between the category of nonsense in philosophy and logic and the expression of general (more precisely: Polish) language, which undergoes linguistic research. The study focuses on a structuralist linguistic perspective. The analysis is based on a distinction which is crucial in the description of language: a term vs. an expression of general language. In line with this distinction, the rules of defining a word functioning in two registers – in specialist language and in general language – differ. This is due, among other factors, to differences in the functioning of such a word. The undertaken linguistic research is preceded by a theoretical and methodological introduction, the latter outlining the adopted assumptions and linguistic description methods, as well as the theories employed for the proposed analysis (including the concept of the unit of language). The results of the study, with a synthesis of relationships established between the compared categories, are presented in the conclusion.

KEYWORDS: linguistics, structural semantics, term, general language expression, defining, nonsense/“nonsense”.

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1. Introduction

The presented study is a return to the problem I discussed in a detailed and comprehensive manner more than 10 years ago in my book (Wolk, 2014). The description proposed in this text aims to compile elements that make it possible to see some points of convergence and divergence between the category of nonsense in philosophy and logic and the phrase used in general (Polish) language. The latter is subject to linguistic research, while the former is understood based on its definitions in philosophy and logic. Thus, it is the linguistic perspective that shall be the main focus of the study. The undertaken research concerns *nonsense* – an expression of the Polish language, thus detailed conclusions regarding both its syntactic and semantic properties do not aspire to be regarded as universal, i.e. applicable to natural languages in general. For this reason, it is also not advisable to expect full convergence of the Polish word *nonsense* with its closest English equivalent, ‘nonsense.’ This study does not undertake such reflection due to its scope and gravity. Juxtaposing the Polish expression and its English counterpart in all their aspects would require a separate analysis. The approach to the problem outlined above, however, necessitates an appropriate theoretical introduction, considering the methodological assumptions of linguistic research.

2. Methodological Clarification

The adopted research methods are part of strict structuralist (formal) semantics which was initiated in the 1960s by Andrzej Bogusławski (cf. e.g. Bogusławski, 1966) and developed mostly by Warsaw and Toruń researchers studying meaning.¹ This perspective on semantics understands meaning narrowly as – most generally – what is said by means of a given expression (cf. e.g. Bogusławski, 1993), radically separating the content from pragmatic values, which may include the emotional attitude of the speaker or other factors related to the use of a given expression, e.g. environmental, territorial, chronological.² Meaning thus understood undergoes description which consists in formulating seman-

¹ Semantic research conducted in these two academic centres has considerably contributed to the development of structuralist semantics. The main representatives of this theoretical perspective are: Maciej Grochowski, Magdalena Danielewiczowa, Adam Dobaczewski, Zofia Zaron, Jolanta Chojak, as well as their students, who already conduct their individual research.

² Opposite to the methodological approach adopted in this study is the approach typical of cognitive linguistics, whose proponents study language in the context of cognitive processes occurring in the human mind (cf. e.g. Langacker 1995). The cognitive approach, in my opinion, comes with a risk of shifting the focus of analysis to phenomena that – although related to language – constitute separate domains (such as psychology or anthropology). In the cognitive approach to studying language meaning is understood broadly, its definition takes context into account, and an open-ended model of definition is adopted. On this topic cf. e.g. Tabakowska 1995.

tic postulates subject to falsification by means of tests of reduction to contradiction. Such a research tool can be applied in an attempt to test whether it is true that the components of meaning of the verb phrase *ktos kłamie* [someone is lying] are: ‘*ktos mówi coś*’ [someone is saying something] and ‘*ktos mówi nieprawdę*’ [someone is telling an untruth] (with a broad understanding of saying, not restricted to the spoken sub-code). As a result of juxtaposing the verb in question and the postulated components of its meaning structure in a system of negations, contradictory sentences are obtained: **Ona kłamie, ale ona nic nie mówi*; **Ona kłamie, ale nie mówi nieprawdy*; **Ona kłamie, ale ona mówi prawdę* [*She is lying, but she is not saying anything; *She is lying, but she is not telling an untruth; *She is lying, but she is telling the truth].³ This allows one to regard them as validated semantic hypotheses (which, of course, does not exhaust the list of possible components of meaning of the phrase). After (negative) verification of the hypotheses, the next stage is the procedure of defining, which is also subject to certain rules. First of all, the *definiens* (a defining sequence, definition, explication) should consist of elements which are semantically simpler than the *definiendum* (an element being defined) and synonymous with it. Consequently, defining becomes a multi-stage procedure whose final stage is arriving at an equative definition built from semantically simple, non-definable expressions, so-called indefinables. Their concept can be traced back to 17th-century philosophy. Then, in three cultural milieus: French, English and German, a concept emerged to determine simple expressions, i.e. expressions which are more intelligible than others and thus not subject to definition (cf. Grochowski, 1982, pp. 51–52). In Descartes’ philosophy, they were seen as a manifestation of simple ideas which are innate; in Lock’s philosophy, they were based on experience; and in Leibniz’s scientific approach, they were transformed into a concrete attempt, then innovative, to define expressions with concepts simpler than them, resulting in *Tabulae definitionum* – a Latin philosophical dictionary, which is one of the oldest works of lexical semantics (cf. the Polish translation: Leibniz, 1975). These ideas were revisited in the mid-1960s by Bogusławski, who added the application of indefinable expressions in explications to the methodological postulates of structuralist semantics. This idea was further developed by Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka (cf. e.g. Wierzbicka, 1969), who applied it in her numerous semantic analyses, and who, from time to time, published lists of indefinables she proposed. The first list – with 14 units – was published in 1972, and the latest one – containing 60 units – in 1996 (cf. Wierzbicka, 1972; Wierzbicka, 1996).⁴ Semanticists using the above research methods have ever since been verifying, discussing and challenging these proposals.⁵

³ In line with the convention adopted in linguistic studies, an asterisk is used here to mark expressions/phrases/sentences which are unacceptable (including those which are internally contradictory).

⁴ Cf. also Wierzbicka, 2021, in her relatively recent comeback to this topic.

⁵ This is shown by a number of works by the researchers enumerated in footnote 1. Here, it is worth mentioning Adam Dobaczewski’s book *Zjawiska percepcji wzrokowej*.

3. A Term vs. A General Language Expression

The methodological postulates based on the above considerations include a theoretical distinction without which there would be no point in addressing the issue to be outlined in the present study. This is a distinction between a term and an expression of general language explicated by Maciej Grochowski in his book *Konwencje semantyczne a definiowanie wyrażen językowych* [*Semantic Conventions and the Defining of Linguistic Expressions*] (Grochowski, 1993). Terms belong to the language of a specific sphere of human activity, which means that their meanings result from accepting conventions other than linguistic ones. Thus, they should be defined by specialists in a particular field of knowledge. Definitions of terms differ from definitions of general language expressions; the latter are reducible to simple concepts, while the former – not necessarily. What is more, such reducibility is not a condition for their adequacy, which is verifiable as a result of relating the definition of a term to the language of a particular field of knowledge, not to natural language (Grochowski, 1993, p. 47). A term is brought into existence by a researcher who specialises in a given scientific field, whereas a natural language expression has no ‘author,’ it appears in language naturally and its meaning is governed by constant linguistic conventions that make it possible to communicate effectively using it, without the need for acquiring its meaning in a structured manner. A term may have different definitions within the same field of knowledge, depending on the approach proposed by a particular researcher. This is because redefinitions are possible in science. As regards different definitions (e.g. dictionary definitions) of a particular expression of general language, they result not from differences in its meaning or reference, but from differences in the construction of the definition itself. According to Grochowski: “if the same sequence of diacritical elements is used both as a term and as a unit of general language, what is needed are two separate definitions developed independently of each other” (Grochowski, 1993, p. 47).

4. The Concept of Language Unit

The final clarification before I undertake analysis in line with the chosen theoretical perspective concerns the concept of language unit as understood by Bo-

Studium semantyczne [*The Phenomena of Visual Perception. A Semantic Study*] (Dobaczewski, 2002), which contains, among other elements, a definition of a language unit with the segment *widzieć* [see] (determined as an indefinable by Wierzbicka in 1996), or Magdalena Danielewiczowa’s book *Wiedza i niewiedza. Studium polskich czasowników epistemicznych* [*Knowledge and Lack of Knowledge. A Study of Polish Epistemic Verbs*] (Danielewiczowa, 2002), which contains a definition of the verb phrase *ktoś myśli, że* [someone thinks that_] (by Wierzbicka considered an indefinable from 1972 until today, cf. the latest list of indefinables in: Wierzbicka, 1996).

gusławski (Bogusławski, 1976). Its main concern is what constitutes the object of a particular lexicological study. Contrary to a fairly common belief, a language unit does not always mean a single word excerpted in an automatic way from a text or a stream of live speech on the basis of a purely technical criterion, such as a pause in speech and a space in writing. Many language units are, in fact, multi-element (multi-segment) sequences which function as separate and independent units of meaning (e.g. numerous phraseologisms), opening places of valence for other expressions. Among them there are, for instance, verb units whose full form is recorded differently than what is typically found in lexicographic sources: it is not an infinitive form, but a personal form with open positions for other expressions, e.g. for the verb *liczyć*: *ktoś liczy coś*, *ktoś liczy na coś*, *ktoś liczy na kogoś*, *ktoś liczy się z czymś* [to count: someone counts something, someone counts on something, someone counts on somebody, someone takes something into account]. Such a notation also gives an account of the sense communicated by the unit, whereas the infinitive form neutralises it, not to say: masks it. As argued by Bogusławski: “a language unit essentially concerns consistent realisation of what is intuitively grasped quite easily, rather than radical conceptual innovation which would oppose the linguistic tradition” (Bogusławski, Wawrzyńczyk, 1993, p. 11).

5. Nonsense vs *Nonsense*—Philosophy vs Linguistics

The theoretical and methodological postulates presented above have a clear impact on the issues addressed in this study. This can already be seen in the title of the article, to be precise: in the spelling of the word *nonsense*. Italics are used only in the second form, while the first one is written in regular font. This is the first signal of juxtaposing two perspectives: philosophical (or: philosophical-linguistic) and linguistic. This is because the first use of the word refers to a category in philosophy and/or logic, while the second one concerns a specific expression of the Polish language, consequently: the first one refers to a term, and the second one to an expression of natural (general) language.

4.1 A thorough review of various detailed conceptualisations of nonsense is beyond the scope of this study, both its methodological premises as well as volume. An attempt to compile a few selected approaches to this category in philosophy and logic is available in other sources (cf. Wołk, 2014, pp. 11–27),⁶ while

⁶ Nonsense in its various aspects is extensively presented in literature. Among the approaches that have influenced this linguistic research, it is worth highlighting, among others, Edmund Husserl’s position, which can be seen as part of the syntactic approach to nonsense (cf. Husserl, 2000), Jerrold Jacob Katz’s theory of semi-sentences (cf. Fodor, J., Katz, 1964), and Rudolf Carnap’s view embracing the category of metaphysical sentences, which he calls apparent sentences, pseudo-sentences (*Scheinsätze*) and excludes from the scope of logical analysis (cf. Carnap, 1969). Also, one needs to mention here Noam Chomsky; in 1965, he extended his 1957 model of language description – pursuant to justified criticism, primarily from Jerrold Jacob Katz and Jerry Fodor (cf. e.g. Fodor, Katz,

this analysis shall only cite a definition, apparently quite widespread as it is found in MEL [*Mala encyklopedia logiki*], in which the term *nonsense* is defined as an inconsistent and syntactically incoherent expression (MEL, 1970, p. 190), represented by sentences of the following type: *Róża lub leży; Pewien człowiek oraz jest* [literally: Rose or lies; Certain man and is], which are meaningless, and to which, consequently, no logical value – truth or falsity – can be assigned. Abandoning classical logic and adopting the concepts of the so-called three-value logic, such sentences could be interpreted as nonsense, ignorance or half-truth, half-falsity (cf. Gabbay, Guenther, 1986). Coming back to the fairly basic perspective which is to be followed here, it must be added that such nonsensical expressions – being so incoherent that their sense is seriously disturbed, making them impossible to be understood – are not sentences in the logical sense. In this respect, the term *nonsense* differs significantly from the term *absurd*, which is defined in logic as an internally contradictory expression realising the scheme $p \wedge \sim p$, which in natural language produces sentences of the (more or less) following type: **On ma żonę i on nie ma żony; *Ten nieżonaty mężczyzna jest żonaty; *On jest kawalerem, ale ma żonę* [**He has a wife and he has no wife; *This unmarried man is married; *He is single but has a wife*]. In other words, such sentences are analytically false – their falsity does not need to be verified empirically because it is a necessary falsity. As false sentences, they are not nonsensical: they have a logical value, they make sense, so they are sentences in the logical sense. In terms of logic, and thus seeing the two expressions, *nonsense* and *absurd*, as terms, absurd sentences, internally contradictory sentences, which are certainly not accepted by language users, make sense, while nonsensical expressions are devoid of sense. It could be assumed that for non-specialists, i.e. non-linguists, nonsense is worse than absurdity. However, the point in this study is not to make such value judgements, but to show two different perspectives: terminological and non-terminological.

4.2 The term *nonsense*, according to the definition quoted above, refers to the arrangement of certain elements in an expression, so it refers to language. The expression *nonsense* which functions in general Polish may refer to both: judgements expressed in language, and the arrangement of certain situations and events in the world which in a way cause a reaction in the form of stating that something is nonsense, i.e. predicating this property. On the one hand, the word *nonsense* can be used to describe someone's utterance, thought or concept (e.g. *Paryż leży nad Wisłą; Ukraina zaczęła wojnę z Rosją; Dwóje studentów są efektem niekompetencji ich wykładowców* [Paris is situated on the Vistula River; Ukraine has started war with Russia; Students' fail as a result of their lecturers' incompetence]), i.e. the result of someone's thinking. On the other hand, we can use it to comment on an event or a situation, e.g. saying that someone has acted,

1977, Katz 1980) – to include a semantic component, i.e. a barrier against grammatically well-formed but nonsensical sentences, such as the famous, often quoted 'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously' (cf. Chomsky, 2002).

in our opinion, inappropriately, unreasonably, irrationally, doing something, e.g. resigning from a position following unproven accusations of incompetence or mobbing.

4.3 Another juxtaposition of the two perspectives under study reveals yet another difference between a term and a non-term (a general language expression). The one-segment term *nonsens* corresponds to several not necessarily one-segment units of language which represent the concept of nonsense functioning in Polish. The language unit theory outlined above posits that what should be described are actual language units rather than isolated graphic words automatically excerpted from texts. Scrutiny of Polish contexts in which the word *nonsens* occurs shows that the full form of units with this word is correlated with its syntactic properties. It appears as a single word when it is a nominal phrase with a referential function (i.e. it labels, identifies an object/phenomenon to which some property is attributed), e.g. *Nie ma sensu walczyć z tym nonsensem* [There is no point in fighting this nonsense]. However, if it appears in a sentence in a predicative function (non-referential, i.e. by means of which a certain property is predicated), it can: 1) be a syntactically loose, context-dependent utterance, e.g. *On rezygnuje z pracy. – Nonsens / To nonsens / To jakiś/kompletny/całkowity nonsens* [He is quitting his job. – Nonsense / It's nonsense / It's some/sheer/utter nonsense]; 2) take the form of a nominal phrase, e.g. *Rezygnacja z pracy jest nonsensem* [His quitting his job is a nonsense]; 3) build constructions with an infinitive, e.g. *To nonsens rezygnować z pracy* [It is nonsense to quit the job]; 4) form sentence structures, e.g. *To nonsens, że on rezygnuje z pracy* [It's nonsense that he's quitting his job]. In each of these situations, there is a formally different unit of language: $_.$ *Nonsens* (1)), *coś jest nonsensem/nonsensem jest coś* (2)), *to nonsens robić coś* (3)), *to nonsens, że* (4)), which still represents the same concept. The examples cited above, although communicating roughly the same, differ in the degree of detail as regards the reported events. Patterns like $_.$ *Nonsens* admit an elaborate (left-handed) co-text that can accommodate various details of the event, which are commented upon with the word *nonsens*. Constructions with nominalization (*coś jest nonsensem/nonsensem jest coś*) or with an infinitive (*to nonsens robić coś*) require a perspective which is synthetic enough to be expressed in a single short phrase (nominal or verb phrase in the infinitive). Patterns with a *że* phrase (*to nonsens, że*) open a space for a sentence, offering a chance for a relatively precise presentation of the event about which *nonsens* is being predicated. From a methodological perspective, these patterns are most convenient research-wise: on their basis, the semantic structure of sentences with such a unit can be analysed with sufficient thoroughness.

4.4 As regards defining the most representative unit, i.e. *to nonsens, że* , it should be noted that within the framework of a short study such a definition can be only partial. In fact, there are as many lexicographic characterisations of this expression as there are studies on the topic. For a non-specialist user of Polish, there is no problem: their being familiar with the expression manifests itself in its proper use, which results in effective communication. At the level of theory,

however, the problem is very clear: most dictionary definitions are limited to stating that *nonsens* means “brak sensu” [lack of sense] (SJPSz, 1988–1989, p. 389; SWJP, 1996, p. 624; USJP, 2003, p. 1221) in an utterance or action. The weakness of such definitions becomes more apparent when attempting to confront them with descriptions of expressions with a very similar meaning, such as *absurd*, *bezsens*, *nielogiczność* [absurdity, senselessness, illogicality], which are also based on the same explanation, which still does not lead to regarding all these expressions as synonymous (whether in a narrow or broad sense). The matter becomes even more complicated because these expressions play the role of *definiens* to each other, i.e. e.g. *nonsens* is defined by the word *bezsens* [literally, ‘with no sense’], and *bezsens* by the word *nonsense*; *absurd* appears in the definition of *nonsens* and the other way round – *nonsens* appears in the definition of *absurd* (cf. definitions of these expressions in SJPSz, SWJP, USJP). One would like to say: *Nonsense!* in response to this entanglement in circularity, this vicious circle of definitions (*ignotum per ignotum*), typical especially of the older Polish lexicography. The circle was finally broken by a description which appeared in ISJP in 2000, and which can be treated as a promising starting point for precise, specialised definitions. The description avoids vicious circles, and it follows the principle of simplicity – both at the level of content as well as its articulation. According to the proposal provided in the dictionary, *nonsens* is defined as: 1) *wypowiedź, z którą się nie zgadzamy, ponieważ sądzimy, że jest pozbawiona sensu, niemądra lub w oczywisty sposób nieprawdziwa*, 2) *zachowanie lub działanie niemądre lub pozbawione sensu* [1) an utterance with which we disagree because we think it is senseless, unwise or obviously untrue, 2) behaviour or action that is unwise or senseless] (ISJP, 2000, p. 389). The referential duality is maintained here, that is, predication of nonsense about language (expressions, statements, judgements) is separated from predication of nonsense about someone’s behaviour, actions, or events.

4.5 Different content is expressed when nonsense is attributed to what someone said and when it refers to an event. So, if the example: *Piotr rezygnuje z pracy*. – *Nonsens / To nonsens, że on rezygnuje z pracy* [Peter is quitting his job. – Nonsense / It is nonsense that he is quitting his job] is considered as regards these two references, it triggers two possible but different interpretations. In relation to a judgement that someone made, presumably in response to a statement made by someone else (e.g. *Piotr rezygnuje z pracy*), the utterance with *nonsens* is used to establish that the judgement commented on is untrue, i.e. it is not as someone said, or it even cannot be as someone said. This conclusion can be confirmed through the test of reduction to contradiction (cf. discussed above the beginning of the study). Constructions with a negated formula concerned with rejecting a judgement considered to be nonsensical because it is untrue (thus a judgement that one cannot agree with) result in a linguistic deviation, e.g.: **Ten nonsens jest prawdą; *To, co on powiedział o Piotrze (że rezygnuje z pracy), to nonsens, ale to prawda; Piotr rezygnuje z pracy – *To nonsens, że Piotr rezygnuje z pracy, ale/i zgadzam się z tym, że Piotr rezygnuje z pracy; *Mówiąc,*

że to, że Piotr rezygnuje z pracy, jest nonsensem, mówię, że rzeczywiście Piotr rezygnuje z pracy [*This nonsense is true; *What he said about Peter (that he is quitting his job) is nonsense, but it is true; Peter is quitting his job – *It is nonsense that Peter is quitting his job, but/and I agree for Peter to quit his job; *By saying that it is nonsense that Peter is quitting his job, I am saying that indeed Peter is quitting his job]. This effect is more clearly visible when one considers an example that precludes double interpretation (i.e. linguistic and extra-linguistic reference), referring only to certain judgements expressed in language, e.g.: *Ruch na świeżym powietrzu szkodzi chorym na serce* [Outdoor activities are harmful for cardiological patients], cf.: **To, co on powiedział o ruchu na świeżym powietrzu (że szkodzi chorym na serce), to nonsens, ale to prawda; *To nonsens, że ruch na świeżym powietrzu szkodzi chorym na serce, ale/i zgadzam się z tym, że ruch na świeżym powietrzu szkodzi chorym na serce; *Mówiąc, że to, że ruch na świeżym powietrzu szkodzi chorym na serce, jest nonsensem, mówię, że rzeczywiście jest tak, że ruch na świeżym powietrzu szkodzi chorym na serce* [*What he said about outdoor activities (that they are harmful for cardiological patients) is nonsense, but it is true; *It is nonsense that outdoor activities are harmful for cardiological patients, but/and I agree that outdoor activities are harmful for cardiological patients; *By saying that it is nonsense that outdoor activities are harmful for cardiological patients, I am saying that it is indeed the case that outdoor activities are harmful for cardiological patients]. It is because the speaker, among other factors, disqualifies the judgement considered nonsense that such verbal responses are often accompanied by quite strong emotions (in the transcript often rendered with an exclamation mark). They occur as a result of the sender’s strong conviction that the judgement they are commenting on is an outright, obvious falsity. There is no hesitation in such a predication: while it is possible to doubt whether something is true or untrue, when predicating nonsense one sees only one possibility (i.e. that it is untrue) and, at the same time, a lack of other possibilities. Thus, acceptable sentences: *Wydaje mi się, że to nieprawda; Przymuszam, że to nieprawda; Waham się, czy to prawda, czy nieprawda* [It seems to me it is not true; I suppose it is not true; I hesitate whether it is true or not true] are contrasted with analogous, yet unacceptable constructions with the word *nonsens*: **Wydaje mi się, że to nonsens; *Przymuszam, że to nonsens; *Waham się, czy to nonsens* [*It seems to me that it is nonsense; *I suppose it is nonsense; *I hesitate whether it is nonsense].

On the other hand, in an interpretation in which the statement that something is nonsense refers to something that happened or became a fact, *nonsens* is employed to express different content, assessing what happened, or more precisely: what someone did. These are always controlled events – what someone considers to be nonsense is a result of someone else’s action, nonsense does not happen on its own, it is always perpetrated and does not result solely from someone else’s nature. That is why the following statements are seen as deviant: **To nonsens, że kwitną już tulipany; *To nonsens, że ten leżak się nie składa* [*It’s nonsense that tulips are already in bloom; *It’s nonsense that the deckchair doesn’t fold] (as

compared with a correct sentence: *To nonsens, że on kupił leżak, który się nie składa* [It's nonsense that he bought a deckchair that doesn't fold]; **To nonsens, że ona jest taka nieśmiała* [**It's nonsense that she is so shy*] (as compared with a correct sentence: *To nonsens, że przez swoją nieśmiałość nie zabrała głosu w tak ważnej dyskusji* [It's nonsense that because of her shyness she did not speak up in such an important discussion]). Evaluation of someone's action is strongly linked here to evaluation of someone's thinking. *Nonsens* is ascribed only to events someone thought about – not to simple, trivial, sometimes even involuntary actions (such as turning a light on or off, opening or closing a door, etc.), but to events that are in some sense complex, connected with other events that may be their consequences. What is considered here is an arrangement of the elements of an event (or interconnected events) in which one can discern some kind of error in thinking (which can have negative consequences), or some sort of an inability to put the elements of an event together, which also prevents achieving a positive effect. For example, if someone's quitting their job is considered nonsense, then – generally speaking – it is concluded that this is not a good step and that it will not bring good results for someone. If one were again to look for confirmation in falsification tests, the following results would occur, cf. e.g.: **To, co Piotr robi (tj. że rezygnuje z pracy), to nonsens, ale sądzę, że to dobrze*; **To nonsens, że Piotr rezygnuje z pracy, ale sądzę, że to dobrze, że Piotr rezygnuje z pracy* [**What Peter is doing (i.e. that is quitting his job) is nonsense, but I think it is good; *It is nonsense that Peter is quitting his job, but I think it is good that Peter is quitting his job*]. Predicating about someone's action as nonsense rules out a positive evaluation of such an action. The speaker refuses to approve of an event that they are ready to call *nonsens*.

4.6 The outlined semantic interpretations only partly present the meaning of the Polish word *nonsens*. They do not offer detailed descriptions that would make it possible to adequately justify all the semantic assumptions made here and that would ultimately offer an explication of the meaning of the analysed units with simple expressions (indefinables). Thus, I refrain here from providing definitional formulas as they are only justifiable if they are supported by an adequate argument, taking into account not only relevant procedures of verification but also a reflection on the crucial details. A precise description of semantic properties of *nonsens* and units related to it as well as an explication of their meaning can be found in my book published in 2014.

5. Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in the present study focused on a single specific problem, that is the functioning of one Polish expression in two different registers: specialist and non-specialist (general). The observations presented above show a discrepancy between the term *nonsens* and language units with the segment *nonsens* used in general (Polish) language.

First of all, the term refers only to judgements (i.e. to something that has been expressed, a linguistic formulation); the expression of general language has a double reference: both linguistic (as regards judgements expressed in language) and object-related (as regards something that someone did, i.e. events that happened). Secondly, the term always takes the form of a single word or a one-segment sequence; the expression of general language is not always one (single) word, it is sometimes a multi-segment unit. Thirdly, the definitions of meaning as regards the term and the general language expression are different, even within the same reference (i.e. a reference to language).

Still, it cannot be said that there are no properties of the specialist term and the general language unit that converge. Obviously, the question asked in the title of the study cannot be answered precisely and unequivocally (its shape being affected by what might be called the rhetoric of the title). However, trying to outline the area in which the content of the two compared expressions converges (or perhaps overlaps), one must recall the notion of sense, or rather lack of sense, with all its differentiation, discussed by Jerzy Pelc in his article “O znaczeniach słów *sens* i *znaczenie*” [“On the meanings of the words *sense* and *meaning*”] (cf. Pelc, 1981). *Sens* has a semiotic meaning when it refers to words, sentences, texts; or a non-semiotic meaning when it refers to actions other than speaking. Then, its content may, according to the researcher, centre around the notion of purpose, cause or value (cf. Pelc, 1981, pp. 1–7). The predication of nonsense, whether about what someone said or about what someone did, always amounts to rejecting what is being predicated about as *nonsens*. In the case of the term, it is rejecting an expression that cannot be understood and to which no logical value can be attributed; in the case of the general language expression, it also boils down to opposing a certain judgement that cannot be accepted as it is obviously untrue. *Nonsens* referring to events, on the other hand, can be reduced to rejecting someone’s action or their thinking which leads to taking such an action. However, identifying a common denominator within the semantics of the compared expressions proves less important than differences in their functioning in these two different perspectives: in specialist language – the language of a specific field of science, and in general language – the language of all users of Polish. That is why, in this study I have limited my observations concerning the specialist term *nonsens* to the necessary minimum, leaving this field of research to excellent experts on the subject.

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