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VERBIFICATION OF FEMININE FORMS OF ADJECTIVES *MOŻNA* ‘POSSIBLE’, *NIEMOŻNA* ‘IMPOSSIBLE’ AND *NIEPODOBNA* ‘IMPOSSIBLE’ – CORPUS-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the process taking place in the Middle Polish period, which led to the transformation of nominative, singular, feminine forms of three adjectives (*można* ‘possible’, *niemożna* ‘impossible’ and *niepodobna* ‘impossible’) into verbal lexemes (the so-called predicatives). In this respect, the predicative uses of these forms in the texts collected in the Electronic Corpus of 17th- and 18th-century Polish Texts (up to 1772) were investigated. The progressive verbification of adjectival forms was considered to be indicated by three changes in the constructions where these forms played the role of a predicate: supersession of connections with feminine verb forms by connections with neuter forms, limiting the connections with verbs to the auxiliary verb *być* ‘to be’, and disappearance of connections with the personal form of the verb *być* in the present tense. The research results show that both forms acquired the two most important features characteristic for predicatives during the 17th century. The third of the analysed properties characterizes the form *można/niemożna* from the second half of the 19th century, and the process of its acquisition by the form *niepodobna* has not ended yet.

Keywords: historical syntax, corpus research, categorical change, adjectives, predicatives

1 INTRODUCTION

In modern grammatical descriptions, a class of the so-called predicatives is distinguished among Polish verbs (cf. Bańko 2002, pp. 101–103). These are verbs that do not have the inflectional categories of person, number and gender, and the values of the tense and mood categories are expressed with the auxiliary verb *być* ‘to be’. The lexemes belonging to this class are of a heterogeneous origin – they arose from fixed infinitive forms of verbal lexemes (e.g. *widać* ‘it seems’), noun forms (e.g. *brak* ‘it is lacking’), adverbial forms (e.g. *wolno* ‘it is allowed’) and adjective forms (e.g. *można* ‘it is possible’).

The predicatives formed from adjectives, which are the subject of this article, comprise two examples: the above-mentioned *można*, the negated form of which is

created by adding the particle *nie* 'not' (*nie można* 'it is impossible') and *niepodobna* 'it is impossible' occurring only in the negated form. Both predicatives differ in the stylistic register: *można* is stylistically neutral, while *niepodobna* is used in a bookish style.

The adjectival form in which both lexemes became fixed (which is now the form of the present tense) is the nominative singular feminine form. It is a relic of expressions composed of a feminine noun *rzecz* 'thing' and feminine forms of adjectives *możny* 'possible', *niemożny* 'impossible', *niepodobny* 'impossible'. In the Middle Polish period (16th–18th century), such expressions as a whole were used in the predicative function, however, the semantically empty noun *rzecz* was often omitted, and the feminine form of the adjective took over the predicative function (examples 1, 2).

1. *Ojcze jeśli* ***można rzecz*** *niech odejdzie precz odemnie ten kielich…* 'Father, if it is **a possible thing**, let this cup go away from me...'[1]
2. *Ojcze mój/ Jeśli* ***można****/ niech mię ten kielich minie…* 'My Father/ If it is **possible**/ let this cup pass me by...'

In the Middle Polish period, constructions such as above-mentioned could include other adjectives, e.g. *słuszny* 'right' (example 3).[2]

3. ***Słuszna*** *by Stwórcy, Stworzenie słuchało.* 'It is **right** that the Creation should obey its Creator.'

However, towards the end of the Middle Polish period, predicative constructions with feminine forms of adjectives gradually fell out of use. Their past existence is still reflected in the form of the lexicalized expressions, such as: *dobra nasza* 'good for us', and the predicatives *można* and *niepodobna* described in this article.

The aim of this paper is to present the process of verbification of both forms consisting in losing adjective features and gaining verb features.

2 MATERIAL

The research presented in this article was carried out on corpus material. Unfortunately, the corpus of Polish texts from the 16th century, i.e., from the period when constructions containing the forms *można, niemożna* and *niepodobna* appeared in the Polish language, has not yet been created. The research on the development of

[1] This and the subsequent Middle Polish examples of usage come from the Electronic Corpus of 17th- and 18th-century Polish Texts (up to 1772), characterized in the next section. Citations are given in the modernized notation used in the corpus.

[2] More about such constructions in Bronikowska 2021.

these forms in the Middle Polish period had to be limited to the 17th and 18th centuries. The material covering this period was taken from the Electronic Corpus of 17th- and 18th-century Polish Texts (up to 1772) (Gruszczyński et al. 2022; https://korba.edu.pl/).[3] This corpus, briefly referred to as *Korpus Barokowy* 'the Baroque Corpus' (hence the acronym KorBa), contains over 13 million tokens.[4]

The material for the analysis presented in this article includes:

- 803 predicative usages of the forms *można* (503 quotes) and *niemożna* or *nie można* (300 quotes),
- 622 predicative usages of the forms *niepodobna* or *nie podobna*.

The way of marking the forms of both later predicatives in the KorBa corpus was intended to reflect their uncertain status in the Middle Polish texts. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the forms *można, niemożna* and *niepodobna* in predicative constructions had the character of mixed categories – it is difficult to classify them unequivocally both as adjectives and as predicatives. Therefore, the authors of the corpus decided to mark them as adjective forms of lexemes *możny, niemożny* and *niepodobny* (examples 4, 5 and 6).

4. *...**można*** [ADJ.NOM.SG.F] *być pobożnym i oraz wesołym.* 'it is possible to be both pious and cheerful'
5. *Bez wiary **niemożna*** [ADJ.NOM.SG.F] *się Bogu podobać.* 'without faith it is impossible to please God'
6. ***Niepodobna*** [ADJ.NOM.SG.F] *staremu długo żyć...* 'it is impossible for an old man to live long'

As there were no standards in terms of joint and separable spelling, the texts from the 17th and 18th centuries also contain notations such as *nie można* and *nie podobna*. In the research presented in this article, such expressions were treated as orthographic variants of the forms *niemożna, niepodobna*; both variants were analyzed together.

The data on the negated form *niemożna/nie można* have been also combined with the data on the non-negated form *można*. In the further part of the article, the notation *można/niemożna* is used to denote both the non-negated and negated form of the later predicative *można*.

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[3] The corpus was created as a result of the project financed under the National Programme for the Development of Humanities for 2013–2018 (NPRH no. 0036/NPRH2/H11/81/2012).

[4] Currently, there is an ongoing work aimed at expanding it – after the current project (no. 0413/NPRH7/H11/86/2018) has been finished, the corpus will cover the entire period of the 17th and 18th centuries, and its size will increase to 25 million tokens.

The search for all the above-mentioned forms was carried out in two stages: the forms of nominative feminine singular of the adjectives *możny, niemożny, niepodobny* and *podobny* (in conjunction with the particle *nie* 'not') were searched automatically in the KorBa corpus. Subsequently, the contexts in which these forms occur in predicative usages were manually selected. The set of quotations, saved in the XLS format, was subjected to an additional annotation, which was intended to mark the syntactic context of the studied constructions.

Some changes in the constructions with *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna* took place after the Middle Polish period, mostly in the 19th century. Studying these changes is difficult as there is not a large, balanced corpus that would include this period. Data from two corpora were used as an aid in the research presented in this article: the small, 1.3-million-token Corpus of Polish texts from 1830–1918 (Bilińska et al. 2016; http://korpus19.nlp.ipipan.waw.pl/) and the relatively large, over 12-million-token, but unbalanced (the so-called opportunistic) Corpus of 19th century texts, covering the period of 1800–1933 (Łaziński et al. 2023; http://www.diaspol.uw.edu.pl/XIX/#!/). The last data source is the National Corpus of Polish (Przepiórkowski et al. 2012; https://nkjp.nlp.ipipan.waw.pl/; hereinafter: NKJP) in which the contemporary Polish texts are gathered.

3 GAINING PREDICATIVE FEATURES BY THE FORMS *MOŻNA/NIEMOŻNA* AND *NIEPODOBNA*

All lexemes currently included in the class of predicatives arose as a result of categorical changes that took place in verbal, substantival, adjectival and adverbial forms, the basic forms of all predicatives are therefore (or at least used to be in the past) homonymous with forms belonging to another part of speech (e.g. *brak* 'lack' – noun vs 'it is lacking' – predicative). This makes it particularly important to define the criteria for including particular word forms in this part of speech. This issue was the subject of a long-term debate, as a result of which various features were pointed out that could be considered as determinants of "predicativeness" (cf. Wróbel 1988; Wiśniewski 1989; Szupryczyńska 1995; Przepiórkowski 2019).

The research in this area, conducted on the material of the contemporary Polish language, presented a synchronic approach. Efforts were made to unambiguously determine whether a given form is or is not a predicative. However, the criteria developed in the course of this discussion can also be used in diachronic research. In this case, it would be about indicating the time when, in the uses of a given form, the features characterizing predicatives begin to prevail over the features of the class to which it originally belonged.

The study presented below discusses three criteria used today to distinguish a class of predicatives. They were treated as a reference point in the analysis of changes that took place over the period under study in syntactic constructions containing the forms *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna*.

3.1 Neuter form of the auxiliary verb *być* 'to be' in the past tense and the subjunctive

The basic criterion used to distinguish predicatives from homonymous forms of other parts of speech, especially nouns, is the grammatical gender taken by the auxiliary verb *być* 'to be'. In this case the forms of the past tense and the subjunctive mood constitute the diagnostic context, because only in them is the generic opposition between the forms of the verb revealed. For example, the verb *być* is combined with the masculine noun *brak* 'lack' by agreement (example 7), and when accompanying the predicative *brak* 'it is lacking' it takes the neuter form (example 8) (cf. Saloni 1974, p. 95).

7. ***Brak*** *jedności* ***był*** [M] *przyczyną klęski...* 'lack of unity was the cause of defeat...' (NKJP)
8. *...**brak było*** [N] *środków na ten cel.* '...there were no funds for this purpose.' (NKJP)

This criterion can be extended to predicatives of non-noun origin, in particular to lexemes derived from adjectives discussed here. Let us compare two examples from the KorBa corpus:

9. *...stamtąd wyniść zgoła **niepodobna była*** [F]. '...it was impossible to get out of there'
10. *...nazad przejść **niepodobna było*** [N]. '...it was impossible to go back'

The feminine form of the verb *być* in example 9 is the result of an agreement with an elided feminine noun *rzecz* 'thing', while neuter form in combination with the form *niepodobna* in example 10 can be interpreted as the analytical form of the predicative.[5]

The corpus data show that in combinations with the forms *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna*, the supersession of the feminine form of the verb *być*[6] by the neuter form took place throughout the 17th century. In the first half of this century, the feminine form of the verb is dominant, while in the second, uses with the neuter form greatly predominate. In the 18th century, not a single occurrence of the feminine form of the verb was recorded in the texts collected in the corpus (Tab. 1 and 2).

[5] This is not the only possible interpretation, because the verb *być* takes the neuter form when combined not only with predicatives, but also with predicative adverbs. The criterion for distinguishing these two grammatical classes will be presented later in the article.

[6] With regard to the form *niepodobna*, the change of the form of two other verbs connected with it was also taken into account: *zdać się* 'to seem' and *widzieć się* 'to seem' (more on such combinations in the next section).

MOŻNA/NIEMOŻNA	1601–1650	1651–1700	1701–1750	1751–1772	Total
feminine gender	2	1			3
neuter gender		11	25	71	107

Tab. 1. Uses of *można/niemożna* with feminine and neuter forms of the verb *być* in the KorBa corpus

NIEPODOBNA	1601–1650	1651–1700	1701–1750	1751–1772	Total
feminine gender	11	4			15
neuter gender	4	22	9	4	39

Tab. 2. Uses of *niepodobna* with feminine and neuter forms of the verbs *być* 'to be', *zdać się* 'to seem' and *widzieć się* 'to seem' in the KorBa corpus

3.2 No connections with verbs other than *być* 'to be'

As noted, the expansion of the neuter form of the verb *być* in conjunction with the forms *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna* is not a proof of their predicative status, because the same process would accompany the transition of adjectival forms to the adverb class. Meanwhile, in the opinion of the majority of contemporary researchers, adverbs in predicative constructions (e.g. *Było duszno*. 'it was stuffy'), the so-called predicative adverbs, do not belong to the class of predicatives.

The main argument in favour of the separateness of these two classes is that predicative adverbs can combine with auxiliary verbs other than *być*, such as *stawać się* 'to get' (e.g. *Stawało się duszno*. 'it was getting stuffy'). If we postulated the existence of the predicative *duszno* 'it is stuffy', we would have to interpret both expressions (*było duszno* and *stawało się duszno*) as variant inflectional forms of its past tense. Due to the difference in meaning of these two expressions such an interpretation is impossible (Wiśniewski 1989, pp. 185–188).

In modern Polish, the lexemes *można* and *niepodobna* do not connect with verbs other than *być*, which, in the light of the argument presented above, is one of the proofs that they belong to the class of predicatives. In the Middle Polish language, there is a difference between the two forms: in the KorBa corpus, the form *można/niemożna* never appears in conjunction with a verb other than *być*, while the form *niepodobna* is used with the above-mentioned verbs *zdać się* 'to seem' and *widzieć się* 'to seem' (example 11).

11. ***Zda się*** *im* ***niepodobna*** *wydołać tej sile…* 'it seems impossible for them to endure this power...'

The corpus data also show that such uses disappear in the second half of the 17th century (Tab. 3). It is worth noting that this process occurred simultaneously with the expansion of the neuter form of verbs in the past tense and the subjunctive.

NIEPODOBNA	1601–1650	1651–1700	1701–1750	1751–1772	Total
zdać się	9	1			10
widzieć się		1			1

Tab. 3. Uses of *niepodobna* with the forms of the verbs *zdać się* and *widzieć się* in the KorBa corpus

3.3 Present tense form without the verb *być* 'to be'

The criterion for distinguishing the forms of predicatives from the forms of other lexemes is also the lack of connections with the form *jest* 'is' (the personal form of the verb *być*) in the present tense. Some researchers point out that the present tense form of the lexemes, which undoubtedly belong to the class of predicatives (e.g. *trzeba* 'must'), does not include the form of the auxiliary verb (e.g. *Trzeba iść.* 'one must go', not: **Trzeba jest iść*.). This is one more feature that distinguishes predicatives from predicative adverbs, where the present tense can be expressed with the form *jest* (e.g. *Trudno iść. = Trudno jest iść*. 'it is hard to go') (cf. Szupryczyńska 1995, p. 175).

This criterion is sometimes considered too restrictive. Przepiórkowski points out that some lexemes (such as *wolno* 'it is allowed') commonly regarded as predicatives, sometimes appear in texts with the form *jest* in the present tense (Przepiórkowski 2019, p. 88). Regarding this feature, there is a difference between lexemes *można* and *niepodobna* in contemporary Polish – the former is never accompanied with the form *jest* in the present tense, while for the latter, sentences as in example 12 are acceptable.

12. *...**niepodobna jest** nauczyć się sztuki komunikowania w przeciągu pół godziny.* '...it is impossible to learn the art of communication in half an hour.' (NKJP).

For the purposes of this article, let us assume that the lack of the form *jest* in the present tense is an additional, auxiliary indicator of the progressive verbification of adjectival forms. As shown in Tab. 5 and 6, in the 17th and 18th centuries, both forms, *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna*, admitted the presence of the form *jest* in the present tense, although in the case of the former, such uses appear less frequently.

MOŻNA/NIEMOŻNA	1601–1650	1651–1700	1701–1750	1751–1772	Total
present tense with the form *jest*	-	1	-	2	3
present tense without the form *jest*	34	119	135	356	644

Tab. 5. Uses of *można/niemożna* in present tense containing and non-containing the form *jest* in the KorBa corpus

NIEPODOBNA	1601–1650	1651–1700	1701–1750	1751–1772	Total
present tense with the form *jest*	6	3	4	5	18
present tense without the form *jest*	91	287	116	44	538

Tab. 6. Uses of *niepodobna* in present tense containing and non-containing the form *jest* in the KorBa corpus

These data do not indicate the complete disappearance of the form *jest* in the present tense with the discussed forms, so the question arises what happened to this structure after the period that is covered by the KorBa corpus. In both available corpora containing texts from the 19th century, the only confirmation of a connection *można jest* comes from 1842, so it can be assumed that such connections disappeared in the first half of the 19th century. The combinations *niepodobna jest* are present in texts throughout the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, and, as evidenced by the data from the NKJP, they can also be used in contemporary Polish.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented in this article was aimed at examining the verbification of the adjective forms *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna*. The observation of three processes which are the determinants of the ongoing categorical change was carried out on the data collected from several corpora covering the period from the 17th century.

Before summarizing the research results, one reservation should be voiced. Although the work used a large, over 13-million-token corpus, and the examined forms had several hundred occurrences, it turned out that there were very few diagnostic uses in which the features characteristic for the class of predicatives would be revealed. For this reason, the time at which the categorical change described here took place can only be defined within a very broad timeframe. To get a more accurate picture, it will be worth repeating the research presented in this article on more data.

The research results are as follows:

1. Combinations *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna* with the feminine forms of the verbs *być*, *zdać się* and *widzieć się* disappear during the 17th century. From the 18th century, only neuter forms are noted.
2. Throughout the entire period under study, the form *można/niemożna* was not accompanied by verbs other than *być*. The combinations of the form *niepodobna* with the verbs *zdać się* and *widzieć się* vanished in the second half of the 17th century.

3. The *można/niemożna jest* combinations fell out of use probably in the first half of the 19th century. Constructions *niepodobna jest* appeared both in the Middle Polish era and in texts from the 19th and 20th centuries; they also appear in texts of the modern Polish language.

The presented results show that the acquisition of predicative features by the adjectival forms *można/niemożna* and *niepodobna* took place mainly over the course of the 17th century. On the basis of the first two, most important criteria, it can be concluded that there have been predicatives *można* and *niepodobna* in the Polish language since the beginning of the 18th century. The adoption of an additional, third criterion means that the form *można* attained full predicative status in the first half of the 19th century, and the process of verbification of the form *niepodobna* has not ended yet.

The findings made here should be reflected in the tagging of the described forms in the KorBa corpus. The annotation of these forms should be differentiated depending on whether the texts in which they occur were created before or after the completion of the verbification process. In order to do that, it is necessary to develop a general method of describing forms which were subject to a categorical change in the period covered by the corpus. Work on this issue is currently underway.

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