“From Cognitive Linguistics to Cultural Linguistics”
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Virility in Polish

Numerals:
Two series of numerals dedicated only to counting men (not used for mixed groups):
(all numerals)
II: dwaj ‘two’, obaj ‘both’, obajdwaj ‘both two’, trzej ‘three’, czterej ‘four’
(limited to these items)
Series I is associated with a special syntactic construction in which the verb appears
with neuter singular (default) agreement, the noun designating the male humans is
marked with the Genitive plural, and there is no Nominative subject, as in: przyszło
trzech studentów ‘three male students came (literally: came three of male students)’.

Marking of virility on plural nouns
Options: honorific virility, neutral virility, and deprecatory virility
Honorific ending: -owie
Neutral virile endings: -i(-y) with consonant mutation; –e
Deprecatory virile endings: –y/(-i) without consonant mutation
Honorific and neutral virility entail special Nominative plural and Accusative
(= Genitive) plural endings for nouns denoting male humans, along with virile
syntactic agreement on associated adjectives, pronouns, and verbs. Deprecatory
virility assigns the same inflectional endings and syntactic agreement patterns as used
with females, animals, and inanimate objects.

Honorific ending used with prestigious titles and professions, such as królowie
‘kings’, generalowie ‘generals’, geografowie ‘geographers’, ethnonyms (if
monosyllabic) Baltowie ‘Balts’, and male kinship terms like ojcowie ‘fathers’. Some
professions can receive either honorific or neutral virile endings, such as
psychologowie/psycholodzy ‘psychologists’ and profesorowie/profesorzy ‘professors’.
Most remaining virile nouns receive the neutral ending -i(-y) with consonant
mutation, as in studenci ‘students’ and autorzy ‘authors’. A few nouns occur with
either neutral or deprecatory virility marking, such as Żydzi/żydzy ‘Jews’,
Murzyni/murzyny ‘Negroes’, and cyganie/cygany ‘Gypsies’. Nouns referring to male
human beings that belong to marginalized or maligned segments of the population
tend to have the deprecatory ending, as in bękarty ‘bastards’, koniokrady
‘horsethieves’, karły ‘midgets’, pedały ‘homosexuals (vulgar)’.

Polish scale of self vs. other has virile category at top
96.7% ethnic Poles, no minority group more than 0.4% (2006 CIA World Fact Book)
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Domination in Russian and Czech

In both Russian and Czech, the Instrumental case is used with verbs that express mastery:

(Russian) Devuška vladeet kisto koj/russkim jazykom
(Czech) Dívka vládne štětcem/ruštinou
‘The girl has mastery of the paintbrush/the Russian language’

Only Russian uses Instrumental to mark people who are mastered: dirižirovat’ ‘conduct (a musical group)’, komandovat’ ‘command’, pravit’ ‘govern’, rukovodit’ ‘lead, direct’, upravljat’ ‘govern, administer’, verxovodit’ ‘lead’.

The construction is the same as in Mal’čik pisal avtoručkoj/posel peškoj ‘The boy wrote with a fountain pen/moved his pawn’.

Czech uses the Dative case to express the domination of human beings. Both Russian and Czech use the Dative case with verbs that denote human relationships, be they equal or unequal.

Equally matched human relationships: Russian ravnjat’sja ‘equal’, protivostojat’ ‘withstand’ and Czech rovnat se ‘equal’, odolat/odolávat ‘resist’

Both languages can mark an unequal relationship where the Nominative subject is weaker and therefore submits to a Dative object: Russian poddat’ sia/poddavat’ sia ‘submit to’, ustupit’/ustupat’ ‘yield to’ and Czech poddat/poddávat se ‘submit to’, ustoupit/ustupovat ‘yield to’.

The third logical possibility is that the Nominative subject is the one with the upper hand, thus dominating the Dative object. This option is realized only in Czech, where the set of verbs denoting domination uses the Dative case, as in dominovat ‘dominate’, vévodit ‘rule’, vládnout ‘govern’.

This set of Dative-governing Czech verbs fills the same semantic niche as the set of Instrumental-governing Russian verbs listed above.

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Self-Indulgence in Czech

Czech si ‘get something for oneself’: dobýt si ‘obtain (for oneself)’, dovolit si ‘allow oneself’, koupit si ‘buy (for oneself)’, obstarat si ‘obtain (for oneself)’, opatřit si ‘obtain (for oneself)’, pořídit si ‘acquire’, chtít si ‘want for oneself’, přisvojit si ‘adopt/take possession’, přivlastnit si ‘take possession’, vynutit si ‘require/get by force’, zasloužit si ‘deserve’, zažádat si ‘demand’, získat si ‘get’. The verbs dáť ‘give’ and vzít ‘take’ undergo a semantic collapse in the presence of si, such that both express ‘give to the self’, as in: Vzal si cigaretu a hned si ji zapálil ‘He took a cigarette (for himself) and lit it immediately’. The use of a verb with si to mean ‘take from the self’ is limited only to situations where this would be beneficial, as in: Ten další zákusek sis mohl odříci, začínáš se podobat svému otc. ‘You could have refused (for yourself) that extra pastry, you’re beginning to look like your father’. Both dáť ‘give’ and vzít ‘take’ participate in important idioms in conjunction with si; dáť si means ‘have (food, as when ordering in a restaurant)’, and vzít si means ‘marry (take wife/husband)’.
Self-indulgent behaviors. This can be seen in distinctions between the uses of verbs with and without si, such as: hrát ‘play’ vs. hrát si ‘play for fun’, házet ‘throw’ vs. házet si ‘throw for fun’. The use of si to express self-indulgence is productive, as we see in these examples: Klikněte si pro vetší obrázek ‘Click (for yourself) for a bigger picture’; V jednom seriálu jel hlavní hrdina autem, na klíně měl notebook a surfoval si po Internetu ‘In one serial the main character was riding in a car, he had a laptop on his lap and was surfing the Internet (for himself)’. Czech si, along with the prefixes po- and za-, participates in a morphological derivation pattern that likewise indicates the “pleasure factor” of certain activities, as in zajedtit si ‘go for a ride (for pleasure)’ and pochutnat si ‘take a taste of (for pleasure)’. 

Personal comfort and hygiene are associated with Czech si. Verbs that express taking convenient positions require the use of si: sednout si ‘sit down’, lehnout si ‘lie down’, dřepnout si ‘squat’, stoupnout si ‘stand up’ (used only when standing is convenient for a task). Verbs expressing the routine maintenance of body parts (and some possessions, usually shoes and clothes) are accompanied by si, producing common phrases such as umýt si hlavu ‘wash one’s head/hair (literally: wash for oneself head)’, vyčistit si zuby ‘brush one’s teeth’, ostříhat si nehty ‘cut one’s nails’. Various verbs expressing both physical and psychological relief are commonly combined with si, such as: oddechnout si ‘take a breather’, odpočinout si ‘rest’, odskočit si ‘relieve oneself (go to the bathroom)’, pohovat si ‘lounge’, postěžovat si ‘complain’. A more subtle expression of benefit is found with the verbs expressing awareness and capability that combine with si: cenit si ‘appreciate’, myslet si ‘have an opinion’, pamatovat si ‘remember’, všimnout si ‘notice’.

There are examples of harm expressed with si, but this use carries implications of accident or ultimate benefit (through necessary punishment). Harm to a body part is necessarily interpreted as an accident (since otherwise si is an indicator of self-indulgence) in expressions such as: narazit si palec ‘stub one’s toe’, podvrtnout si kotník ‘sprain one’s ankle’, rozbít si koleno ‘skin one’s knee’, zlomit si nohu ‘break one’s leg’. On occasion, if a person feels the need to castigate himself or herself for doing something foolish, it is possible to use si with a punishment verb to deliver self-flagellation, such as nafackovat si ‘slap oneself’ and nakopat si ‘kick oneself’. This use of si strongly implies that the punishment is beneficial to the self, as seen in this example: Já mám na sebe vztek, já bych si nakopal, já jsem blbec ‘I’m furious with myself, I could kick myself, I’m an idiot.’

**Bibliography**


