

## WHEN ONE IS NOT ENOUGH. COERCING DISTRIBUTIVE READING THROUGH METONYMY

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to analyse distributive verbs in Slovak formed by means of the distributive prefix *po-*. Distributive semantics of the verb imposes constraints on its arguments, profiling the distribution of an action over every member of a plural object or subject. The study brings evidence on sentence structures in which the argument of the distributive verb is used in the singular form. In such structures, there is a mismatch between the semantic properties of the distributive verb with the role of a selector and the grammatical properties of its argument with the role of a selected element. The grammatical context thus causes the language user to reinterpret the semantic features of the argument. The use of the singular form of an argument in such structures can be understood as the result of an operation that changes the semantics of the argument on the basis of metonymic transfer. Metonymic operations providing the target plural interpretation can be analysed in terms of various metonymic models, corresponding to particular idealized cognitive models. Three values of distributivity are analysed: participant distributivity (also labelled as *external*), temporal distributivity, and spatial distributivity (also labelled as *internal*). The analysis shows how different interpretations of distributivity arise depending on the metonymic interpretation of nominal arguments.

**Keywords:** distributivity, metonymy, coercion, external distributivity, internal distributivity.

### Highlights:

- In this article, Slovak distributive prefixal verbs are addressed from a cognitive perspective.
- Metonymic mappings taking place in constructions with distributive verbs are analysed as coercion mechanisms operating on the arguments of distributive verbs.
- It is shown how conceptual mismatch between the distributive construction and the singular form of verb argument coerces the plural interpretation of the argument.
- Various types of metonymies adhering to different ICMs which are at play are revealed as mechanisms ensuring semantically adequate interpretation of the argument of distributive verb.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Slavic languages, including Slovak, verbal prefixes can express immense diversity of semantic characteristics, contributing spatial, temporal, quantificational, and aspectual meanings. Prefixal derivation of verbs is highly productive in Slovak (see Ološiak 2015; Ološiak – Ivanová 2021) and plays a central role in the Slovak word formation system.

The present paper looks at those verbs derived using the distributive prefix *po-* and investigates constraints imposed on their arguments by the distributive semantics of these verbs as well as mechanisms enabling the saturation of these constraints.

In theoretical studies, distributivity is described as a result of universal quantification, i.e., the whole set of participants is involved in the event (Scha 1981) and the sub-events within the event, expressed by the verb with the distributive prefix, happen one after another, affecting single participants or groups of participants one by one at temporal subintervals within the event, e.g., *prekladat*<sup>PFV</sup> ‘translate’ → *po-prekladat*<sup>PFV</sup> ‘translate one by one’:

- (1) *Za noc po-preklada-l do slovenčin-y*  
 over night-ACC.SG DISTR-translate-PST-SG.MASC into Slovak-GEN.SG  
*rôzne leták-y.*  
 various leaflet-ACC.PL  
 ‘Overnight, he translated various leaflets into Slovak (one by one).’

*Po-* in example (1) requires that there be a number of several separate translating acts each of which involves a single leaflet being translated and also strongly suggests that the leaflets were translated during successive translating events.

Universal quantification imposes constraints on the grammatical characteristics of arguments selected by distributive verbs. Participant distributivity requires plurality of one of the participants in the sentence structure – either expressed by a plural subject and/or a plural object or by argument with plurality semantics (typically, a collective noun).

However, there are examples in the corpus data which bring evidence of arguments of distributive verbs expressed by singular noun forms, e.g.,

- (2) *Mam-a po-bali-l-a syn-a.*  
 mother-NOM.SG DISTR-pack-PST-SG.FEM son-ACC.SG  
 ‘The mother has packed (= one by one) her son.’

Such structures can be described as examples of a ‘clash’ between two grammatical values: requirements of the distributive verb on the plurality of one of its arguments (either coded by a morphological plural form or a semantically plural noun) and the singular form of this argument expressed by a countable noun. Such violations often call for some kind of ‘reconciliation mechanism’ which would solve the incongruity. In similar cases, the term ‘coercion’ is often used in theoretical studies<sup>1</sup>. Coercion occurs when the basic (standard) interpretation of a construction

<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of coercion has always been of great interest to researchers from different theoretical approaches. It is used in generative semantics, pragmatics studies, as well as construction grammar approaches. Some researchers argue that the notions of coercion and metonymy overlap, and

yields an improbable or impossible conceptual representation, due to an incompatibility of its constituents, e.g., *Pustila sa do knihy*. ‘She began the book.’ (= *pustila sa do čítania knihy* ‘she began reading the book.’), cf. Ivanová (2023).

In this paper, it is argued that the coerced plural reading of the argument is realized through metonymic mappings. Example (2) provides an instance of ‘complement coercion’, in which the predicate denoted by the distributive verb licenses plurality interpretation of its object argument. However, the verb’s complement, the noun phrase *syn* ‘son’, is used in its singular form. This is consolidated by the introduction of a ‘plurality’ concept that maps argument onto plurality reading which is enabled by the metonymic transfer of this argument (*syn* ‘son’ = *synove veci* ‘son’s stuff’).

The structure of this study is as follows: Section 2 outlines a general overview of distributivity, including the division between various subtypes of distributivity. Section 3 brings important findings on the conceptual nature of metonymy and examines in some detail the phenomenon of coercion (Michaelis 2005; González-García 2011, 2020). Section 4 examines the relevance of metonymy in the process of coercion of arguments selected by distributive verbs under scrutiny and provides a fine-grained analysis of the types of metonymies that can be posited within constructions with distributive verbs in present-day Slovak. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main findings and singles out some areas ripe for further future research.

## 2. DISTRIBUTIVITY

In theoretical studies, distributivity is understood as the distribution of a predicate over plural subjects or objects so that the verbal predicate holds for each individual in the denotation of the participant noun<sup>2</sup> (for details, see Champollion 2019).

Distributive interpretations can be enforced by adding overt distributive markers or it can be inferred from the context.

Sentences (a) – (e) illustrate different coding strategies of distributive meaning in Slovak:

- a. *Žiaci dostali melón.*  
‘[the] pupils got a watermelon.’  
i) = pupil 1 got a watermelon 1, pupil 2 got a watermelon 2, etc. = distributive reading (participant distributivity), ii) = all pupils got one watermelon = collective reading

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metonymy is labelled as a kind of “semantic coercion”. In her study, Ziegeler (2007) rejects the notion of coercion as superfluous due to the fact that it can be accounted for in light of metaphoric and metonymic extension processes in general. However, this claim was challenged by González García (2011).

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with theories of (semantic) valency, obligatory complements in the meaning of the lexical units are labelled as participants (actants) as opposed to free modifications. This division roughly corresponds to the argument/adjunct dichotomy, see Panevová (1994).

- b. *Každý žiak dostal melón.*  
 ‘Each pupil got a watermelon.’  
 i) = pupil 1 got a watermelon 1, pupil 2 got a watermelon 2, etc. = distributive reading (participant distributivity)
- c. *Žiaci dostali po melóne.*  
 ‘[the] Pupils got a watermelon apiece.’  
 i) = pupil 1 got a watermelon 1, pupil 2 got a watermelon 2, etc. = distributive reading (participant distributivity)
- d. *Žiaci podostávali melón/melóny.*  
 ‘Pupils one by one got a watermelon/watermelons.’  
 i) = each pupil one by one got a watermelon. i.e. pupil 1 got a watermelon 1, pupil 2 got a watermelon 2, etc. = distributive reading (participant + temporal distributivity)
- e. *Žiaci jeden po druhom dostali melón.*  
 ‘All pupils, one by one, got a watermelon.’  
 i) = pupil 1 got a watermelon 1, pupil 2 got a watermelon 2, etc. = distributive reading (participant + temporal distributivity)

Sentence (a) can have both distributive and non-distributive meaning, the verb belongs to the group of so called “mixed” predicates, allowing both collective and distributive readings (Henderson 2019, p. 15). On the collective or referential reading, the pupils as a group got a watermelon. On the distributive or quantificational reading, each individual pupil got a watermelon.

On the other hand, the distributive quantifier *každý* ‘each’ in sentence (b) and the distributive phrase with the word *po* (*melóne*) ‘after (watermelon)’<sup>3</sup> in sentence (c) license a sentence-internal different meaning, i.e., a reading to the effect that, for any two pupils A and B, the watermelon given to pupil A is different from the watermelon given to pupil B. In these cases, the distributive reading is enforced by using quantificational noun phrases headed by determiners like *every* or *each* (Scha 1981) or a distributive numeral which is formed from a cardinal numeral and the preceding word *po*, e.g., *po (jednom) jablku* from *jeden* ‘one’ (if the cardinal number is one, the numeral itself is often not expressed and the quantity is implied by the singular form of a noun).

However, only the distributive prefix *po-* in sentence (d) constrains that the events of giving proceeded one by one in time as opposed to sentences (b) and (c) which can also have a simultaneous interpretation.

The same distributive interpretation as in (d) arises in the sentence (e) when the modifier *jeden po druhom* ‘one by one’ is used. Whereas the expression *každý* ‘each’

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<sup>3</sup> In Slovak, it is often classified as particle.

only requires each individual in the cover to be instantiated, *jeden po druhom* ‘one by one’ adds the meaning of temporal concatenation of events of giving. It can be proved by the fact that *jeden po druhom* is able to target nominals headed by *každý* ‘each’ in Slovak:

- (3) *Dnes každý žiak jeden po druhom dosta-l*  
 today each pupil-ACC.SG one by one get-PST-SG.MASC  
*melón.*  
 watermelon-ACC.SG  
 ‘Today each pupil, one by one, got a watermelon.’<sup>4</sup>

*Jeden po druhom* can be described as an event modifier that targets a plural participant in the event and breaks the event down into temporally sequenced sub-events and distributes the plural participant over these sub-events (Brasoveanu – Henderson 2009).

In example (d), object argument can be realized either in singular (*melón*) or plural form (*melóny*). The distributive prefix coerces the plurality interpretation of the object argument in spite of the singular form: as a distributive marker, it coerces the interpretation that many watermelons were distributed, each to every pupil.

On the other hand, the plural form of the object argument is ambiguous as it allows for two possible interpretations: (i) each pupil got one watermelon, (ii) each pupil got more than one watermelon. Example (d) demonstrates that the argument of the verb prefixed with the distributive *po-* cannot be a singular noun, either the subject or object argument must be coded by the plural form of the noun (either *žiaci podostávali melón* ‘pupils one by one got a watermelon’ or *žiak podostával melóny* ‘the pupil got watermelons one by one’).

Distributive prefixes can be considered more complex distributive operators than distributive numeral. Whereas the distributive numeral encodes the multiplicity of actions distributed over plural participants, the distributive prefix also adds the meaning of seriality of actions. As we see in (4’), the distributive verb *podostávať* ‘get one by one’ is odd when used with the temporal adverbial *naraz* ‘all at once’, excluding the complete temporal overlap of all the sub-events, whereas in the sentence (4) with a distributive numeral, the usage of the temporal adverbial *naraz* is possible.

- (4) *Naraz dosta-l-i po šesť vzoriek piv-a.*  
 at once get-PST-PL DIST six sample-GEN.PL beer-GEN.SG  
 ‘They each got six samples of beer at once.’

<sup>4</sup> This possibility contradicts the assumption made by Beck – von Stechow (2007) who predict that *one by one* should not be able to target nominals headed by *each*, e.g., \**One by one, each student left*.

(4') \*Naraz po-dostáva-l-i šest' vzoriek piv-a.  
 at once DISTR-get-PST-PL six sample-GEN.PL beer-GEN.SG  
 'They each got six samples of beer at once.'

In the following sections, different type of structures with singular forms of arguments selected by distributive verbs will be examined.

For the sake of the analysis, a list of distributive verbs has been extracted from the *Slovník koreňových morférov slovenčiny* (2012)<sup>5</sup> and a prepared fifth volume of the *Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka*<sup>6</sup>. On the whole, 421 verbs were classified according to following parameters:

- (i) transitivity of the base verb: transitive (T) vs. intransitive (I);
- (ii) morphematic status of the base verb: unprefix base verb (D) vs. prefixed base verb (Dp);
- (iii) prefix element in the case of Dp, e.g., *do-*, *na-*, *pri-*, *vy-*, etc.;
- (iv) character of base verb: domestic base verbs (0) vs. adopted base verbs (2);
- (v) affiliation of verbs to semantically specified groups: cognition (cog), communication (comm), contact (cont), creation (crea), dandi and recipiendi (dr), inchoative (inchoat), manipulation (man), modification (mod), reciprocity (recip), physiological process (phys).

The entire database is published online in Kyseľová – Ivanová (2024) and is freely accessible.

Examples on the singular form of arguments selected by distributive verbs were taken from the corpus Omnia Slovaca IV Maior Beta, using the query [lemma="distributive verb"]{0,2}[tag="S.\*s."].

### 3. METONYMY

While conceptual metaphor has been a central concept in cognitive linguistics since the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff – Johnson 1980), metonymy received more or less only marginal attention in cognitive linguistic research until the late 1990s. The turning point came with the publication of Kövecses and Radden's *Metonymy: Developing a cognitive linguistic view* (1998) and the edited collection *Metonymy in Language and Thought* (Panther – Radden 1999). Since then, extensive

<sup>5</sup> *Slovník koreňových morférov slovenčiny* (2012) investigates the interaction between word formation and morphemics/morphophonemics in Slovak on the basis of approximately 66 000 units. It is of both derivational and morphemic character. For the first time, it offers a systemic analysis of word-formation relations in word-formation nests (a metaphorical term used in Slavic word-formation in the meaning of 'word-family'). It currently substitutes for the missing derivational dictionary of the Slovak language.

<sup>6</sup> *Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka* (first four volumes: 2006, 2011, 2015, 2021) represents a monolingual dictionary of the Slovak language. In the prepared fifth volume, distributed verbs will be processed.

research into the phenomenon of metonymy has proved that metonymy, like metaphor, is a conceptual phenomenon which is ubiquitous and plays a central and crucial role in conceptualization and communication (Denroche 2015, p. 70). Kövecses (2013) even argues that certain metaphors (e.g., ANGER is A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER) are derived from metonymy, i.e. metonymy has a default status in relation to metaphor (see also Barcelona 2003). Within Slavic context, the attention was paid mostly to metonymy in domain of word formation (e.g., Janda 2011, Janda 2014) or aspectuality (Janda 2008). In the given works, broad definition of metonymy is adopted: “Metonymy is an inferential relationship between two concepts: a source concept is overtly named and provides mental access to a target concept in a given context” (Janda 2011, p. 360).

Barcelona (2011, p. 8) considers the core properties of metonymy to be the phenomenon characteristic of (1) fundamentally conceptual nature, (2) experiential basis, (3) ability to be the basis for cognitive models, and (4) the integration of experientially and conceptually related elements. This definition brings metonymy and metaphor cognitively closer together; the difference between them essentially concerns only the fourth named property, i.e. the relationship between the source (source) and target (target) domains as constitutive elements of both metonymy and metaphor. Domain theory states that while the source (sub)domain and the target (sub)domain are conceptually distinct in metaphor, in metonymy they are both localized within the same conceptual domain. Whether these are one identical or two distinct conceptual domains may sometimes not be entirely clear, in which case this results in the problem of distinguishing metonymy and metaphor (see Barcelona 2003; Kövecses 2013). In his work, Croft (1993) introduces the term “domain matrix”, suggesting that both metonymy and metaphor involve mapping between domains, but in the case of metonymy, both domains belong to the same “matrix”, whereas in metaphor there are different (unrelated) domains matrices (Croft 1993, p. 348).

Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez (2000) recognizes two basic types of metonymy: (i) source-in-target, where the source domain is a subdomain of the target domain, (ii) target-in-source, where the target domain is a subdomain of the source domain:

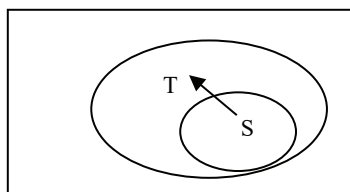


Figure 1: Source (S) in target (T)

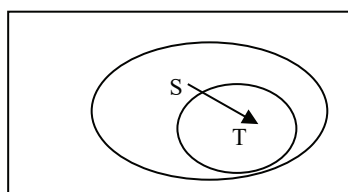


Figure 2: Target (T) in source (S)

A typical example of type (i) is the metonymy PART FOR WHOLE (e.g., *attract the best brains to Europe* for *attract the best brainy people to Europe*). In



contrast, metonymy of type (ii) is typically represented by the WHOLE FOR PART model (*I broke the window.* for *I broke the windowpane.*, *Tie your shoes.* for *Tie your shoelaces.*). Since in the case of source-in-target metonymy, source element refers to a wider subdomain, Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez (2000) characterizes this type of metonymy as a process of domain expansion. On the other hand, in the case of target-in-source metonymy, the source element refers to a narrower subdomain, so he understands this type of metonymy as a process of domain reduction.

Although operating within the same conceptual domain is a necessary condition for metonymy (and a disjunctive one in relation to metaphor), it is not a sufficient condition. Indeed, the belonging of two elements to the same conceptual framework does not mean that one element can serve as a reference point for the target subdomain. Just as there are metaphorical models, there are also metonymic models determining the relationship between two subdomains and their nature or role (WHOLE FOR PART, PLACE FOR CITIZENS, PERSON FOR PHYSICAL OBJECT, etc.). The relationship between them is referred to as the pragmatic function. In its absence, metonymy is not possible (the nose cannot be a source point for the mouth, although both elements operate in the same domain – human face) (Barcelona 2011, p. 14).

In Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 36) metonymy is defined as a mapping occurring within a single domain, and that there is a “stand for” relationship”. However, the Lakovian definition of metonymy is refined by Kövecses and Radden (1998, p. 39), who describe it as a “cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same domain, or ICM [Idealized Cognitive Model]”. Metonymy is often defined as an inferential process between two concepts: a source concept is overtly named and provides mental access to a target concept on the basis of contiguity of source and target. For Panther and Thornburg (1999), contiguity shows that our knowledge is classified in terms of frames and scenarios which are referred to as ICM in Lakoff (1987, p. 288).

#### **4. METONYMY AND COERCION IN DISTRIBUTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS**

According to Geeraerts and Peirsman (2011), the referential shift from source (reference point) to target in metonymy takes place on the basis of verbal selectivity and encyclopaedic knowledge. As an example, they cite the sentence *The Times criticized the minister*, where the verb *criticize* presupposes a volitional human subject. The expression *The Times* does not satisfy this, and so target activation is triggered. A referential shift also occurs in the case of the sentence *Nixon bombed Hanoi.*, where encyclopaedic knowledge tells us that it was not Nixon as such who actually bombed Hanoi.





(iii) participant is expressed by mass noun:

- (7) *Treba okolo celého dom-u po-rozlieva-t’ benzín.*  
necessary around whole house-GEN.SG DISTR-spill-INF petrol-ACC.SG  
‘It is necessary to spill petrol (little by little) around the whole house.’

(iv) participant is expressed by a quantized noun denoting an aggregate object with several subparts (e.g., *flat – rooms*):

- (8) *Po-upratova-l byt.*  
DISTR-clean-PST-SG.MASC byt-ACC.SG  
‘He cleaned the flat part by part/room by room.’

(v) participant is expressed by a noun denoting possessor of things:

- (9) *Mama po-bali-l-a syn-a. (= jeho veci)*  
mother-NOM.SG DISTR-pack-PST-SG.FEM son.ACC.SG  
‘The mother has packed her son (= his things one by one).’

(vi) participant is expressed by a quantized noun denoting container in locative construction:

- (10) *Po-vyklada-l prívesný vozík.*  
DISTR-unload-PST-SG.MASC trailer-ACC.SG  
‘He emptied the trailer (one by one).’

Distribution over plural objects is typical of transitive modification and manipulation verbs for which one agent affecting more than one patient is a more typical situation than many agents affecting one patient<sup>7</sup>. It can be explained by the fact that, in these cases, the participant coded by the object argument usually represents an incremental theme. Hypothetically, plural agents may affect a different portion of one and the same incremental object, e.g., *deti pojedli jablko* ‘[the] children one by one have eaten the apple (part by part)’, however, such examples are rare in the corpus data. Object distributivity is a more frequent pattern, e.g., *dieťa pojedlo jablká* ‘[the] child has eaten the apples one by one’ (intuitive explanation is that eating represents an event that is individualized with respect to one agent eating one or more eatable items).

A different situation can be traced for transitive motion verbs<sup>8</sup> which can distribute both over a plural subject as in example (11) and a plural object as in example (12):

- (11) *Vojáčik-ovia po-preskakova-l-i plot.*  
soldier-NOM.PL DISTR-jump-PST-PL fence-ACC.SG  
‘The soldiers one by one jumped over the fence.’

<sup>7</sup> Transitive manipulation and modification distributive verbs represent 80% of our sample.

<sup>8</sup> Intransitive motion distributive verbs represent 12% of our sample.

- (12) *Boženka-a po-preskakova-l-a mlák-y.*  
 Boženka-NOM.SG DISTR-jump-PST-SG.FEM puddle-ACC.PL  
 ‘Boženka has jumped the puddles one by one.’

The explanation of this fact is related to the thematic role of actants in the Direct Transitive Construction with motion verbs. In this construction, the participant coded by object argument of the motion verb is conceptualized as a non-incremental obstacle which can be overcome by more than one agent.

Intransitive distributives are mostly of two kinds: (i) distributives from unprefixated unaccusative imperfectives (e.g., *podochnúť* ‘die one by one’, *pohynúť* ‘whiten sth. on the surface one by one’), see example (13), (ii) distributives from unergative secondary imperfectives (e.g., *povybiehať* ‘run out one by one’, *povchádzať* ‘go in one by one’), see example (14)<sup>9</sup>.

- (13) *Aj zvierat-á po-hynu-l-i.*  
 even animal-NOM.PL DISTR-die-PST-PL  
 ‘Even animals have died (one by one).’  
 (14) *Cestujúc-i po-vybieha-l-i von.*  
 traveller-NOM.PL DISTR-run out-PST-PL outside  
 ‘Travellers came running out one by one.’

Coding the participants from examples (11), (12), (13) and (14) in singular form would render the sentence structures ungrammatical: *\*Boženka popreskakovala mláku.*, *\*Vojačik popreskakoval plot.*,<sup>10</sup> *\*Aj zviera pohynulo.*, *\*Cestujúci povybiehal von.*

However, the concepts of ‘plurality’ and ‘singularity’ are gradual in language and “different lexical items may [...] be associated with different degrees of plurality and singularity” (Gil 1996, p. 64). For example, the primary interpretation of the expression *chlieb* is a countable noun denoting ‘individual piece of food made from dough’ so that its plural form is required when used with distributive verb (e.g., *pokúpiť chleby*, not *\*pokúpiť chlieb*). However, it can also be used in singular form in sentence structures like (15) in which limited amounts of bread are conceptually profiled:

- (15) *Po-nosi-l-a na stól chlieb.*  
 DISTR-bring-PST-FEM.SG on table-ACC.SG bread-ACC.SG  
 ‘She brought the bread on the table (one by one).’

<sup>9</sup> As opposed to Serbian and Croatian, *po-* distributives in Slovak are rarely created from perfective verbs, e.g., the Croatian *pozapamtiti*, but the Slovak *\*pozapamätať si* ‘memorize one after another’, one exception of derivation of distributive verb from a perfective pendant in Slovak is *po-kúpiť* ‘buy one after another’ which is formed from the perfective *kúpiť* ‘buy’.

<sup>10</sup> Given structures would be acceptable only with iterativity adverbs like *Vojačik viackrát popreskakoval plot.*

It seems that some expressions are variable in their distribution of singularity and plurality level readings. It is “metonymic processing” that facilitates the “flexibility and subtleties” of what can be expressed while remaining within the conventionalized linguistic resources of ready-made signs (Denroche 2015, p. 85). In the following parts, metonymic models that can be identified on the basis of corpus data are examined.

#### 4.1. THING-AND-PART ICM

The relationship between a whole and a part typically applies to things and their parts, where the notion of ‘thing’ is to be understood here in the schematic sense of Langacker (1991), referring to the conceptual archetypes ‘object’ and ‘substance’ (Langacker 2008, p. 128).

Distributive verbs can be used with a singular mass noun denoting substance in the case of temporal distributivity:

- (16) *Vosk sa po-vylieva-l z kahanc-a.*  
 wax-NOM.SG REFL DISTR-pour out-PST-SG.MASC from burner-GEN.SG  
 ‘The wax has poured out the burner little by little.’

Temporal distributivity in example (16) yields individuation of sub-events based on separate running times and results in adverbial temporal meanings ‘successively’, ‘consecutively’, ‘one part, portion at a time’ (e.g., *povyliemat’ sa* ‘to pour out part by part, one (proportion) at a time, after another’).

The possibility to use a singular participant with a distributive verb is determined by the semantics of actants taking part in each of the repeated situations, namely by differentiation of cumulative and quantized predicates (the term “predicate” is used pursuant to Krifka 1992).

In example (17), the predicate *dew* is cumulative because if one takes one portion of dew and adds to it some more dew, they also get dew<sup>11</sup>:

- (17) *Ros-a po-sch-l-a.*  
 dew-NOM.SG DISTR-dry up-PST-SG.FEM  
 ‘The dew has dried up little by little.’

In example (18), the predicate *apple* is quantised because while it is true of some apple that it is an apple, a part of an apple is not an apple:

- (18) *Jablk-á po-pada-l-i pod strom.*  
 apple-NOM.PL DISTR-fall-PST-PL under tree-ACC.SG  
 ‘The apples have fallen under the tree one by one.’

<sup>11</sup> Krifka uses the term ‘cumulative’ to describe the unbounded construal of objects and quantised to describe the bounded construal of objects (Krifka 1989, p. 75). For mass nouns, the default construal is unbounded, for count nouns, the default construal is bounded.

Within this type of ICM, even quantized predicates can be used as arguments of distributive verbs under the condition that the action affects spatially scattered parts of a single object:

- (19) *Koláč*                      *po-praska-l*.  
 cake-NOM.SG    DISTR-crack-PST-SG.MASC  
 ‘The cake cracked here and there.’

Spatial distributivity in example (19) encodes a set of sub-events affecting different locations or vantage points of the spatial entity and results in readings like “here and there”, “all over” (e.g., *popraskat’* ‘to crack here and there’).

We will use the terms *distributive share* for the set of objects that are distributed and *distributive key* for the set of objects among which the distributive share is distributed (Choe 1987; Gil 2005). The meaning of spatial and temporal distributivity is triggered by the contextual clues:

- (20) *Po*    *výbuch-u*                      *po-praska-l*                      *strop*.  
 after explosion-LOC.SG    DISTR-crack-PST-SG.MASC    ceiling-NOM.SG  
 ‘The ceiling cracked here and there after the explosion.’
- (21) *Časom*                      *strop*                      *po-prask-á*.  
 in the course of time    ceiling-NOM.SG    DISTR-crack-PRS.3SG  
 ‘The ceiling will crack here and there in the course of time.’

In example (20), the subevents of cracking are distributive share and different parts of the ceiling are distributive key so that the meaning of the sentence is purely spatial distributivity (it is contextually determined by the semantics of the non-durative adverbial *po výbuchu* ‘after explosion’). On the other hand, in example (21), the subevents of cracking are distributive share and different parts of ceiling and different time periods are distributive key so that the meaning of the sentence is both spatial and temporal distributivity (it is contextually determined by the semantics of the durative adverbial *časom* ‘in the course of time’).

Spatial distributivity involves quantification over stages of an individual (Součková 2004). In the case of spatial distributives, the distributive prefix can scope even over singular forms of quantized predicates in case they denote spatial entity characterised by parthood. The singular form cannot be used if the action is expressed by the verb with non-dispersive semantics, compare the following examples *poprelamovat’ tabletku* ‘break the pill little by little’, but \**poprehľtat’ tabletku* ‘swallow the pill little by little’. The verb *poprehľtat’* ‘swallow (little by little)’ is derived from the verb *prehľtat’* which cannot express a change affecting a single object part by part (it involves a closed scale which has a maximum degree that is construed as a result state). The verb *poprelamovat’* ‘break (little by little)’ is derived

from the verb *prelamoť* expressing an action that can affect a single object part by part (it involves an open scale lacking a maximal degree). For *poprelamoť tabletku*, there is the possibility of understanding the event as a multiple action affecting different fragments of the participant *tabletku*, which is not available for *poprehltať tabletku*. In this case, the plurality meaning is present in the semantics of the argument with the resultative semantics *na kúsky* which is not obligatorily expressed in the sentence structure, compare (22) and (22'):

- (22) *Konár*                      *poslušne*              *po-prelamoť-l*.  
 branch-ACC.SG   obediently              DISTR-break-PST-SG.MASC  
 'He obediently broke the branch.'
- (22') *Konár*                      *poslušne*              *po-prelamoť-l*                      *na kúsky-y*.  
 branch-ACC.SG   obediently              DISTR-break-PST-SG.MASC   on   part-ACC.PL  
 'He obediently broke the branch into parts.'

Two types of verbal units can be counted among inherent spatial distributives in Slovak: agentive verbs of splitting (e.g., *poprelamoť* 'break little by little, part by part', *poprerezávať* 'cut little by little, part by part') and reshaping<sup>12</sup> (*poohýbať* 'bend little by little, part by part', *popreliačovať* 'make a dent little by little, part by part') or non-agentive verbs of reshaping (e.g., *ohnúť sa* 'become bent little by little, part by part', *popreliačovať sa* 'become dented little by little, part by part').

Spatial distributivity is also evoked in other types of structures with distributive verbs. Singular quantized nouns can be used in them if the noun has a plurality feature at notional level, denoting conglomerate objects, assembly (which is often reflected in dictionary definitions), e.g., *byt* 'flat' is defined as *súbor miestností určený na bývanie jednotlivca al. rodiny* 'a set of rooms intended for the housing of an individual or a family' in *Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka* (2006) (see example 7). On the other hand, nouns denoting simplex, non-conglomerate objects cannot be used in the singular form with a distributive verb, e.g., *porozbíjať výklad* 'to break [the] shop window', but *\*porozbíjať prasiatko* 'to break [the] piggy bank'.

Distributive verbs are usually formed by adding the prefix *po-* to the verb with the status of an accomplishment or achievement predicate (Vendler 1957) and they cannot be formed from verbs denoting state (e.g., *veriť* 'believe' – *\*po-veriť* 'believe one by one'), or activity (e.g., *tancovať* 'dance' – *\*po-tancovať* 'dance one by one'). The reason is that state and activity predicates are internally homogeneous and atelic. Accomplishments are durative and telic, they consist of an activity (process) leading up to a culmination point whereas achievements denote transition from one situation

<sup>12</sup> In FrameNet (2017), verbs of reshaping are defined as lexical units denoting the situation when a Deformer deforms a Patient possibly against a Resistant \_surface such that it undergoes a shape-change from its canonical or original shape into the Configuration, a new shape.





following examples can be given: *Your dog bit my cat.*, *Roger heard a noise.*, *Susan has a cigarette in her mouth.* Realistically, it is not the whole dog that bit the whole cat, but only part of its body (the teeth) performed the action on part of the cat's body. Similarly, not Roger in the sense of the whole heard the noise, but only a part of his body (the ears), Susan does not have the whole cigarette in her mouth, but only a part of it, etc.

Similarly, in constructions with distributive verbs, different parts (or "facets") of our knowledge of the referent are brought to the fore, e.g., in the structure *povysávať dom* 'to vacuum the house part by part', ground parts (floor or carpets) are profiled whereas in the structure *ponatierať dom* 'to paint the house (part by part)', walls become the centre of our attention. Metonymy is therefore a reflection of our fundamental reference point ability to decide which facet is being profiled in any particular instance of language use.

Thus, in simple terms, the active zones can be said to denote those parts of the source that participate directly in the relation/event (Langacker 1984, p. 177). However, Langacker (ibid.) points out that the active zone is not necessarily a discrete, sharply delineated area within the whole entity. As opposed to situations such as *Paul hit me* or *The car needs washing*, where *Paul* and *the car* may be said to stand as wholes for the parts 'Paul's fist' and 'the car's body', respectively, in examples like (18), we cannot identify precise parts of the cake that participate most directly and crucially in that relationship. The given examples are often described as a case of a partial coercion licensed by the metonymy SUBSTANCE → PORTION/AMOUNT of SUBSTANCE or THING → PART of THING.

#### 4.2. CONSTITUTION ICM

Another ICM to which the relationship between a whole and a part may be said to apply is what can be called 'constitution ICM'. Substances may be conceived of as parts which constitute or make up things, in particular physical objects.

This type of metonymy may arise when a mass noun denoting substance is used as a metonymic source for physical objects made of this substance as a metonymic target. In such cases, a singular mass noun is used as the argument of the distributive verb, as in example (23):

- (23) ... *jej porozbija-l-i*                      *vzácný čínsky porcelán*.  
          her-DAT   DISTR-break-PST-PL   precious Chinese porcelain-Acc.Sg  
          'They broke her precious Chinese porcelain (= porcelain products).'

In the given example, a conceptual mismatch arises between the singular noun *porcelán* and the distributive verb. Conceptual conflict is solved by coercion based on metonymy MASS to COUNT which can be analysed under Constitution ICM.

This ICM involves the material or substance that constitutes an object. Substances are unbounded and therefore uncountable. A substance may, however, be conceived of as bounded, i.e. as object-like, and is then profiled as a count noun, as in example (23). In such cases, there is a metonymic connection between the material and the products made of them which enables metonymic operation.

#### 4.3. POSSESSION ICM

In the study by Janočková (2011) the sentence in example (13) is interpreted as an example of internal distributivity. In fact, these examples can be interpreted as a case of external distributivity based on possession metonymy. The noun *syn* ‘son’ as a possessor metonymically stands for possessed belongings from his personal sphere (*veci* ‘things’) within *Possession ICM*. ‘Personal sphere’ can be defined as a “mental sphere which consists of persons, objects, localisations and facts so closely connected with a given person, who is called the target person”, that “any change which these objects, facts and persons undergo will directly or indirectly affect the target person” (Dąbrowska 1997, p. 17):

- (24) *Rodič-ia*                      *povyžúva-l-i*                      *chlapč-a*.  
parent-NOM.SG   DISTR-take off-PST-PL   little boy-ACC.SG  
‘The parents took the little boy’s shoes off.’

In this case, the action is directed at the boy’s shoes which are conceptualized as belonging to his personal sphere.

Possession ICM may lead to reversible metonymies, both POSSESSOR FOR POSSESSED and POSSESSED FOR POSSESSOR. There is, however, a clear preference for choosing the possessor as the vehicle and the possessed object as the target. The relation between possessor and possessed belongings constitutes the metonymic link labelled as *proximity* or *adjacency*, which is considered a less typical manifestation of contiguity (cf. Kövecses – Radden 1998).

#### 4.4. CONTAINMENT ICM

Locative alternations require two “non-actor” arguments (locatum and location; or container and contents of containment) associated with a simple event verb structure and two different ways of realising them at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

In the primary structure (25), the theme argument expressing content of container becomes the direct object (*veci*), and the source argument expressing container is coded in the form of the preposition phrase (*z vozíka*):

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<sup>13</sup> Similar Czech constructions are discussed Kettnerová (2014).

- (25) *Povyklada-l*                      *vec-i*                      *z*                      *prívesného vozík-a*.  
 DISTR-unload-PST-SG.MASC item-ACC.PL from trailer-GEN.SG  
 'He unloaded the items from the trailer one by one.'

In the case of derived alternated structures as in example (25'), only the location argument expressing the container as a singular direct object is expressed in the sentence structure in spite of the plurality requirement that is imposed by a distributive verb on its participant.

- (25') *Po-vyklada-l*                      *prívesný vozík*  
 DISTR-unload-PST-SG.MASC trailer-ACC.SG  
 'He emptied the trailer (one by one).'

According to Sweep (2011), two core elements (theme – locatum and source – location) in the locative frame are closely connected and they can be seen as a single gestalt. Therefore, the direct object can metonymically shift between the theme-element and the source-element in locative constructions, depending on which part of the gestalt involved is highlighted. The contiguity between theme and source serves as a possible explanation for the fact why a distributive verb requiring plural participant enables the frame with an object participant expressed by a singular countable noun. Coercion of participant-plurality reading is determined by adaptive mechanisms that operate at the interface between semantic and conceptual knowledge.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The idea that the concept of coercion can be applied to cases of metonymic reference transfers has been shown in many theoretical studies (e.g., Nunberg 1979; Levinson 2000). Distributive coercion can be described as domain-internal operation which is used to solve conceptual mismatch between the plurality requirement of the distributive verb on its participant and singular coding of this participant. The role of metonymy in distributive construction is to provide a natural inference schema that connects the coerced element (NP argument) and the coercing element (distributive verb).

Depending on the type of predicate and the formal morphology of the arguments in the sentence structure, the following distributive interpretations are possible, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of predicates and distributivity scope

One-place predicates						
	Distributivity	Example	Interpretation	Noun	Profiling	ICM
singular subject	temporal	(a) <i>rosa poschla</i>	the dew dried up little by little	mass	portions of substance	Thing-and-part
	spatial / spatial + temporal	(b) <i>koláč popraskal</i>	the cake cracked here and there/here and there part by part	count	parts of thing	Thing-and-part
	participant	(c) <i>*zvierá pohynulo</i>	-			
plural subject	participant	(d) <i>zvieratá pohynuli</i>	the animals died one by one	count	things	-
Two-place predicates						
	Distributivity	Example	Interpretation	Noun	Profiling	ICM
singular subject – singular object	temporal	(e) <i>popil všetok čaj</i>	he drank all the tea little by little	mass	portions of substance	Thing-and-part
	spatial	(f) <i>otec povysával gauč</i>	the father hoovered the couch part by part	count	parts of thing	Thing-and-part
	participant	(g) <i>*otec pobudil dieťa</i>	-			
		<i>mama pobalila syna</i>	the mother packed son's things piece by piece	count	things	Possession
		<i>muž povykladal vozík</i>	the man loaded the card	count	things	Containment
		<i>muž porozbíjal porcelán</i>	the man broke up the porcelain	mass	things	Constitution
singular subject – plural object	participant	(h) <i>otec pobudil deti</i>	the father woke up children one by one	count	things	-
plural subject – singular object	participant	(i) <i>deti popredbiehali učiteľku</i>	the children one by one overtook a teacher	count	things	-
	participant + spatial / spatial	(j) <i>upratovači povysávali gauč</i>	(i) the cleaners one by one hoovered the couch part by part = distributive marker scopes over subject and object participant (ii) the cleaners collectively hoovered the couch part by part = distributive marker scopes over object participant	count	parts of thing	Thing-and-part

plural subject – plural object	participant	(k) <i>deti</i> <i>popredbiehali</i> <i>učiteľky</i>	(i) classmates collectively overtook more than one teacher one by one = distributive marker scopes over object participant (ii) classmates individually one by one overtook a group of teachers = distributive marker scopes over subject participant (iii) classmates individually one by one overtook more than one teacher one by one = distributive marker scopes over subject and object participant	count	things	-
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The meaning shifts in constructions with distributive verbs are twofold: lexical shifts based on lexical metonymy (e.g., from object to parts of objects or from mass to portions of substance) or grammatical shifts based on grammatical metonymy (*singularis pro plurali* schema).

Grammatical metonymy in Construction I involves no change on the conceptual level, the metonymic nature of the distributive construction is reflected in the use of a grammatical form not licensed by a verb selector:

[[OBJECT] → [SET OF OBJECTS]], e.g., *všetci žiaci podostávali vysvedčenie* ‘all pupils (one by one) got the school report’.

The noun *vysvedčenie* ‘school report’ has been used in the singular form even though the expression *vysvedčenie* does not actually designate only one school report being distributed among pupils, but many school reports, one for each pupil. However, the plural form of the subject enables the coding of the object argument in the singular form. This type of grammatical metonymy applies in constructions with *verba dandi* and *recipiendi* and the possible motivation for it is related to the possible semantic underspecification of the plural form. The usage of the expression *vysvedčenia* ‘school reports’ in the given construction could lead to semantical ambiguity (it would not be clear whether every pupil got one school report or more than one school report).

Lexical metonymy in Construction II is conceptual, i.e. it involves the change from concept A to concept B. The following types of concept metonymies may be distinguished in the case of distributive verbs:

(i) FORM<sub>A</sub> -CONCEPT<sub>A</sub> FOR FORM<sub>B</sub> -CONCEPT<sub>B</sub>: as in (*povyžívať*) *syna* ‘literally: to take off the son’ for (*povyžívať synovi*) *topánky* ‘to take off the son’s shoes’ (son as the possessor stands for shoes as possessed thing);

(ii) FORM-CONCEPT<sub>A</sub> FOR CONCEPT<sub>B</sub>: as in *vosk (sa povylieval)* ‘the wax poured out’ for ‘portions of wax poured out’ (wax as a substance stands for portions of wax);

(iii) FORM<sub>A</sub>-CONCEPT<sub>A</sub> FOR FORM<sub>A</sub>-CONCEPT<sub>B</sub>: as in (*poroznášat*) *pitie* ‘literally to take drinking round’ for ‘to take the drinks round’ (drinking as event *pitie 1* stands for drinks as objects of drinking *pitie 2*).

The first type involves two different signs denoting two concepts belonging to the same ICM.

The second type differs from the preceding one in that the target concept does not have a name in the language.

The third type adheres to polysemy which is a common way in which metonymic concepts manifest themselves in the language.

The major result of the present analysis is detection of a set of two general patterns and nine sub-patterns of lexical metonymic extensions.

Five of these sub-patterns refer to metonymic extensions within the domain “object”:

(i) [[OBJECT] → [SPATIALLY SCATTERED PARTS OF THE OBJECT]], e.g., *koláč popraskal* ‘the cake cracked’,

(ii) [[OBJECT] → [ALL PARTS OF THE OBJECT]], e.g., *povysával gauč* ‘he vacuumed the couch’,

(iii) [[OBJECT] → [SALIENT PARTS OF THE OBJECT]], e.g., *povysával byt* ‘he vacuumed the flat’,

(iv) [[OBJECT] → [OBJECTS CONTAINED IN THE OBJECT]], e.g., *povykladal vozík* ‘he unloaded the cart’,

(v) [[OBJECT] → [OBJECTS IN THE POSSESSION OF THE OBJECT]], e.g., *pobalila syna* ‘she packed her son’.

Sub-patterns (i) – (iii) can be labelled as cases of internal distributivity, sub-patterns (iv) – (v) represent external distributivity.

Four of these sub-patterns refer to metonymic extensions within the domain “substance”:

(vi) [[SUBSTANCE] → [LIMITED AMOUNTS OF THE SUBSTANCE]], e.g., *vosk sa povylieval* ‘the wax poured out’,

(vii) [[SUBSTANCE] → [OBJECTS MADE OF THE SUBSTANCE]], e.g., *porozbíjal porcelán* ‘he broke the porcelain’,

(viii) [[SUBSTANCE] → [CONTAINERS THAT HOLD THE LIMITED AMOUNTS OF SUBSTANCE]], e. g. *poroznášal kávu na stoly* ‘he took the coffee round to tables’,

(ix) [[CONTAINER THAT HOLD THE LIMITED AMOUNTS OF SUBSTANCE] → [SUBSTANCE]], e.g., *porozlieval fľašu vína do pohárov* ‘he poured the bottle of wine into glasses’.

Sub-pattern (vi) can be labelled as cases of internal distributivity, sub-patterns (vii) – (ix) represent external distributivity.

The constructions with grammatical and lexical metonymy represent various construals. The specificity of the construal methods introduced by both constructions is related to phenomena such as focusing, i.e., “the selection of conceptual content for linguistic presentation, as well as its arrangement into [...] foreground vs. background” (Langacker 2008, p. 57), focused viewing, focus of attention, and focal prominence (introduced after Langacker, 2008).

The metonymy in Construction I (with grammatical metonymy) introduces focused viewing and focal prominence (the focus is on an individual object from a set of objects), whereas the metonymy in Construction II (with lexical metonymy) serves as a mechanism for “zooming out” from the parts to the whole.

In the construction with grammatical metonymy, one of the objects of the set of presented objects is extracted, and it makes this element available for focused viewing. Thus, this construction appears to realize pattern ONE X for a MANY X-ES.

Zooming out applies in situations when the target parts are not easily accessible, or available for construal. Unavailability may be related to the conceptual level, when the substance is in focus instead of portions of this very substance, e.g., *vosk sa povylieval* ‘the wax poured out’. As the target concept does not have a name in the language and can be only paraphrased, it is communicatively more convenient to use the expression of the whole substance. Availability may also be restricted in the given communication context, such as particular contents of a container as in *povykladal vozík* ‘he unloaded the cart’ (perceptual accessibility of bigger objects such as containers is higher than those of smaller objects such as things in the container), or products made of some substance *v rámci predvianočného upratovania poumývajte sklo* ‘as a part of pre-Christmas cleaning, wash the glass’ (this metonymy reverses the cognitive principle BOUNDED over UNBOUNDED due to the Maxim of Quantity – the name of material *sklo* ‘glass’ stands for the set of nouns denoting products *poháre* ‘glasses’ which is in accordance with the Submaxim of Quantity “Do not make your contribution more informative than is required”), cf. Huang (2019). This strategy is also used in situations when the source meaning of the whole object is conceptually more prominent, i.e. more in the focus of attention, than the target meaning of parts (in the case of aggregate objects as in *povysával gauč* ‘he vacuumed the couch’ the whole is more prominent in conceptualization). As was shown, the involved distributive verbs may trigger various metonymic readings that bring different parts into focus and activate disparate active zones of the same object (as in *povysával dom* ‘he vacuumed the house’ and *ponatieral dom* ‘he painted the house’).

The analysed sub-patterns also demonstrate that there are a number of cognitive and communicative principles which govern the default selection of the preferred metonymic vehicle. These cognitive principles pertain to the areas of human experience and perceptual selectivity (cf. Radden – Kövecses 1999).



Human experience, determined by anthropocentrism (Vaňková 2005), is reflected in the different principles of relative salience. In the case of distributive constructions, human experience is instantiated by metonymies such as HUMAN OVER NON-HUMAN (*pobalila syna*) or VISIBLE OVER NON-VISIBLE, which is reflected in metonymies CONTAINER FOR CONTENT since containers are visible, but things in the container are, as a rule, not (*povykladal vozík*).

The *foci* of perceptual selectivity is reflected in the cognitive preference of perceptually salient sources and is instantiated in metonymies such as GOOD GESTALT OVER POOR GESTALT. This principle arises out of our tendency to perceive gestalts as a whole rather than separate parts and accounts for the wide-spread use of whole objects when in fact an “active-zone” part is meant (*povysával byt*). The perceptual selectivity is also responsible for the metonymic model labelled as BOUNDED OVER UNBOUNDED when the metonymic shift CONTAINER FOR THE SUBSTANCE IN THE CONTAINER (*porozlievať fľašu*) allows us to construe an unbounded thing as bounded. Its reverse metonymy, such MATERIAL CONSTITUTING AN OBJECT FOR THE OBJECT (*porozbíjať porcelán*), is possible, yet much less productive.

The present study tried to prove that the interaction between coercion and metonymy should be acknowledged as playing an essential role in distributive constructions in the process of coercing plurality meaning of arguments selected by distributive verbs and it may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of both phenomena – distributivity as well as metonymic transfers.

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## Ked' jeden nestačí. Koercia distributívnej interpretácie na základe metonymie

### Resumé

Cieľom príspevku je analýza distributívnych slovies v slovenčine utvorených pomocou distributívneho prefixu *po*. Distributívna sémantika slovesného prvku v príslušnej konštrukcii ukladá na argumenty verba isté obmedzenia. Distributívnym slovesom sa profiluje distribúcia deja na každý člen objektu alebo subjektu, čo predpokladá plurálové kódovanie týchto argumentov. Štúdia sa venuje príkladom tých vetných štruktúr, v ktorých sa argument distributívneho slovesa vyjadruje singulárovou formou substantíva. V takýchto štruktúrach vzniká nesúlad medzi sémantickými vlastnosťami distributívneho slovesa s úlohou selektora a gramatickými vlastnosťami jeho argumentu s úlohou selektovaného prvku. Gramatický kontext tak núti používateľa jazyka reinterpretovať sémantické a/alebo formálne vlastnosti argumentu. Použitie singulárovej formy argumentu v takýchto štruktúrach možno chápať ako výsledok operácie, ktorá mení sémantiku argumentu na základe metonymického transferu. Metonymické operácie zabezpečujúce cieľovú plurálovú interpretáciu možno analyzovať v rámci rôznych metonymických modelov, zodpovedajúcich rozličným idealizovaným kognitívnym modelom. V práci analyzujeme tri podoby distributívnosti: participantskú distributívnosť (označovanú aj ako externá distributívnosť), temporálnu distributívnosť a priestorovú distributívnosť (analyzované ako prípady internej distributívnosti). Analýza ukazuje, ako vznikajú rôzne interpretácie distributivity v závislosti od metonymickej sémantiky nominálnych argumentov.

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