

THE IMPACT OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT ON THE LEXICON OF CONTEMPORARY POLISH

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It is trivial to state that language reflects social relations, especially those of power and domination. This relationship between language and social power has been of interest not only to linguists but to sociologists, anthropologists, journalists and politicians.¹ Language conveys both private opinions but also mirrors stereotypes and prejudices that are deeply rooted in society. As power and dominance have been the privilege of the male for most of time, the male point of view has been central to opinions of the world, culture, and social interaction. Male values have been perceived as the norm and the female values considered a derivative or deviation from this norm. Consequently, the language used in social interaction has been affected for the benefit of the dominant male group. The issue of gender bias in the language has been widely debated in some societies, especially those of Western Europe and the USA. In some countries, e.g. Germany or Switzerland, the debate has resulted in changes within the legislative system.

1. Present research situation

However, in Poland this issue has attracted little attention and has been of interest mainly to linguists. The aim of this paper is to present a brief overview of research on

¹ Such eminent scholars as Sapir, Whorf, Humboldt or Wittgenstein have contributed greatly to the discussion. It is generally believed that the language mirrors the social dynamics, however, it has been doubted whether the opposite can hold true, i.e. whether language can have any impact on the society. A short overview of the discussion on the relation between language and society is offered by e.g. Szpyra-Kozłowska & Kwartowska 2005, 103-104.

language gender asymmetry in Polish, and on how this area is perceived by linguists. It will include a short discussion of the attitudes towards this relatively new research field, problems with terminology involved, an analysis of ways in which the Polish language shows disparity in treating its male and female users, which will focus on feminine derivatives as they best represent language asymmetry in Polish, and have been most extensively researched. This will be followed by a presentation of some suggestions of how to redress the gender imbalance in the language, and consequently in society.

1.1 Attitudes towards language gender asymmetry

As mentioned above, there is little public discourse dedicated to the problem of the role of women in Polish society and to how this inequality in gender roles is portrayed in the language. This fact is further complicated and undermined by lack of unity in the positions voiced by Polish linguists, feminist activists or indeed women (e.g. Warchoń-Schlottmann 2007).

Scarcity of research within language gender asymmetry can be attributed to the unfavourable atmosphere surrounding this area as the topic is still perceived as not worthy of academic attention.²

Those Polish linguists who take interest in this area come to the conclusion that the Polish language tends to show andocentric features, i.e. the representation of masculine forms in the language dominates over the feminine forms. However, different positions are taken regarding the way this feature should be assessed and addressed. For example, Kwartowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005, 93) claim that the language has not yet adapted to the social, cultural and economic changes and its structures and lexis do not reflect the current social interaction or current attitudes appropriately. Gender

² The research in the area has been initiated by scholars active abroad such as Jaworski, Herbert & Nykiel-Herbert, Miemietz. Szpyra-Kozłowska & Kwartowska (2005, 113) highlight the fact that an interest in linguistic androcentrism as an academic study is often met with disbelief and surprise. This may indicate and confirm the condescending attitude towards this topic, research dedicated to it, and researchers active in this area.

asymmetry is an inherent part of the language and for this reason an active and informed language reform is advocated.

Łaziński (2005), on the other hand, maintains that extensive and detailed analysis of the syntax and lexis constitutes the prerequisite for arriving at any conclusions and subsequently for any language reforms. Current research does not provide adequate and reliable evidence that it is grammatical structures, vocabulary or the actual language use that exhibit gender bias. Considering syntactic and lexical limitations, language users seem to be content with the language elements available to them, which goes to prove that there is no real need for any changes, or that these changes would not enhance and improve communication (cf Warchoń-Schlottmann 2007, 243-244). For this reason, the language should not be interfered with by prescribing new forms and usage. No one should be “engineering” the language but rather we should wait for relevant changes in society which in turn will result in language change.

What all researchers seem to share is their insistence on distancing themselves from the feminist movement in Poland (cf Handke 1994).

1.2 Terminology

The disagreement in the research focus is further complicated by the terminology. While most linguists agree that the Polish language displays some bias towards the masculine gender, they tend to allocate different names to this phenomenon. *Linguistic sexism*, a term favoured by Szpyra-Kozłowska & Kwartowska (2005), seems inadequate to some as it may convey emotional rather than empirical attitudes (cf Łaziński 2005: 119-120).³ Therefore others choose *asymetria językowa* [language asymmetry⁴], a term first suggested in a post-conference volume edited by Anusiewicz & Handke (1994); a

³ Łaziński defines *sexism* as a personal view and a social relationship (2006, 195-196). He also points out (2006, 198) that the term indicates opinions and views of researchers who apply it (“*seksizm językowy* jest terminem wartościującym *a priori*”). For more discussion on the terminology see Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005, 13-14.

⁴ In English, this term tends to be assigned to studies on logic or on the language production (acoustics, brain work etc.). Łaziński (2005) uses also the term gender-sex asymmetry *asymetria rodzajowo-plciowa*, which rightly indicates that the asymmetry relates not only to the grammatical gender of the noun but to the natural gender / sex of the person denoted by this noun.

term that is not emotionally loaded, a term that describes a research-centred, matter-of-fact approach devoid of any non-factual sentiments. Handke (1994, 12) highlights the fact that the sociolinguistic approach she adopts does not imply support for the fight for women rights but—in line with research requirements—confines itself to interpreting language facts in an academic vein. In that way, Handke (1994) distances herself from offering any non-linguistic conclusions, or even suggesting how to redress the linguistic gender imbalance.⁵

2. Gender of Polish nouns

Polish has a three gender system, the genders are traditionally called masculine, feminine and neuter. There are also two subgenders: animate and inanimate, but there is also the category of virile nouns, i.e. nouns that denote men. Trivially, nouns denoting humans are assigned according to their semantic meaning, nouns denoting males are masculine, and nouns denoting female are feminine. However, since Polish is a highly inflected language, some argue that there are five gender classes of the Polish noun: masculine human (virile), masculine animate (higher order animals), masculine inanimate, feminine and neuter.⁶

3. Feminine derivatives

The most salient evidence of language gender asymmetry are feminine animate derivatives, nouns coined from masculine (primary) forms, that denote women. Traditionally, masculine forms are treated as primary, basic and superior (“pierwotne, podstawowe, nadrzędne” Handke 1994, 20-21; 2008, 147 and 150) which gives them hierarchical dominance over the feminine forms which in turn are subordinated to the

⁵ Although Handke (1994) points out that the research (and published papers) do not focus on both genders equally often. The situation of men acts as a background to describing the situation of women, which proves that the situation of women poses a social problem.

⁶ See Kryk-Kastovsky (1999, 730) for a more detailed analysis. She also notes conclusions by other researchers who claim that there are six or more genders in Polish.

masculine ones. Therefore a study of feminine derivatives lends itself best as an example of linguistic androcentrism.

3.1 Historical background

Polish is one of the languages that can offer two different forms for a noun denoting a person, depending on their nationality, family relation or occupation:

<i>Polak</i> (Polish man)	<i>Polka</i> (Polish woman)
<i>kuzyn</i> (male cousin)	<i>kuzynka</i> (female cousin)
<i>aktor</i> (actor)	<i>aktorka</i> (actress)

Gender has been, as Handke (2008, 147) states, strongly rooted in the language system and in its normative regulations. The special nature of this relationship results from the strong dependence of the linguistic domain on extra linguistic factors. Patriarchal systems, supported by law and religion, favoured the man. The woman, as a dependant, did not have the right to use fully the linguistic range when referring to herself.

Initially, feminine forms were mainly used for describing family relations which indicates that the woman was primarily active within the family environment. Feminine derivatives denoted mainly the position of the woman within her family (*żona, córka*) or, by extension, informed of the husband's position or profession (*hrabianka, generalowa*). The few occupations open to women included household chores and nursing professions (e.g. Borejszo 2005, 237). Lack of feminine forms, i.e. lexical gaps, for other jobs and positions can be easily explained by extra linguistic factors. For example, as there were no female doctors there was no feminine form denoting the profession (*lekarz > lekarka*). There was no pragmatic need to create obsolete forms that did not have any anchoring in the outside world. New vocabulary items, especially those relating to career and professional position (jobs, functions, roles etc.) have been formed whenever the situation has changed and a new lexical item was required.

3.2 Regressive derivation in surnames

With time women started participating more actively in the community, in other occupational contexts, outside of family home or nursing. More and more women took up paid employment within professions that had so far been reserved for men only. However, when pursuing their emancipation in 19th century, Polish women made a point of not forming new vocabulary items to describe their new position in society but rather chose to use the existing masculine forms. This regressive tendency within word building applied also to proper names.⁷ Surnames dropped their feminine suffix denoting “possessives” (cf Handke 1994; 2008, 153), belonging to a man. Instead, surnames adopted the masculine form, the form that is stripped of any reference to the marital status.⁸

The disappearance of the feminine derivation in proper names began a long time ago; Handke (1994, 25; 2008, 153-154) claims it can be traced back to the Renaissance.⁹ It shows that women wanted to be seen not through their father's or husband's profession or social standing. The regressive tendency of these lexemes can be seen as a defence mechanism of women's strategy to improve their social status and claim their independence in social, cultural and psychological/mental contexts (cf Borejszo 2005, 241). By analogy, one could therefore come to the conclusion that this “reversing,” going back to using the masculine form over the feminine one, may be the process adopted by Polish society to demonstrate the equality of the sexes. It is one view in the discussion (eg Łaziński 2006, 251-252; Warchoł-Schlottmann 2007, 243-244).

⁷ Initially, there were two kinds of suffixes used to form feminine derivatives. One denoted the wife (*Długoszowa*), the other the daughter (*Długoszówna*). A masculine form of a surname does not disclose the civil status of the man (*Kowalski* or *Długosz* can be either a single or married man). Similarly, the feminine form of the surname without the feminine suffix does not indicate the woman's marital position (*Kowalska*, *Długosz* can be either a single woman [daughter of] or a married woman). Alongside this process the word *panna* (Miss) was dropped, it disappeared from the official use and nowadays has gained a different semantic meaning.

⁸ Currently, there are very few instances when the feminine derivative is used in surnames (*Grzegorzyczkowa*, *Puzynina*). Karwatowska & Szypra-Kozłowska (2005: 27) and Łaziński (2006: 251) point out that these forms tend to be rare and are usually found in academic or artistic circles.

⁹ Łaziński (2006: 251) notes that varied forms of surnames within the same family may have posed a problem for the administration of countries between which Poland was partitioned, which may have played a part in accelerating the regressive derivation process in proper names.

3.3 Prestige

Since the feminine form has usually been derived from the masculine one, this emphasizes the fact that the masculine form is the basic one, the one that carries the basic, neuter and consequently superior value (cf Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005, 16 and 32; Handke 1994; 2008, 150, Borejszo 2005, 244). It means that the masculine form has been attributed more gravitas.

Despite extensive suffix repertoire, some masculine nominals have shown strong resistance in coining feminine forms. Two areas can be identified where such lexical gaps are most likely to occur and the reason for this is social impact.¹⁰ Łaziński (2006, 242, 253-254) observes that the professions that enjoy a very high status alongside prestige tend to be very resistant towards forming a feminine equivalent. The higher the status of the job, the less likely it is to coin a feminine form.¹¹ These relate to vocabulary describing:

- high profile functions such as *prezydent* (president), *premier* (prime minister),¹² *rektor* (university rector), *ambasador* (ambassador)
- jobs, usually manual jobs, traditionally carried out by men (*strażak* (fire fighter), *hutnik* (steel factory worker), *górnik* (miner))¹³ or for other reasons held by men only (*ksiądz* (priest))¹⁴

¹⁰ This could be seen as an instance of discrimination, had it not been for the fact that women themselves do not oppose this situation. (Handke 1994, 23)

¹¹ Cf Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005, 34) and Warchoń-Schlottmann (2007, 242). Łaziński (2005, 128-129) notes that the same situation holds true for words at the other end of the prestige scale. Words such as *wróg*, *tchórz* or *szpieg* do not have any feminine derivatives.

¹² There has been no female president in Poland yet, but there has been one female prime minister, Hanna Suchocka. Yet, the Polish language has failed to present a form to accentuate the distinction for a female prime minister or indeed any other high ranking female politician in other countries (e.g. current German Chancellor Angela Merkel). See also Kryk-Kastovsky (1999, 740-741) who offers some comments on the manner in which Ms Suchocka was addressed during her term as prime minister. Only one minister, Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka (*Pełnomocniczka Rządu ds. Równego Statusu Kobiet i Mężczyzn*), Poland's first Government Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Men and Women, insisted on being addressed as *ministra*. However, this suggestion has not been successful (Łaziński 2005, 143-144; Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005, 277; Warchoń-Schlottmann 2007, 239-240). No other female minister (or the prime minister) has used feminine forms to describe their role.

¹³ More discussion in Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005, 17-18.

¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the word *ksiądz* and its possible feminine equivalents see Łaziński 2005, 134; 2006, 229.

It is worth noting here that professions that hold low prestige and rank low on the social status scale (and which consequently are underpaid) tend to use feminine forms only, for example *pielęgniarka* (nurse), *przedszkolanka* (nursery worker), *kosmetyczka* (beautician), *niania* (nanny), *gosposia* (housekeeper) or—rather poignantly—*emancypantka* (emancipated woman). They often lack the masculine form and, when a term to denote a male person in that profession is required, a completely new lexical item is created. For example, a male person who works as a *przedszkolanka* (female nursery worker) is referred to officially as *wychowawca przedszkolny* (male nursery worker).

As mentioned earlier, the beginning of the 20th century saw it as acceptable to expand the meaning of the masculine form in the singular to refer to a woman too. The reason for this may be, as Klemensiewicz (1957, 11) points out, that many women perceive the feminine form as one carrying a pejorative meaning, a kind of stigma, a word which is tainted and inferior to its masculine equivalent. It is believed therefore that women themselves prefer to use the masculine form when describing their profession. In her article, Handke (1994, 25; 2008, 155) also observes that emancipation aspirations for equality in Poland have not led to or been accompanied by the need to produce new linguistic forms, even though the Polish language offers a wide range of linguistic features to coin feminine forms parallel to their masculine equivalents. On the contrary, the linguistic *status quo* has not been challenged.¹⁵ This proves that social constraints and other extra linguistic constraints play a vital role in the formation of a new lexis.

¹⁵ Pelcowa (2001, 265-266) agrees with this opinion noting that women do not tend to shape the surrounding environment from the point of view of gender. This seems to imply that women fully accept the roles and functions allocated to different genders, and consequently they accept the linguistic asymmetry so evidently rooted in the language itself. Compare also Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005, 31) and Handke (2008, 151). Warchoń-Schlottmann (2007, 224) concludes her analysis with the statement that the lack of feminine forms formed for new professions proves that women do not feel that they need to highlight this fact, and they do not feel that using other forms would make any difference to their professional and / or private lives. Furthermore, she observes a paradox in the fact that in the Polish language, women's emancipation manifests itself in the equal status of their access to masculine forms.

3.4 Lexical semantic asymmetries

Another reason for using masculine forms over the feminine is the fact that certain names of professions have different meanings for masculine words and their feminine equivalents:¹⁶

Sekretarz (*np. stanu*) (secretary e.g. of state; a statesman)—*sekretarka* (*np. firmy*) (secretary, an office administrator in a company)

Dyrektor (*fabryki*) (director; head of a factory)—*dyrektorka* ([tylko] *szkoły*) (headmistress)

Profesor (a university professor)—*profesorka* (a secondary school teacher)

3.5 Aesthetic constraints

Deriving feminine forms from certain masculine words (*tokarz*, *docent*, *senator*) can be perceived as artificial or clumsy, as a morphological anomaly. Terminińska (1994, 36) notes that feminine derivatives may create a humorous effect, or even offend—as in the case of the word *senatorka*. Warchoł-Schlottmann (2007, 238) asserts that the feminine form can be wrongly perceived as a colloquial expression or a dialectal alternation, and it is those connotations that discourage one from using new feminine derivatives.

Feminine derivation from masculine words ending in *-log* has been widely debated. Some linguists strongly oppose using feminine suffixes in those cases:

Socjolog > *socjolożka*¹⁷

¹⁶ A discussion illustrated with more examples is offered by Warchoł-Schlottmann (2007, 241) or Handke (2008, 151-152). Dominiak (2001, 22) observes a similar tendency in new vocabulary items. Polish word *biznesmen* has different connotations than *bizneswoman* / *biznesmenka*, where the feminine form denotes a woman who is running a small business and earns substantial but not huge income. Szypra-Kozłowska & Kwartowska (2005, 100) also observe that while some pairs denoting the man and the woman are symmetric in their dictionary definitions, they differ in their semantic collocations and consequently in the set phrases they form.

¹⁷ The word *socjolożka* scores 12,300 hits on Google, and there are eight examples of the word in the corpora of the Polish language by PWN. See also the following response by an online language counsellor: “Choć wydawnictwa poprawnościowe przestrzegają przed formą *psycholożka* i uznają ją za niepoważną, nie wahałbym się używać derywatów żeńskich od rzeczowników z cząstka *-log*. Właśnie po to, żeby nikomu nie wydawały się niepoważne. W orzeczniku można pozostawić *filologa*: “Ona jest filologiem”, gdyż płęć wynika z rodzaju podmiotu, ale w innych przypadkach forma *filolożka* jest najzupełniej do zaakceptowania. W Korpusie Języka Polskiego PWN mamy wprowadzić tylko jedną

Filolog > *filolożka*

The reason given for this is mainly aesthetic. Some claim that this form “does not sound nice”¹⁸ which is hard to accept as a valid argument for rejecting it. In fact, these forms have been more and more widely used in the media, and—even though they are not represented in all dictionaries yet—many linguists encourage their use and observe the increase in their frequency (cf Łaziński 2005, 133).

3.6 Homonymy

Another issue that is problematic in the discussion of feminine derivatives is the case of homonyms. Namely, the feminine suffix *-ka* can form a derivative that may denote a state, profession itself, tool or workplace¹⁹, diminutive form²⁰ etc. rather than a female person:

Polityk (politician) > *polityka* (politics)

Reżyser (film director) > *reżyserka* (film director's room)

Szofer > *szoferka* (lorry cab)

Some linguists are of the opinion that it is not possible to extend the meaning of such words and thus create homonymy. In their view such a situation would only cause

filolożkę, ale za to np. osiem *socjolożek* i dwadzieścia *psycholożek*. Marek Łaziński, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*” (posted on: 29th January 2007)

¹⁸ Warchoń-Schlottman (2007, 238) assumes that such a feminine derivative may sound like an incorrect or very exotic form. Łaziński (2006, 257), on the other hand, disagrees with this view: “Nie wiadomo dlaczego *psycholożka*, *socjolożka* czy *teolożka* ma brzmieć ‘śmiesznie i niepoważnie’.” He stresses that this is a question of personal taste and preference.

¹⁹ For an overview of derivative forms denoting a venue or tools derived from masculine animate nouns see Piela (2002). In her article, she notes that the suffix *-ka* is one of the most frequently used and most polymorphic (2002, 90; 95). For example, it can be used to form a name of an object used by the designate as in the names of caps / hats: *dżojekka*, *cyklistówka*, *konfederatka*. Note also *hipisówka* 'sukienka, bluzka noszona przez hipisów; w stylu hipisowskim' (...) *pilotka* 'czapka [...] noszona zwykle przez lotników, kierowców, motocyklistów, dzieci', workplace *reżyserka*, *spikerka* or the pluraria tantum of the following names of shoes: *juniorke*, *cowbojki*, *oficerki*, *saperki*, *traperki*. However, frequently in such cases these derivatives are motivated formally but there is hardly any clear semantic relation between the masculine noun and the word formed with the suffix *-ka*. See also (Kryk-Kastovsky 1999, 740).

²⁰ Warchoń-Schlottmann (2007, 238) assumes that the reluctance to use feminine forms can be explained by the fact that they come across as childish and thus not serious. Furthermore, a semantic ambiguity can inhibit the communicative message, e.g. the word *krytyczka* can denote a female critic or an irrelevant and trivial critique (i.e. diminutive of *krytyka*) that one should not worry about. However, Warchoń-Schlottmann analyses lexis in a vacuum and does not consider such factors as the context which offers ample clarification and consequently the right semantic meaning.

communication to deteriorate as it would make the meaning of the feminine form even more pejorative (as it would be equivalent to the name of an object)²¹. However, others (e.g. Łaziński 2006, 259) claim that homonymy would not generate any problems, it will not impede communication but will in fact enrich the vocabulary.

3.7 Masculine form used in a generic sense

In formal situations such as generalizations or job ads and when the referent is unspecific (their sex is undetermined and is not relevant), masculine nouns are preferred. Their function is thus to represent both genders. However, past evidence proves that the use of masculine forms as generic ones can lead to the exclusion of women and result in their invisibility in a legal or professional context (Szypra-Kozłowska & Kwartowska 2005, 97).

Masculine forms in singular and in plural can be used either to denote men only or to have a generic (universal) reference despite the fact that there are sufficient linguistic elements to denote both genders (*studenci* vs *studentki*; *sluchacze* vs *sluchaczki*; cf Karwatowska & Szypra-Kozłowska 2005, 282; Handke 2008, 151). It is generally believed that words denoting masculine professions act as generic (universal) descriptors while feminine forms are used with a particular reference, which proves that they are not full equivalents of masculine forms²². For instance, Klemesiewicz (1957, 106; cf Łaziński 2006, 265-266) illustrates this with the following examples:

- (1) *Adamska jest najlepszą lekarką w mieście.* (Ms Adamska is the best [female] doctor in town.)

²¹ “Gramatyczne zaszeregowanie kobiet to tej samej kategorii co zwierzęta czy przedmioty i wyodrębnienie oddzielnych form męskoosobowych stanowi dość jaskrawy przykład asymetrii językowej i androcentryzmu.” (Karwatowska & Szypra-Kozłowska 2005, 51), cf Handke (1994, 23-24)

²² As Karwatowska & Szypra-Kozłowska (2005, 35-37) rightly point out, the masculine form is used to discuss a general situation (*klient ma zawsze rację*) whereas the female form would add “humorous” effect to a travesty of the structure. In some cases the effect would be quite grotesque, e.g. *Wszyscy ludzie są braćmi.* > **Wszyscy ludzie są siostrami.*; *Polak potrafi.* > **Polka potrafi.* This assertion may hold true for some fixed metaphorical expressions, however there is no evidence to date to support the theory that it applies to other areas.

(2) *Adamska jest najlepszym lekarzem w mieście.* (Ms Adamska is the best [male] doctor in town.)

Sentence (1) may be ambiguous as it is not referring generally to all doctors but brings to the fore the female doctors only. Sentence (2), on the other hand, puts Adamska in the context of all doctors irrespective of their natural gender and in this way focuses on the fact of being a doctor as opposed to sentence (1) where the fact of being female is perceived as the main message, more important than the information about her profession or ranking in the professional hierarchy²³.

To avoid possible misunderstandings or ambiguities, Łaziński (2005, 138-141) asserts that the masculine form will continue to be used in its generic capacity until further research on the generic references brings adequate findings. Another reason for generic use of masculine nouns in the plural with reference to mixed gender is language economy:

(3) *Lekarze pracują na wielu etatach.*

Łaziński (2005, 128) claims that the masculine form with generic reference in sentence (3) is fully justified. The subject *lekarze* denotes a mixed sex group.

(4) *Anna jest lekarzem.*

The predicative use of the masculine noun in sentence (4), even when the person referred to is female, does not misinform or confuse, as the gender is noted in the subject. However, a feminine derivate in this example would be as informative and clearer but equally economical (no cost to the length). In such cases lexical redundancy should not be avoided, as these occurrences prove that the gender conflict should be addressed with the reference to both semantic and formal criteria.

Łaziński (2006, 198-200) questions whether any (world) view, stereotype or prejudice is embedded in the language and strongly encourages forming and using overt feminine forms. However, he goes on to claim that the generic (universal) function of

²³ Szpyra-Kozłowska & Kwartowska (2005, 95) observe that the masculine form cannot be used generically when referring to nationalities or inhabitants of towns or regions. The following would therefore be incorrect: **Ona jest Anglikiem / warszawiakiem.*

the masculine form is a way of employing language economy (i.e. of not repeating redundant information, not resorting to listing all possible forms) and is not a tool of “linguistic extermination” (“językowe unicestwienie”, Łaziński 2006, 197, 204) of the feminine form, or an expression of masculine dominance. It is just a pragmatic and economic way of using the language. Moreover, he notes an increase in the tendency to use the masculine form with words *kobieta* or *pani*, and/or surnames,²⁴ and concludes (Łaziński 2006, 248) that this strategy will probably be more likely to be adopted as it is by far more practical. He contributes to the general discussion on the issue by pointing out that it is impossible to consider eliminating the generic (universal) use of the masculine form without considering eliminating grammatical gender in the first place.

3.7.1 Rephrasing

Some linguists call for stripping the masculine form of its generic reference by replacing it with new structures or synonyms²⁵:

Tegoroczni maturzyści = osoby zdające w tym roku maturę

Naukowiec = kadra naukowa

Klient = klientela

However, this method comes with many drawbacks. First, each time one would have to search for appropriate and adequate vocabulary, whose meaning may not always overlap with the original and thus the message may be sometimes compromised. Furthermore, paraphrasing can lead to overuse of the word *osoba* [person] and make the texts more monotonous.

3.7.2 Splitting

Another suggestion is to employ splitting, i.e. using both masculine and feminine forms:

Nagrodę otrzymali tacy autorzy i autorki jak ...

²⁴ See Handke (2008, 152-153) who notes that this would make all forms clearer and more straightforward. However, the issue of syntax would still need to be addressed, e.g. *Chciałbym przedstawić pana dyrektora Wilka* but *panią dyrektor Wilk*. (cf Łaziński 2005).

²⁵ Cf Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005, 280), Łaziński (2006, 210).

The disadvantage of this is the clumsy wordiness of new phrases and therefore it is not likely to be accepted generally in the language. However, as Łaziński (2006: 210) notes, this form is found increasingly often in letters or in official greetings and address forms:

Drogie Studentki i Drodzy Studenci!

3.8 Syntactic constraints

In Polish, an obligatory gender agreement holds between the noun, adjective or attribute, pronoun and verb. This makes the Polish gender also a syntactic issue (Kryk-Kastovsky 1999, 730).

The generic use of the masculine form exemplifies the disparity between the natural and grammatical gender. Handke (2008, 150) concludes that this illustrates the different treatment of gender in the language. Masculine nouns which refer to a male maintain full inflectional and declension agreement (*Mam spotkanie z dyrektorem Nowakiem*). Masculine nouns which refer to a female, on the other hand, lose their inflectional efficiency and consequently the zero suffix becomes an indicator of the female gender (*Mam spotkanie z dyrektor Nowak*).²⁶

This syntactic pattern can support the theory that the masculine noun acts as a hyponym, where one meaning refers specifically to males, whereas another meaning refers to females. Corbett (1991, 183-184) considers such nouns “hybrid”. He asserts that the “choice of form to be used depends in part on the target type. This situation results from a conflict of the assignment rules, since the noun denotes a female (and so should be feminine) yet its declensional type is such that it should be masculine [...], it is a curious composite with one half being masculine, apparently half of a double

²⁶ Some consider such words feminine and not declinable. Łaziński (2005, 132), on the other hand, proposes that they are masculine with feminine inflection and declension *ad sensum*.

gender noun (when a male is denoted), while the other half is a hybrid noun (when a female is denoted).²⁷

Thus, the asymmetry in gender manifests itself through the dominance of the masculine form. Masculine (virile) nouns require a different declension from all other nouns, i.e. masculine animate (including animals), all feminine and neuter. However, Łaziński (2005, 141-142) concludes that the issue of grammatical gender does not hinder communication or at least it does not do so to a greater extent than the generic use of the singular, homonymy of declensional cases or the difficult syntax of numerals.

4. Language reform

From the semantic point of view, gender distinction is redundant. Feminine derivatives reduce lexical gaps but do not enhance the language. If required, information about the gender of the person can be sufficiently provided by available linguistic elements. Therefore the functional load of the difference in gender is negligible. It becomes relevant where natural gender is of importance.

One vital element to consider are social attitudes since present research proves that there is scarce social demand to form new lexical items to reflect social, economic and cultural changes. The general attitude is to simplify the language and reduce the number of lexical items. Expansion of lexis and increase in vocabulary could overload the language user and lead to blurred messages and misunderstandings. The social reluctance is strengthened by the fact that the feminist movement, the party who explicitly voices their interest to implement changes, has not offered a unified approach to the issue (cf Warchoń-Schlottmann 2007, 243). There are however voices (cf Szpyra-Kozłowska & Karwatowska 2005, 105) who offer evidence to prove that linguistic androcentrism has social and behavioural implications for our perception of the world

²⁷ As Corbett (1991) has proven for other languages, the nominal inflection is often linked to the gender classification of nouns. Membership in a specific inflectional class motivates the choice of gender. In the discussed case, the assignment of feminine gender is motivated by the lack of a case suffix. Corbett (1991, 225-260) sees it as a hybrid agreement. This means that the nouns in question show a consistent masculine agreement pattern and exceptionally allow for feminine agreement in case of a female referent—but not with all agreement targets.

and our interaction within the community. Gender bias present in language constitutes a barrier in communication, it reinforces stereotypes and encourages sexist behaviour in everyday life. Linguistic androcentrism contradicts gender equality in other domains. Therefore they call for introducing linguistic modifications. Other countries, such as Germany or the USA, have successfully managed to influence their citizens who made conscious changes in their language habits, in their choice of lexis, syntax and communicative strategies.

5. Conclusion

The issue of androcentrism in the language has just started being addressed in Poland and feminist linguistics has had its impact on the way the research results have been presented and conclusions reached. : Thanks largely to the feminist movement more and more members of the general public are aware of the relationship between the language and gender, of the “way in which language can reflect and help to maintain social attitudes towards men and women” (Crystal 1987, 46). It has made the issue of redressing imbalances in the language more conspicuous, even though it has created some controversy in the process. The attitudes shown by Polish linguists to the problem do vary, sometimes dramatically, but all in all the feminist movement has helped to identify the main areas that need to be addressed, put the issue of language asymmetry relating to gender in the context of social and cultural change and of economic transformation, offered some reflection on problems in a more global context, and put forward some practical suggestions on how the Polish language might be rid of language asymmetry.

Although Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005) are not optimistic²⁸ about the possible language change, pointing out social as well as language inherent constraints, they show in their research that the awareness of gender asymmetry in the language has been growing especially among the younger generation. Therefore even if the change is

²⁸ Although disagreeing with most of the points of the analysis, Łaziński (2006, 211 and 246) shows more optimism about language change induced by linguistic research, findings and recommendations.

not going to be imminent or if it is not going to adopt suggestions put forward by feminist activists, it is highly likely to occur. It is generally believed that language change will follow social change.

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