

International Research Networking Project
**Language and Gender: Academic Research
and Practical Implementation**

Workshop: *Language and Gender: Achieving Conceptual Clarity*

19.01.2024

Polish

Małgorzata Szajbel-Keck

Viadrina Center of Polish and Ukrainian Studies
European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)
szajbel@europa-uni.de



Polish – very brief introduction

- A West Slavic language
- A highly fusional language with relatively free word order
- Clause dependencies reflected in morphology

Polish – gender in language structure

- Obligatory grammatical gender
 - Grammatical gender reflected in inflection and derivation:
 - Classifying category for nouns and personal pronouns
 - Inflectional category for verbs, adjectives, adjectival pronouns, adjectival participles and numerals
 - Gender marking fused with other grammatical features, such as number or case
- => elimination of gender feature is close to impossible

Polish – gender in language structure

- Three genders in singular: feminine, masculine and neuter

on [he.N]

ona [she.N]

ono [it.N]

chłopiec [boy.M]

dziewczynka [girl.F]

dziecko [child.N]

- Two genders in plural:

oni [they.Mpers]

one [they.nMpers]

chłopcy [boys.Mpers]

dziewczynki [girls.nMpers]

dzieci [children.nMpers]

*Masculine singular distinguishes additionally between animate and inanimate

Polish – gender, summary

Structurally:

- Referential gender does not always align with grammatical gender
- Restricted options for the adjustment of the grammatical gender according to the referential gender
- Only male/female dichotomy for the referential gender
 - => difficulty in inclusion of non-binary and fluid identities
- Impossible to discard gender marking
 - => neutrality must be achieved through other means

Gender "revolution" in language

- Strict generic masculine
 - => invisibility of genders other than masculine, generic masculine considered gender neutral
- Adjusted generic masculine (masculine nouns may trigger feminine agreement)
 - => increased visibility of women
- Feminization of nouns (male/female only)
 - => symmetry between male and female
- Breaking with binary (inclusion all gender identities)
 - => introduction of non-binary morphology

Polish – non-binary language

- Mixing of masculine and feminine forms
- Several non-binary conventions combining derivation and inflectional morphology
- The non-binary page *zaimki.pl* lists e.g. four conventions:
 - Neutral – based on the neuter gender
 - Dukaisms – based on a post-human language invented by the novelist Jacek Dukaj in *Perfekcyjna niedoskonałość* [Ideal Imperfection]
 - Person-compounding – based mainly on the word *osoba* [person]
 - Placeholders – x * _ æ

Polish – non-binary language

NOIZZ

niebinarnx - Noizz

A collection of interviews with non-binary people, who use non-binary language

<https://noizz.pl/niebinarnx>

What's in the name?

Język neutralny (płciowo) - (gender)-neutral language

Język włączający (płeć) / inkluzywny - (gender)-inclusive language

Język nieseksistowski - non-sexist language

Język niewykluczający - non-exclusive language

What's in the name?

Język równościowy - equality language

Język wrażliwy na płeć - gender-sensitive language

What's in the name?

Język niebinarny - non-binary language

What's in the name?

język wrażliwy na płęć i inkluzywny

[gender-sensitive and inclusive language]

język wrażliwy na płęć i język włączający

[gender-sensitive and inclusive language]

język równościowy, włączający

[equality language, inclusive]

niebinarny i neutralny płciowo język

[non-binary and gender-neutral language]

Gender (noun), *genderowy* (adj.) – problematic terms in Polish

gender ≠ *płeć*

płeć [natural gender/sex, social/cultural gender]

gender ≠ *rodzaj*

rodzaj [grammatical gender]

gender = ?



A small anti-gender demonstration in Warsaw in 2021



Gender – a problematic term in Polish

By those with conservative views, **gender ideology** (pl. "**ideologia gender**") is considered an unnatural separation of biological and cultural gender. According to opponents of gender philosophy, biological sex coincides with cultural gender.

In the essentialist view they hold, biology is the "essence" of femininity or masculinity and is inseparable from cultural identity.

In such a view, there is no room for anything but femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality.

According to them, promoting gender ideology means undermining traditional values, including those of the family.

Summary

- The complexity of the adjustments that need to be made in Polish to make it more gender-neutral, gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive makes it impossible to choose one umbrella term.
- Different terms need to be used to better reflect the intentions - inclusion, neutrality, symmetry, sensitivity.
- The terms with negation (non-sexist, non-exclusive) are rather used to clarify what is meant with the more general terms.

Summary

- In order to reflect the non-binary and fluid gender in morphology, old forms need to be reinterpreted and new ones introduced. Therefore, it makes sense to give this register/style its own label - non-binary.

Summary

- The introduction of the term "gender" into the Polish language had the potential of disambiguating between natural gender and social/cultural gender.
- However, the term was hijacked by conservative opponents of the theory of social gender.
- Gender came to mean, in a negative way, anything culturally progressive and socially at odds with the traditionalist view of the person and the family.

Selected references

- Chmura-Rutkowska, I., and J. Szpyra-Kozłowska. 2022. *Nierówność płci w języku: Poradnik dla nauczycielek i nauczycieli szkół m.st. Warszawy*. Warszawa: Warszawskie Centrum Innowacji Edukacyjno-Społecznych i Szkoleń; Urząd m.st. Warszawy. Biuro Edukacji.
- Krysiak, P., and A. Małocha-Krupa. 2020. “Feminatywum, Feminatyw, Nazwa Żeńska, Żeńska Końcówka - Problemy Terminologiczne.” *Oblicza Komunikacji* 12:229–38. <https://doi.org/10.19195/2083-5345.12.15>.
- Małocha-Krupa, A. 2018. *Feminatywum w uwikłaniach językowo-kulturowych*. Wrocław: Atut.
- Szajbel-Keck, M. in press. “Opposition Discourse in Public Debate on Gender-Inclusive Language in Poland”
- Szpyra-Kozłowska, J. 2023. “Pielęgniarka ery cyfrowej. Feminatywy w funkcji generycznej.” *Język Polski* 103 (1). <https://doi.org/10.31286/JP.00152>.
- Szpyra-Kozłowska, J. 2021. *"Nianiek", "ministra" i "japonki": Eseje o języku i płci*. Kraków: Universitas.
- For more - ask.