

## The Feminisation of Russian and Polish A Feminist Idea? Or a Real Tendency in Language?

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*This article tackles the question whether and to what extent one can speak of a rising tendency of feminisation of the Russian and Polish language today. It is highly visible today that both languages, Russian and Polish contain more and more elements and linguistic forms which make us speak of a tendency to feminise these languages. However, it is also possible to assume that the significant use of the very different feminine forms is only the result of a feminist idea, but it is not the result or the beginning of a change in and of language. This article does not intend to examine the ways in which Russian and Polish are feminised. This article is dedicated to the question of why a feminisation of language can be observed in general, why feminine forms penetrate languages at all and are regarded as relevant for a language, why feminine forms are used and which strategies of feminisation are noticed.*

Key words — linguistic tendencies in Russian and Polish, feminisation of language, gender linguistics, motion suffixes, person nouns, language ideologies.

Currently, evidence of linguistic feminisation can be observed increasingly in many Slavonic languages. This feminisation is characterised by a growing usage of feminine forms in the broadest sense. As a trend, feminisation is the object of heightened interest and feminine forms have moved to the centre of attention. Numerous academic works have examined the level which feminisation has reached in individual Slavonic languages and the forms feminisation has adopted in these languages. Traditionally, the main focus of academic interest is on motion suffixes or, more specifically, the usage of motion suffixes and the formation of feminine personal designations by means of such suffixes but also by means of other linguistic means and methods of word formation, in order to guarantee the visibility of women and femininity in the area of personal designations (cf. e.g. for Slovene Doleschal 2015, Štumberger 2015, for Croatian Kersten-Pejanić 2015, for Serbian Rajilić 2015, for Czech Valdová 2002). However, feminisation may not be reduced to feminine personal designations and the usage of motion suffixes. Obviously, the feminisation of language comprises also grammatical phenomena, which are meant to ensure the visibility of women and femininity in and through language (e.g. Corbett 2006, 1979). As to grammar and word formation, all phenomena which serve the purpose of making women and femininity visible in and through language are summed up under the term *feminine forms* in this article.

For several decades, there has been a discourse – scientific as well as public – in Western European

societies about the necessity of feminising language in order to make women explicitly visible, a discourse which has led to actual linguistic processes of feminisation. Today, this discourse has reached Poland and Russia, too. While the debates concerning feminisation in both countries have by no means attained the same dimension as in Western Europe (cf. Łaziński 2015 for Polish), and while the active usage of feminine word forms in contemporary Polish and Russian cannot be compared with the (partially mandatory) usage of feminine forms in German and English, for instance, a growing frequency of feminine forms can be registered in the Polish and Russian languages – in journalistic texts, in particular. Inter alia, this is reflected by the usage of motion suffixes for the creation of feminine personal designations, a characteristic and crucial feature for the feminisation of a language and an important signal for gender-neutral language use. Yet, feminine pronouns, verb forms and adjectives for maintaining feminine congruence are used increasingly often in those cases where the designated person is female but where the personal designation alone insufficiently reflects that person's gender. Also, new phenomena can be noticed in this area. There is evidence of cases in which the actual sex of a person takes precedence over the grammatical gender of the respective personal designation or the grammatical norm respectively, for example in interrogative sentences with *kto*. More attention should be paid to this observation in the future.

This article is neither meant to examine the ways in which languages are feminised nor to provide evidence for such feminisation. Such an undertaking would require more detailed analyses, which would support initial observations and would thus justify the hypothesis stipulating the existence of a trend of feminisation. Instead, this article is dedicated to the question of why a feminisation of language can be observed in general, why feminine forms penetrate languages at all and are regarded as relevant for a language, why feminine forms are (or have to be) used, which strategies of feminisation are (or can be) noticed or (must be) created and what the growing usage of feminine forms says about our *weltanschauung* and our linguistic awareness. Because if we accept that there is a rise in the usage of feminine forms in a language, then this rise must be accompanied by a certain knowledge and awareness of language. Above all, there must be a certain sociocultural and

gender-related awareness which enable speakers to use feminine forms in no matter what way and which underlines the importance of using such forms.

The usage of feminine forms and the spread of the trend of linguistic feminisation potentially resulting from it are certainly rooted in ideology. However, this means in no way – and this must be stressed – that avoiding feminine forms and the resistance against the tendency towards feminisation is not motivated by ideology. All forms of language usage and language description are based on ideologies. These ideologies are different, however, with the difference resulting from interpretations, opinions, and above all worldviews. Consequently, it is not permissible to assert that the usage of feminine forms is motivated by ideologies and that gender studies as a whole is an ideological project and to label it therefore as essentially feminist (cf. Łaziński 2015). Such a verdict on language usage and the character of such language criticism are also influenced by ideology and thus by no means neutral. However, this fact is often willfully ignored.

Independent of its form, language usage is always based on ideology and highlights the ideologies that are represented by a speaker and that are predominant in a language community. As “evaluative beliefs” (Dijk 1998b), ideologies are subjective *convictions and beliefs*, which reside in the unconscious, *ideas, opinions* or *thinking*, which are opposed to the real truth (Cameron: 2003: 447). It is precisely due to their being hidden in the unconscious that we often fail to perceive ideologies as such. Rather, we regard them as universal, self-evident, logical, natural, and normal, which is the case when the majority of speakers in a sociocultural community adhere to the same ideology (Dijk 1998a: 15).

Ideologies are based on our worldview. They produce a subjective reality that must be primarily seen as imaginary, a form of illusion (cf. Mills 1997: 32). Ideologies that are established and form parts of our lives show the ways in which we construct our reality, experience it, and reproduce it continuously (Dijk 1998a: 8). Moreover, ideologies reveal our values. They highlight that which is right, permitted, and appropriate and that which is wrong, forbidden, and inappropriate.

For decades, scholars have pointed out that language is a medium shaped by androcentrism, the use of which reflects established patriarchal structures within society and the forms and functions of which force speakers within a community to continuously adopt male perspectives. This is also true for women who have no choice but to submit to androcentric structures. As a consequence, women are rendered invisible by language because manhood and thus the masculine often dominate in languages. Social and thus linguistic femininity is often considered as a deviation. As a consequence, it is not accepted as a universally valid alternative. Proponents of this linguistic strategy frequently argue that the (generic) masculine includes women and that (generic) masculine forms can also be used in a feminine context, whereas feminine forms can only refer to women which

consequently limit their usage. Recently, however, numerous experiments have shown that the usage of masculine (generic) forms is not as inclusive as this line of argumentation would like to have it. Indeed, there is evidence that users of a language do not always infer from masculine forms that women are included. Therefore, it is justified to doubt the generally propagated idea that the masculine can represent both genders generically.

In the context of language and function, factors such as (the construction of) identity, (the construction of) reality and ideologies have to be considered in the respective discussion. As a start, we need to ask the question of what arguments justify the masculine's classification as the universal gender or if the masculine can still be considered as a universal gender today and if this classification does justice to the requirements of our reality. Considering this provokes another question: is it really possible to still make a case against the use of feminine word forms, especially in those cases where it is evident that we are dealing with a feminine subject, entity, or person?

Teun A. van Dijk regards ideologies as social representations and sociocognitive patterns (Dijk 1998a, 1995). This is why different sociocultures and societies produce different ideologies. Ideologies may even differ within a society: they are shared by groups within a society, can dominate discourses and win majorities or may be restricted to specific communities. There are some fine examples for this phenomenon in the context of gender: according to majority opinion, masculine forms can also encompass women. Additionally, the concept that masculine word forms can refer to women is widely accepted. This is justified by arguing that masculine personal designations emphasise a person's profession or position and not their gender (or that the gender did not need to be emphasised in the first place). Unfortunately, this view fails to consider the fact that the – alleged – generic masculine does not only represent the professions or positions of men. It is also the linguistic variant used to represent the adequate – masculine – gender of men, whereas the adequate gender for women – and consequently a substantial part of their identity – is not considered at all. From this, it follows that masculine forms are usually rather associated with men – and that the masculine generic falls short of being the neutral all-inclusive default option some would like it to be.

There is more to this issue, though. Not only do we observe a growing awareness of changing realities, today. Language awareness is also beginning to change as well as the awareness that language is an essential element of our reality. This is why there is a rising criticism of the generic masculine which questions its capacity to act as a universal stand-in for both genders.

This modern criticism of the generic masculine is certainly the merit of feminist and emancipatory movements and of the activism motivated by feminism. Today, however, the notion that language reflects social values, ideas, and norms and that in doing so it helps

directly to maintain patriarchal and androcentric power structures has become part of a wider consensus which has spread beyond feminist circles into society at large. Language is regarded as an instrument of power and especially as a medium that reveals relations of power (Gräbel 1991, Reiss 2007) and hierarchies, inequalities and discrimination (Philips 2003, Pishwa/Schulze 2014, cf. Coates/Cameron 1988, Lakoff 1990, Talbot 2003). From this point of view, language serves “as a place of oppression” (Reiss 2007: 64). It is important to note that on its own language neither discriminates against people nor oppresses them as language *per se* does not hold power and is incapable of exercising power. Only the manipulation of language – by means of systematisation and the application of evaluative criteria and directives for usage on the one hand, and language usage itself on the other hand – turns language into an instrument of discrimination. In the context of gender, language is conceptualised as a medium which renders everything that is not masculine – women in particular – invisible and which in doing so discriminates against “non-men”, marginalises and excludes them (Heinrich et al. 2008). A distinctive awareness for a non-sexist use of language has not yet fully developed in the Polish and Russian societies to this date. However, some isolated directives<sup>3</sup> for gender-neutral language have appeared – for example for Polish. These directives aim at sensitising for sexist and discriminatory language. They point out that the generic masculine form has been established as the norm for referring to persons or groups of an unspecified gender or to mixed-gender groups. Yet, they also say that norms can be altered (Glück 2000: 62). The norm that the generic masculine is gender-neutral and gender-inclusive is based on ideologies. In each particular case, that which is defined or regarded as the norm is the result of discourse-induced construct. Hence, a norm can be viewed as the direct implementation of ideological beliefs. Norms are not natural phenomena. Norms are created by institutionalised authorities within a society and according to the principle of representativeness, which means that a norm represents the normal case and predominant phenomena (Dijk 2000: 35, 1998a: 15). In this context, it does not matter that we may not be able to discern a causal relationship between reality and the norm at hand. The ideology behind a certain norm only exhibits a “fictitious relationship with true reality” (Althusser 2008: 41), yet, it is considered to be “reality” and it is hence portrayed as such.

The rise of feminine word forms in Polish and Russian has not gone unnoticed by the public and academia. Indeed, it has sparked numerous debates. It is a striking

<sup>3</sup> A noteworthy example for this are the directives of the Academia Gender of Lower Silesia which can be found online at: [www.umwd.dolnyslask.pl/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Organizacja\\_pozarzadowe/Dolnoslaska\\_Akademia\\_Gender-Poradnik\\_Row\\_nosciowy\\_F-Grejpfirut.pdf](http://www.umwd.dolnyslask.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/Organizacja_pozarzadowe/Dolnoslaska_Akademia_Gender-Poradnik_Row_nosciowy_F-Grejpfirut.pdf) as well as at: [www.akademia\\_gender.cba.pl/gm6.html](http://www.akademia_gender.cba.pl/gm6.html) and of the Polish Society for anti-discrimination law, online at: [www.ptpa.org.pl](http://www.ptpa.org.pl) [all last accessed 28.03.2017].

feature of these debates that they are the stage of an – in parts intense – aversion to the tendency of feminisation. This is all the more striking because the incidence of feminine forms is increasing, in particular in Polish. Furthermore, feminine forms, especially feminine personal designations, comply with the rules of word formation and are fit for their particular purpose. This is why linguists agree that recent *feminativa* such as *ministra*, *premiera*, *psycholożka*, *dyrektorka* or *rektorka* are correct.

The dictionary of Polish feminativa (*Słownik nazw żeńskich polszczyzny*) by Małocha-Krupa (2015) highlights the fact that feminativa are not a novelty in the Polish language. They have largely existed for several decades or even centuries (cf. the works by Worbs et al. 2007 and by Jadacka 2001 which also include and discuss feminativa). According to Małocha-Krupa, the formation of feminativa is not the result of recent feminist or emancipatory interventions but based on purely functional grounds. Its main objective is to reflect our reality adequately (e.g. *blokerka*, *bodypainterka*, *copywriterka*, *dietoterapeutka*, *designerka*, *freelancerka*, *lobbystka*, *pornografka*, *researcherka*, *shopperka*, *singielka*, *squatterka*, *surferka*).

The results of my own (albeit preliminary and superficial) research tie in seamlessly with these findings. I have found the gradual spread of feminine personal designations ending with *-lożka* since 2004 particularly striking. An undifferentiated online search for the lexeme *psycholożka*, for example, produces more than 68,000 entries. The NKJP contains 83 entries in total. In the online edition of *Słownik języka polskiego*, the lexeme is marked as neutral. Overall, a search for feminativa ending with *-lożka* in the NKJP reveals 289 entries, including *antropolożka*, *archeolożka*, *astrolożka*, *dermatolożka*, *ekolożka* and *socjolożka*.

#### EXAMPLES

Amerykańska **psycholożka** Linda Tropp poprosiła studentów jednego z tamtejszych uniwersytetów o wyobrażenie sobie spotkania z ludźmi pochodzącymi z różnych grup etnicznych oraz określenie, na ile mogliby oni zaufać tym osobom. (Polityka 27.10.2007, from: NKJP)

**Archeolożka** amerykańska zaczęła swoją pracę od segregowania "żetonów" ( "tokens" ) z Uruk (Gazeta Wyborcza 15.05.1998, from: NKJP)

The search engine Google also produces a vast body of evidence for the use of *rektorka*, even though the NKJP contains only seven entries.

#### EXAMPLE

[...] oświadczyła głośno Margarita Laux-Antille, **rektorka** akademii magicznej (Chrzest ognia 1996, from: NKJP)

An online search for *profesor* delivers thousands of results. The NKJP contains 226 references for the word, many of them in the sense of ‘university professor’.

## EXAMPLE

Astrid Lindgren – pisała **profesorka** historii literatury Uniwersytetu Sztokholmskiego Boel Westin – rzuciła wyzwanie dziecięcej książce tamtego okresu i jej dydaktycznie nacechowanemu pogładowi na dziecko jako na formowalny materiał. (Polityka Online 17.11.2007, from: NKJP)

Compare this with selected Russian feminine personal designations:

## EXAMPLE

А мне **психологиня** в Интернах понравилась... хохлушка, по моемому... (http://blog.fontanka.ru/posts/86868)

В «Наваждении Люмаса» молодая **филологиня** открывает существование необъяснимых пространственно-временных связей. (Russkij Reporter 34/2011, from: NKRJ)

В самом начале с коротким вступлением выступила **ректорша** Университета, рассыпавшись в благодарностях за новое оборудование, беспроводной доступ и другую помощь суперкорпорации. (http://itnews.spb.ru/a0/ru/archive/view.html?i=428&p=0)

and:

Подскажите, пожалуйста, если кто готовила дома, какая эффективность?<sup>4</sup>

Девочки, если кто была на узи на седьмой день задержки, помогите пожалуйста.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure: the frequency of feminine forms in Russian and Polish is nowhere close to the levels of other languages. However, a latent to significant rise of feminine forms can be observed in general as demonstrated by findings from the internet. For more than a decade, the usage of feminine forms, especially in Polish, has become more frequent across text types and across communities of speakers. Feminativa have started to appear in press releases and in texts which appear in the social media. Mono- and bilingual dictionaries for Polish have also begun to register feminativa increasingly. In contrast to this, usage of feminativa in Russian is catching on rather slowly. Nevertheless, it is justified to speak of a tendency here – which means that we will have to discuss how to deal with this tendency – not least on the level of lexicography.

<sup>4</sup> Online at: <http://otvet.mail.ru/question/90950291> [last accessed 28.03.2017].

<sup>5</sup> Online at: <http://otvet.mail.ru/question/27697237> [last accessed 28.03.2017].

We need to see more studies concerning the use of feminativa in the future. This includes the factors which create a need for the use of feminine verb forms. Cases of congruence between nouns and feminine forms of adjectives are no longer rare – a phenomenon which can be observed for classifying adjectives in Russian (cf. *zubnaja vrač*).

As to feminisation, novelties and developments can be observed in Russian and Polish which invite gender linguists to find new insights and start new discussions which will enrich the field of Slavonic gender linguistics. However, the notion that the use of feminine forms is exclusively motivated by feminist ideas should be laid to rest. Their increasing usage clearly contradicts this outdated theory.

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## Gender issues in language and translation: English ↔ Ukrainian

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*The paper deals with a sociolinguistic issues of gender. A translation approach has been employed to compare gender in English and Ukrainian languages, cultural traditions and contexts. Ways of avoiding sexism have been suggested.*

Key words — gender, avoiding sexism, translation, intercultural communication, English/Ukrainian parallels.

### I. Introduction

Recently, gender issues and gender studies have become a target of intensive socio-cultural research. Sex is considered a biological notion while gender is viewed from a socio-cultural perspective. Gender research reflects social dynamics on male-female relations. In male-dominated world sexism is a belief that one sex is not as good, clever etc as the other, especially when it results in unfair treatment of women by men.

Tannen D. [8] following Lakoff R. joined the growing dialogue on gender and language because the risk of ignoring differences is greater than the danger of naming them. She claimed that there are gender differences in ways of speaking and we need to identify and understand them. Tannen D. recognizes talk between men and women as cross-cultural communication.

### II. Gender and Language

In the era of opening opportunity, women are beginning to move into position of authority. Democratic society denies any kind of discrimination, sex discrimination included. Language reflects social changes. Words discriminating against a person because of his/her sex are called sexist words. Although this form of discrimination can be against men, most instances involve discriminating women. The reason is that many of our words suggest male superiority. Our language developed in a male-dominated society. From this perspective, the situation in Ukraine is much more problematic as compared to the U.S. and the UK [1]. A common tendency around the civilized world is to avoid sexist words.

### III. Ways of avoiding sexism in language

Suggestions for avoiding some of the more troublesome sexist words are given below in Lesikar's Basic Business Communication [4].

Perhaps the most troublesome sexist words are the masculine pronouns (*he, his, him*) when they are used to refer to both sexes, as in this example: "The typical State

University student eats his lunch at the cafeteria." Assuming that State is coeducational, the use of *his* suggests male supremacy. Historically, of course, the word *his* has been classified as generic – that is, it can refer to both sexes. But many modern-day businesspeople do not agree and are offended by the use of the masculine pronoun in this way.

You can avoid the use of the masculine pronoun in three ways. First, you can reword the sentence to eliminate the offending word. Thus, the illustration above could be reworded as follows: "The typical State University student eats lunch at the cafeteria". Here are other examples:

1. Sexist: When an unauthorized employee enters the security area, he is subject to dismissal

Non-sexist: An employee who enters the security area is subject to dismissal.

2. Sexist: When a customer needs service, it is his right to ask for it.

Non-sexist: A customer who needs service has the right to ask for it.

A second way to avoid sexist use of *he, his, him* is to substitute any of a number of neutral expressions. The most common are *he or she, he/she, s/he, you, one* and *person*.

1. When an unauthorized employee enters the security area, he/she is subject to dismissal

2. When service is needed, one has the right to ask for it

A third way to avoid sexist use of the masculine pronoun is to make the reference plural. Fortunately, English has plural pronouns (*their, them, they*) that refer to both sexes:

1. When unauthorized employees enter the security area, they are subject to dismissal

2. When customers need service, they have the right to ask for it.

Many of English words are masculine even if they do not refer exclusively to men. Take *chairman*, for example. This word can refer to both sexes. But more appropriate and less offensive substitutes are *chairperson, chair* and *moderator*. Similarly, *salesman* suggests a