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THE FUNCTIONING OF *FEMINATIVUM* IN THE POLISH LINGUISTIC REALITY. A CASE STUDY

The subject of this paper is the so-called *Feminativum* issue, which is presented in descriptive terms. The term covers, for instance, female professional names and this paper examines various *Feminativa*, their perception by society, and the way they are perceived in spoken and written language. The paper includes a historical overview and is intended as an introduction to further research. The purpose of the paper is to highlight a problem concerning linguistics and to point out the problematic usage and acceptance of *feminativum* in speech and daily use – even in forms of social media. Stereotypes, not only of the linguistic kind, can function in specific well-established manners that can often turn complex social phenomena into simple and shallow categories, creating a very specific reality. The main aim is to show two areas that *feminativum* can cause areas of contention, one with functioning *feminativum* and one without. Based on a partial analysis, this paper concludes with a number of diagnoses regarding feminization (or lack of it) and a draft of the state of female forms in contemporary general Polish. This leads to the open question of whether we are able to free ourselves from discrimination based on sex. In reality, I believe that there is still no answer to that question.

Keywords: *feminativum*, woman, man, performed profession, social media.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminativum is an extremely current topic in Polish linguistic discourse, which arouses many intense emotions and frequently causes emotional discussions. The issue is basically related to female naming of occupations, including female titles (Małocha-Krupa, 2013). Additionally, nowadays not only linguists but also ordinary language users are engaged in the dispute.

The relationship between language and gender, which is the topic of the paper, is visible on various levels, with language and gender intensifying each other with different force. The relation is connected to language itself as well as language styles or simply the way of communication.

I will try to introduce and discuss that dependence, and generally the attitude to female profession names, with regard to social background. Additionally, attention will be drawn to how ideologies influence changes in the use female expressions (Woźniak, 2014).

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2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

At the beginning it should be noted that the issue of feminine names is not a completely new topic. The problem was raised over one hundred years ago and it seems that it will not be resolved soon. In 1931, Ignacy Wieniewski noticed the emergence of the issue of feminine names of professions in the Polish language, and until now, over eighty years later, it still has not been resolved:

The small social revolution which took place in relation to the acquisition by women of positions previously occupied only by men found Polish language completely unprepared. It created a linguistic confusion from which we have not found a way to escape yet (Wieniewski, 1931).

Female name endings – colloquially called formats, which are created by *Feminativum*, are also a topic which is covered by media. For instance, it is worth to recall the heated debate initiated by Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, who in 2004 used the form *ministra* (Łaziński, 2006). In contrast, I will mention Krystyna Pawłowicz's statement. Referring to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, she was seriously outraged when others addressed her as "posłanko", claiming that the Constitution mentions only the masculine name for 'deputy' – "poseł", and not "poseł" and the feminine "posłanka" (in an interview with Jarosław Kuźniar, 2013).

In 2011, Katarzyna Hołojda conducted a survey which showed that more than half of female respondents participating in it expressed the following belief: they do not feel the need to use feminine naming of occupations in everyday life². The researcher observes that women found *Feminativum* rather ridiculous and infantile than serious (Hołojda, 2013). In accordance with the Polish language development principles, new words simply have to "settle in" (Markowski, 2005). Katarzyna Hołojda, in her analysis of the research which she made, notes that the issues came from ignorance and uncertainty in the naming creation and additionally were connected with the sense of uncertain linguistic correctness. According to the research, many women also believe that masculine forms of occupation names make them feel higher in the hierarchy:

Many women still do not only accept this state of affairs, but also believe that using masculine naming ennobles them. Anyhow, observing trends in this area, for instance discussions on internet forums, we can see that more and more people is voting for equality in male and female naming forms. Why is this matter relevant? Language does not only reflect reality but also influences it. Since names like prezydent, profesor, inżynier (president, professor, engineer) function only in the masculine, women in these positions are still woman presidents, woman professors- and woman engineers. It is a deviation from the norm but not a norm itself. It is likely that this dispute will continue for many years, but I think the result can be only one (Wierzchoń, see: Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018).

Doubts related to the creation of feminine names of professions appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, and they were summed up by Klemensiewicz (Klemensiewicz, 1957). The language and gender dispute continues. After World War II and the

² <http://www.akademiagender.cba.pl/gm3.html> [access: 3.01.2020].

growth of “masculinization of language thinking” (Karwatowska, Szpyra 2005), the trend started to be reversed. In 1957 the Polish Language Culture Committee PAN was about to resolve the issue of *Feminativum* and the related disputes (Klemensiewicz, 1957). In 1971, the authors of *Kultura języka polskiego* made a statement in relation to feminine names. They wrote:

The usage of male forms for women is permissible and correct in all cases where female naming forms have no tradition and when their creation is impossible or is leading to conflict with stylistic or tradition factors. On the other hand, it is completely wrong and not deserving for normative acceptance to deal in the same way with lexical units that have a long tradition in functioning in the language and replace them with male ones (Buttler, Kurkowska, Satkiewicz, 1971).

The 21st century brings an increased interest in female forms of occupation naming. Marek Łaziński, mentioned earlier, notices the type and gender asymmetry in the Polish language. It is completely not surprising that the language itself and its grammatical form is gender related. The author of the monograph *O panach i paniach. Polskie rzeczowniki tytułowe i ich asymetria rodzajowo-płciowa* analyzes the matter of the so-called universality of the male form and its linguistically gender stereotyping (Łaziński, 2006). Type-gender asymmetry is a pure sexism manifestation – this is a conclusion by the authors of *Lingwistyki płci. Ona i on w języku polskim*. The entire issue is mostly connected with gender stereotypes which show women in a disadvantageous way and in an unfavorable light.

In 2012, the Polish language Council announced in their official statement a view on media discussion around the afore-mentioned feminine form *ministra*. Linguists proposed to avoid controversial forms and use before a male occupation name the TA exponent, like ‘ta premier’, ‘ta socjolog’ (this prime minister, this sociologist)³, finally without giving any specific language guidelines:

However, (...) female forms of occupations and titles are system-wise approved. If for most of particular job names and titles they are not commonly used yet, it is because they cause negative reactions in the case of most people who speak Polish. This matter can be changed if society will be convinced that feminine names of the above-mentioned positions, and the use of them will testify to the equality in the field of services provided and functions held.

Nothing can be imposed on a live language, the adoption of legal regulations in this area will not result in Polish people starting to use forms like *inżyniera* or *inżynierka*, *inżyniera*, *inżynierka*, *ministra* or *ministerka*, *maszynistka pociągu*, *sekretarza stanu* or any other similar ones⁴.

Three years later, in 2015, *Słownik nazw żeńskich polszczyzny* was published. Over 2100 entries were cataloged and stored in it. The authors emphasize the fact that it is only the

³ http://www.rjp.pan.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1359:stanowisko-rady-zyka-polskiego-w-sprawie-eskich-form-nazw-zawodow-i-tytuow [access: 28.12.2019].

⁴ http://www.rjp.pan.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1359:stanowisko-rady-zyka-polskiego-w-sprawie-eskich-form-nazw-zawodow-i-tytuow [access: 28.12.2019].

first edition of it. Anyhow, Łaziński is quite critical to this publication, primarily noting the chaos and lack of masculine basis of word formation.

3. MODERN FUNCTIONING OF THE *FEMINATIVUM* – RESEARCH OVERVIEW

As far as the issues of gender and grammatical gender, there is no denying the fact that the concept of gender in the Polish language is mostly related to the opposition between femininity and masculinity, i.e. a purely biological difference. The grammatical type and its category are connected to the natural type of the described object. In recent years researchers who have questioned the idea of grammatical gender emphasized the conventionality of it, which seems to be reasonable when talking about entities of inanimate nature (Nowosad-Bakalarczyk, 2009). In the case of personal names and animal naming this cannot be accepted.

Usage of female job naming is not a currently dominating tendency. Feminine names, as the above mentioned survey showed, are often associated negatively. They evoke negative and even sexist ideas. *Pilotka* (woman-pilot) is a hat, *bokserka* (woman-boxer) is just a kind of a T-shirt. *sekretarka* (woman-secretary) is an attractive assistant of a boss, on the other hand, *sekretarz* (man-secretary) is a very prestigious clerk. In social media⁵ women themselves admit that some of *Feminativa* sound very artificial and even contemptuously, especially in case of senior kinds of jobs, which they expose⁶. Additionally, the user of the internet, in search of female name counterparts for some profession names created various neologisms, which they found ridiculous and not very serious. Some examples are:

inżynier – inżyniera, inżynielozka, inżynierzyca, marynarz – marynarka, marynolozka, gość – gościni, gościowa, weterynarz – weterynarka, kierowca – kierowczyni, kierownicza, kierownica, stolarz – stolarka, spawacz – spawarka, cukiernik – cukierniczka, żołnierz – żołnierka, kominiarz – kominiarka, blacharz – blacharka, mechanik – mechaniczka, chirurg – chirurga, chirurgzka, chirurgini, grabarz – grabarka, grabarczyni, budowlanec – budowlanka, budownica⁷. However, to fully liberate women, liberation must also appear in the language (Humm, 1993), not only in the media, which are significantly directing our way of thinking about various issues to specific paths (Balczyńska-Kosman, 2010).

Semantic shifts play an important role in the whole process, which Joanna Satół-Staškowiak draws attention to, saying that:

There is often a situation where semantic shifts take place. As a result of that, the male form means something completely different than its formal female counterpart, for instance: *maszynista* (train driver) – *maszynistka* (women who

⁵ Following Facebook profile [facetpo40.pl](https://www.facebook.com/facetpo40)

⁶ Here collected statements of women who took part in the discussion about names of female professions: <https://www.facebook.com/facetpo40.pl/wolne-mysli/psycholozka-lekarka-profesorka-nasi-czytelnicy-zabieraja-glos-w-sprawie-zenskich-form-nazw-zawodow/> [access: 28.12.2019].

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/facetpo40.pl/wolne-mysli/psycholozka-lekarka-profesorka-nasi-czytelnicy-zabieraja-glos-w-sprawie-zenskich-form-nazw-zawodow/> [access: 28.12.2019].

types a text using a typerwriter), *kominiarz* (chimney-sweep) – *kominiarka* (kind of a hat), *ciężarowiec* (weightlifter) – *ciężarówka* (truck), *dziekan* (dean) – *dziekanka* (type of vacation), *dyplomata* (diplomat) – *dyplomatką* (kind of a bag), *magister* (master) – *magisterka* (master thesis), *marynarz* (sailor) – *marynarka* (jacket) or *pilot* – *pilotka* (kind of a cap), *reżyser* (director) – *reżyserka* (director's cabin).

The semantic difference between male and female forms which relate to a particular profession is decisive in choosing the male form as a neutral and more appropriate one for its designation. It does not happen in Polish that a feminine name is a “neutral” form for an occupation performed by men (Satoła-Staśkowiak, 2018).

An perfect example of the domination of male forms is a doctor's profession⁸. *Lekarz* (doctor) applies to both men and women. Using this male term we refer to either a man or a woman, where the occupation is significantly dominated by men. We very rarely hear the term *lekarzka* (female doctor).

Idziemy do lekarza – we go to a doctor (man), korzystamy z pomocy lekarza – we use doctor's (man's) help, stosujemy się do zaleceń lekarza – we follow the doctor's (man's) instructions. However, the situation is slightly different.

The current data as of 31/10/2019 kept by *Centralny Rejestr lekarzy RP* belonging to *Naczelna Rada Lekarska* present an interesting summary:

Naczelna Izba Strona Lekarska 1 / 1 w Warszawie

Numerical list of doctors and dentists by age, sex and professional title
taking into account the division into practicing and non-practicing doctors

Gender - age range (yearly)	Number of all current members of the chamber				Number of doctors and medicine. practicing dentists			
	Doctors	Dentists	PWZ	TOTAL	Doctors	Dentists	PWZ	TOTAL
Men in age from [no limit] to 25	795	275	0	1070	795	275	0	1070
Men in age from 26 to 30	5724	1179	6	6909	5704	1177	6	6887
Men in age from 31 to 35	5380	1321	13	6714	5350	1313	13	6676
Men in age from 36 to 40	4143	1104	30	5277	4109	1099	29	5237
Men in age from 41 to 45	4664	1072	53	5789	4592	1065	44	5701
Men in age from 46 to 50	6483	1182	53	7718	6320	1178	40	7538
Men in age from 51 to 55	7952	968	63	8983	7723	973	45	8741
Men in age from 56 to 60	6884	717	34	7635	6729	705	24	7458
Men in age from 61 to 65	6944	702	21	7667	6758	682	18	7458
Men in age from 66 to 70	4658	416	17	5091	4383	393	9	4785
Men in age from 71 to [no limit]	8759	816	47	9622	8268	483	25	8776
Men in total:	62386	9752	337	72475	58731	9343	253	68327
Women in age from [no limit] to 25	1269	782	0	2051	1269	781	0	2050
Women in age from 26 to 30	10123	3322	5	13450	10098	3305	5	13408
Women in age from 31 to 35	9090	3244	8	12342	9013	3223	8	12244
Women in age from 36 to 40	7018	2825	24	9867	6953	2801	20	9774
Women in age from 41 to 45	6631	2879	35	9545	6519	2834	33	9386
Women in age from 46 to 50	8029	3188	44	11261	7818	3152	36	11006
Women in age from 51 to 55	8863	3649	46	12558	8664	3613	27	12304
Women in age from 56 to 60	8307	2663	30	11000	8118	2603	22	10743
Women in age from 61 to 65	9093	2503	26	11622	8802	2347	15	11164
Women in age from 66 to 70	6246	2362	21	8629	5670	1904	13	7587
Women in age from 71 to [no limit]	14422	5321	34	19777	8617	2067	15	10699
Women in total:	89091	32738	273	122102	81541	28630	194	110365
	151477	42490	610	194577	140272	37973	447	178692

Nr wersji zestawienia: 1.0.

⁸ This has already been pointed out by dr. Paulina Zagórska, a linguist, whose article on this subject was available on the now-defunct blog LEWOGRAM.

It is not difficult to notice that there are over twice as many women in the doctor profession than men (sic!). Are we then going to start to use the female form *lekarka* rather than *lekarz* (male form). It is very unlikely.

What is additionally important, the profession of a nurse is definitely dominated by women, but in the Polish language there is a male equivalent created a long time ago. Nobody is surprised or disgusted by the fact that there is a male form „pielęgniarsz” (male nurse). The Supreme Chamber of Nurses provides a summary of registered employees with the gender differentiate⁹:

Number of registered nurses and midwives in 2008 – 2017 years							
As of	Number of Nurses		Number of midwives		SUMA	Average age of	
	W	M	W	M		Nurses	Midwives
31-12-2008	263 259	4 756	32 429	45	300 489	44.19	43.23
31-12-2009	266 655	4 569	32 990	36	304 250	44.48	43.96
31-12-2010	269 503	4678	33 477	50	307 708	45.28	44.66
31-12-2011	270 781	4494	33 733	57	309 065	46.05	45.32
31-12-2012	273 666	4830	34 327	60	312 883	46.94	46.09
31-12-2013	275 075	4964	34 750	64	314 853	48.69	47.69
31-12-2014	277 334	5188	35 389	65	317 976	48.43	47.21
31-12-2015	279 861	5515	36 026	69	321 471	50.13	48.72
31-12-2016	282 547	5848	36 737	69	325 201	50.79	49.15
31-12-2017	285 542	6248	37 494	74	329 358	51.43	49.58
31-12-2018	288 774	6707	38 240	75	333 796	52.03	49.98

What is more, it is worth referring to the data collected by the Central Statistical Office. from the report of 2016 reads:

Gender is one of the crucial features used in labour market analysis. Women often work in different professions and industries than those where men do. They have different salaries and working time schedule. That diversity is also conditioned by various factors like education, involvement in family life or even expectations of quality of life. Another root cause is historical conditioning. Initially only men

⁹ <https://nipip.pl/liczba-pielegniarek-poloznych-zarejestrowanych-zatrudnionych/> [access: 28.12.2019].

worked and women started to enter the labour market gradually. Economic development after World War II caused an increase of women's activity in this field. It also took place gradually but with a regular tendency. It is shown by the data regarding the share in the total number of employees in Poland: in 1950 it amounted to around 31%, in the beginning of 70s it exceeded 40%, and finally in 2014 it approached 49%.

The education level of men and women is also a significant factor. Women who with a university degree constitute 42,3% of the total number of women active on the labour market. Among working men vocational education dominates – 32,1% of the total amount¹⁰.

The same issue matter applies to teachers, where both forms of profession (nauczyciel – man teacher, nauczycielka – woman teacher) are equally popular.

Let us now take a look at the university education level¹¹, at which *Feminativa* are not very often and common. We can find terms proposed by the Polish Language Council and mentioned above – pani doktor (a female with a PhD degree), or pani profesor (a female professor). It is difficult not to consider the percentage of working women at universities. According to the *Statistical Office (GUS)*:

From among the total number of academic teachers, women are counted for 45% (42,700 The positions of a professor are occupied by over 6,000 women, which is 28.1% of all staff hired in this position. Among persons occupying the position of *adiunkt* the share of women was at 47.2%, and at the assistant level – 53.2%¹².

As can be seen, the distribution was almost equal, when it comes to hiring men and women at Polish universities (except the male dominated professor position).

The creation of female name counterparts for titles and occupations seems to be necessary.

Professional activation of women and constant increase of education level with care about prestige have given a women new functions for which language remain not sensitive (Jadacka, 2005).

Without any doubts, language functions against the background of intersexual relations. What is more, "relationships between language (both written and spoken) with social live and gender roles (whether content or way of language usage) are very complex and multifaceted"(Wierzchoń za: Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018). It is completely not surprising that female profession names have a male word-formation basis:

Lekarz – lekarka, nauczyciel – nauczycielka, urzędnik and urzędniczka), which is related to their historical backgrounds. Some of these forms are pejorative (prezes

¹⁰ https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5821/1/6/1/kobiety_i_mezczyzni_2016.pdf [access: 28.12.2019].

¹¹ As at the end of December 2017, 95 thousand were employed in universities (in 2016 – 95.4 thousand) academic teachers (90.9 thousand full-time employees and 4.0 thousand part-time employees converted into full-time positions), including over 2.1 thousand foreigners.. <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/szkoly-wyzsze-i-ich-finanse-w-2017-roku,2,14.html> [access: 28.12.2019].

¹² *Ibidem*.

– prezeska, doktor – doktorka, profesor – profesorka, dyrektor – dyrektorka) or not equivalent (sekretarz – sekretarka, położnik – położna). If particular occupation has no male form, it is most often not very prestigious and assigned to women (because most of men consider it to be a not male kind of job) for instance a nanny or a kindergarten teacher (Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018).

With the same concerns names (Wierzchoń, see: Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018). Obviously, language is not about battling to ensure “common equality”. Nowadays, linguists or even average language users are rather trying to prevent discrimination:

When we talk about a doctor, we see a man, when we imagine directors, deputies, professors, our imagination generates images of male representatives. There is very little free space for women but there is no objections to settle by them collective imagination in role of hairdressers, saleswomen or nurses. In such cases female forms are most widespread and even sometimes accepted as the only possible ones (such as a kindergarten teacher) (Wierzchoń 2012; Karwatowska, Szpyra-Kozłowska 2010).

If we want to replace female names of professions by male ones, especially where there are female names found, the so-called andocentrism occurs (Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018) or simply a linguistic asymmetry takes place (Krysiak, 2013). At any rate, that problem can occur when men ill desire to work as the above mentioned nanny or kindergarten lady. How to call him properly? (Wierzchoń, see: Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018) In the case of women, language problems such as these do not exist at all. Following universal rules and recommendations of the *Polish Language Council* we can use the form “Ms.” and the name of the profession or we can simply say “Anna jest mechanikiem” (Anna is mechanic). If we move further and fight for women’s rights, mockery occurs, or words simply sound dismissive (Wierzchoń, za: Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018):

Giving of female word-ends process for „gender-neutral” profession (with male name forms) is also an accusation of foolishness and feminism. There is still no agreement between linguists whether the words: *psycholożka*, *socjolożka*, *filolożka*, *pedagożka* are correct or not. Word 2007 accepts the first two of them, and does not accept the latter two. The new dictionary of correct Polish language PWN of 2000 treats them as unacceptable, the universal Polish Dictionary records them as colloquial words, while professor Bralczyk says that they are correct (except *filolożka*) (Wierzchoń, see: Satoła-Staškowiak, 2018).

4. SUMMARY

Is the fight for *Feminativum* a manifestation of a language fashion or already a trend in media or social networking sites? It is very hard to say. The debate is more and more often initiated by ordinary language users. It is raised in various groups and on various levels, not only in the linguistic scientific sphere. Some believe that this vogue will pass like millions of others in the past, others consider this as a significant beginning of some changes – not only linguistic but also social ones. What is a proper order of things? Does language influence changes in society or is it the other way round?

Finally, I will bring up a well known riddle. Father and son were travelling by car. They had an accident. Father died and his seriously wounded son was immediately taken to hospital. In the operating room, the surgeon (*chirurg* – in Polish the word has a male form) looks at him and says: “I can’t operate because he is my son!” How is it possible?¹³

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¹³ Answer: the surgeon is the boy’s mother.

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