

## Mixed-Gender Groups and the Problem of Genesis of the Masculine Personal Gender\*

Key words: historical inflection, masculine personal gender, mixed-gender groups

In every area of research we encounter issues awaiting solutions, even though they have already been addressed by widely known and respected scholars. Adopting a certain stance is a matter of belief, especially when a problem, difficult and not fully solved, pertains to history. If we are to understand changes which have occurred in human action and we are deprived of the opportunity to fathom realities and intentions, we are then forced to observe causes and to embark on a study in which we explore a chain of cause-and-effect relations by broadening the comparative background, while laying emphasis on either a causal or a teleological viewpoint. Thus, the issue of the emergence of the masculine personal gender, contrasted with the non-masculine personal gender, is a recurring one, and its hypotheses are accepted with more or less faith. Joining the discussion that has been going on for decades, I do not think I will be able to put forward a hypothesis more cogent than the ones already established. Still, I am convinced that the crystallisation of this morphological category is the result of a whole group of conditions – phonological-syntactic ones, as pointed out by KURYŁOWICZ (1934: 5–8; 1960: 151–154; 1947: 12–16; 1960: 155–159), inflectional-syntactic ones emphasised by GRAPPIN (1956) and KURASZKIEWICZ (1961: 288–295), and even extra-linguistic ones, related to different positions that the European civilisation ascribed to men and women in terms of their social roles. Adopting such a standpoint encourages one to share some thoughts and simultaneously to join a circle of linguists who speak on the genesis of the masculine personal gender. In the present article I wish to highlight the issues which, to my way of thinking, are linked to the problem of the masculine personal gender, and which have not been, to my knowledge, raised while discussing its genesis.

Gender binarism in the plural underwent the process of shaping for surprisingly long; if we only take into account recorded written Polish, it shows that the process of shaping gender binary opposition spanned four centuries. Thus, it was a phenomenon caused by factors which were indeed to some extent hindering, but posed no threat to communication. Syntax, apart from lexis, is the level of language system characterised by the highest degree of variability, and thus it offers the biggest number of possibilities how to bypass a troublesome linguistic problem. Directing attention to the syntactic plane of language is also methodologically motivated – grammatical gender is a selective category of noun, that

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is, it makes non-nominal parts of speech adjust their forms to the noun in terms of gender. If a language user has no linguistic intuition at his or her disposal, grammatical gender “embedded” in noun is not open to their historical observation. What we can merely do is to ascertain what form a given adjective, pronoun, numeral, or a verb took, and on this basis determine the grammatical gender of a certain noun.

Polish inherited from Proto-Slavic a tripartite gender opposition, both in the singular and in the plural. Still, in the plural a non-nominal element was able to refer not only to a multiplied object sharing the same grammatical gender, but also to a mixed-gender group, for example, *syn i córka* (son and daughter), *niebo i ziemia* (heaven and earth), *wół, krowa i cielę* (ox, cow, and calf). When it comes to the two types of adjectival declension – simple and compound – the Polish language still employs the latter. If we take into account mixed-gender groups, the compound declension was far more efficient. Phonetic processes already in Proto-Slavic led to the unification of endings, and only two cases – nominative and accusative – resisted gender demorphologisation. Still, the partially-ordered problem becomes complicated on different grounds. The necessity to achieve gender agreement was undoubtedly reinforced by the “rampant” compound past tense supplanting the simple gender-free past tenses – the aorist and the imperfect.

Significant was also the nascence of the literary published writing in Polish. It is during the very process of writing when a reflection on correctness emerges, and in the case of doubts, one pursues other paths, the ones that make it possible to bypass a difficulty linked to language usage. Finding concatenated multiple-gender subjects in Old-Polish texts is not an easy task. And those found reveal a picture that is all shaky and unstable, especially that what is involved is a group different than the one marking grammatical person (where the rules from the very outset have been fairly clear). This fact made me think that for such groups there may have existed other non-morphological ways of pointing at past events or at a widely understood feature – the ones that made it possible to avoid a troublesome process of reaching gender agreement in the plural. This assumption yielded unexpectedly good results. The oldest texts revealed numerous syntactic solutions that prevent one from dealing with the problem of gender in the plural. These are some of them:

1. It was very frequent that in strings a verb in the singular was employed, with the first element of the group being obliged to reach gender concord. The subsequent elements were added by means of connective conjunctions *i* or *a*. The phrase that unfolds after a conjunction gives an impression that we are presented with a sentence containing ellipsis of a verbal element. Below there are a few examples to illustrate the point:

*aże ciało w nim puchnęło i ręce, i około serca. Żyw Am 65*

*gdyż się dokonało niebo i ziemia. BZGen III*

*Potym przyszedł wielki deszcz na nie i pomierzknienie tako. HAI 163*

When I write that employing the singular verb for the multi-gender strings was a way of avoiding trouble connected with achieving grammatical gender, I would not like to suggest that the discussed syntactic structure was reserved for such situations. Old-Polish texts abound in examples in which the problem of gender concord is non-existent, since the verb is used in the singular; compare

*Poczyna się prolog i wtore księgi o żywocie błogostawionej dziewicy. Rozm 42*  
*Moc boga wszemogącego, mądrość syna jedyneho, dar i łaska ducha świętego, racz być z nami. Gn ap 1<sup>a</sup>*

I merely wish to show that in the Old-Polish period the singular was employed with multi-gender strings on a large scale, and in the case of the past tense, marked for gender, this was a convenient way of omitting the problems related to gender in the plural.

2. Ellipsis was employed also in the case of attributive elements – used for one of the elements of the string, the attribute agrees with this element in terms of gender, but the semantics of the attribute relates also to the subsequent element, even though it is not specified on the surface.

*kolędzy brat i siostra mają się modlić za duszę jego. Reg XIX 14*

*A tako bracia **wszytcy** i siostry mają się zżyć oblicznie na pogrzeb. Reg XIX 13v*

3. Another option, with no need to establish gender agreement in relation to any element in the string, was nominal or pronominal generalisation, accompanied by enumeration; compare:

*A to jest podobieństwo utrapienia: uciski, nędze, śmierć i potym zmartwychwstanie i żywot wieczny. GrzegŚm 37*

*Ty **rzeczy** są, których się nie godzi chować siostróm: niedźwiedzi, psów, małp, zwierząt ani ptaków. Ust 109v*

*I co może przydź ku myśli baczącemu albo pamiętającemu koronę tarnową miłego Jezukrysta, jedno: ukazanie wzgardzenia, przeciwność sromocenia a trudność męczenia? Rozm 830*

4. In the case when the presence of an existential predicate was involved, the ellipsis of a verb was allowed, for instance:

*Wskazał jemu płomień, gdzie światłość i ciemność, smętek i płacz, i ciężkie wzdychanie. XV ex. Zab. 536*

5. Yet another way of “ducking” the issue of selecting a gender-marked form of a predicate next to a concatenated subject was employing a prepositional phrase + the instrumental case – then it was possible for the predicate to be in the singular:

*Jako Hanka z swym oćcem wytrzymała połowicę Gorzyc. Roty 106*

*Jako się Stachna i s mężem zaprzała swego pana. Roty 120*

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It was possible for gender opposition to hold in the plural only on the condition that the rules standardising congruence in multi-gender concatenated strings in the subject position be adopted. It is already in the oldest relics of Polish writings that we note the rule of highlighting the masculine gender in the case of multiple-gender strings denoting persons:

*A gdyż {ci więc} Jozef z Maryją **jest** {ona} **była** do tego miasta Betlehem przyszła, a tedy więc **oni** nie **mogli** {ć} są mieć nijedne gospody tamo byli. Gn II, 3v*

*nalazł ludzie i żonki nagie mając ciała kosmate jakoby zwierzęta, którzy zwykli mieszkać w rzece jakoby na ziemi. HAI 160v*

*a mieli teże dziwkę służebną a trzy parobki, którzy służyli Jozefowi a dziewicy Maryje.*

**Rozm 81**

*Bracia i siostry najmilszy, coście się tu zgromadzili. WKaz 3*

The selection of a masculine form had a strong systemic motivation. The masculine personal gender is usually manifested in nouns, and we confirm its existence by observing its collocability with adjectives or with verb forms marked for gender. But the very notion of the masculine personal gender in Polish has been far more extensive from its very origin, and thus its manifestations can be found at levels other than the inflectional one.<sup>1</sup> Let us consider the issue at hand in the context of the word-formation system. The names of agents or “carriers” of attributes which were formed derivationally required to be varied in terms of sexes. It is since Proto-Slavic times that we have known morphological means of “moulding” female names on the basis of male ones – we have the whole array of derivative formants like *-ka, -ica, -ina, -ini/-yni*, as well as the change of paradigm. The reverse direction, which is forming male names on the basis of female ones, is rare (*wdowiec* [widower]).

It is characteristic, however, that derivatives stemming from masculine names embrace semantically both the male sex and the female sex:

- apart from *mistrz* (master), there is also another lexeme, *mistrzyni* (mistress), as well as derivatives *mistrzostwo* (mastery), *mistrzowski* (masterly); even though they stem from the masculine element, they pertain to events or features of both *mistrz* (master) and *mistrzyni* (mistress).
- *prorok* (prophet) has its feminine equivalent *prorokini* (prophetess), but *proroctwo* (prophecy), *proroczy*, *prorocki* (prophetic), which are shaped on the basis of the masculine element of the pair, encompass semantically also the feminine element, as, for example, in *proroctwo Sybilli* (the Sibyl’s Prophecy);
- *towarzysz* (male companion) functions along with the feminine form *towarzyszka* (female companion); both of these elements are contained in the group *towarzystwo* (company); a woman can be *towarzyska* (sociable; feminine adjective), even though both derivatives have their basis in the masculine noun.

Still, there are such derivatives which are based on the masculine form and they refer solely to the male sex. This is the case when there exists no feminine equivalent; for example: *papież* (pope), *ksiądz* (priest), *bawidamek* (ladies’ man), or the feminine element of a given pair is an underived noun (it has a different root), compare *ojciec//matka* [father/mother], *chłopiec//dziewczyna* [boy/girl], *wujek//ciotka* [uncle/aunt], *dziadek//babcia* [grandfather/grandmother] – but still in such cases it may happen that the masculine element creates the name for the group (*wujostwo* [uncle and aunt], *dziadkowie* [grandfather and grandmother]).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly the reflection of the patriarchal type of the Proto-Slavic culture at the level of language.

<sup>2</sup> The ability to represent a multiple-gender group of masculine nouns was so strong that, like in the case of word-formation pairs, it was possible to express the meaning of the whole pair utilizing

We may note, then, that we have acquired the word-formation system that foregrounds the male sex. When we take a look at the word-formation level while taking into account the hierarchy of elements designating various sexes (the masculine gender is situated higher up, since it possesses the ability to “encompass” its feminine equivalent), the masculine forms applied to female designations, which were spreading in the 20th century (*doktor, magister, minister* type, as well as the names of the *Baran, Kowal* type) (SĄTKIEWICZ, 1981: 130–155), seem to be a natural thing. It is, as it were, sanctioning the form of something that has been present in language for long – a masculine gender form had the ability to refer to a female designation. And the traces of employing masculine forms to designate women date back to very early times. Marian KUČAŁA (1978: 47) quotes an example from the 14th century:

*Jachna, powod de Solcza, habet terminum cum Michaele et cum Stephano infra ii ebdomadas, quia uiolenter arauit trecentos brozdy. 1394 StPPP VIII nr 5584*

A random perusal of *Słownik języka polskiego* (Dictionary of the Polish language) by B. S. Linde provides examples from the 17th century:

*Grekwowie zwali Izydę prawodawcą, jakoby pierwszą wynalazcą praw. Otw. Ow. 44*

*Palas była wynalazcą przędziwa... Otw. Ow. 139*

*Ceres była nie tylko wynalazcą zbóż, ale i dawcą ich i ich stworzycielką. Otw. Ow. 208 et 314*

*Pani i wódz Rzymskiej czystości Likrecyja. Warg. Wal. 187*

The higher hierarchical level of the masculine gender for multiple-gender strings demanded the use of a masculine element in the predicative position:

*baba gąbki zbiera, dziad struże korzenie, syn ślimaki strzela, córka lalki działa, wszyscy próżniacy. L. IV, 488*

No wonder that for the majority of masculine personal nouns the plural has a double semantic value – it pertains either to a multiple number of representatives of the male sex (*uczniowie = uczeń + uczeń + uczeń* [male pupils = male pupil + male pupil + male pupil]), or to a mixed group (*uczniowie = uczeń + uczennica* (male pupils = male pupil + female pupil]) (GRZEGORCZYKOWA, LASKOWSKI, WRÓBEL, 1984: 154). The plural of masculine personal nouns is one of the means with which to form groups, and this may be the reason for the declining productivity of collectives as a word-formation category (cf. GRZEGORCZYKOWA, LASKOWSKI, WRÓBEL, 1984: 383).

The difference of sexes refers also to the animal world. And here, as long as a pair is formed with the help of word-formation means, a masculine element is placed in the centre of a derivational nest, and the sense of its derivatives covers both elements of a given

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the masculine counterpart even when the former was created lexemically; cf. *Syny Judziny a jersalemskie* [sons of Judea and Jerusalem ...] *chcecie sobie podlić w robotniki a w robotnice* BZ II 28,10.

It is interesting that in *Biblia Tysiąclecia* this gender inconsistency has been preserved (*Teraz zamierzacie ujarzmić dla siebie synów Judy i Jerozolimy* [sons of Judea and Jerusalem] *jako waszych niewolników i niewolnice*). In the bible published by the British and Foreign Bible Society, this verse already looks different – the noun *syn* (son) is not present: *Teraz zaś zamierzacie ujarzmić Judejczyków i Jeruzalemczyków* [Judeans and Jerusalemans], *aby byli waszymi niewolnikami i niewolnicami*.

pair; another thing is that usually we do not mull over whether *zupa żółwiowa* (turtle soup) is made from *żółw* (male turtle) or from *żółwica* (female turtle), or whether *stonik* (baby elephant) is a male or a female. But the word-formation system was not overly exploited for the description of the animal world. As long as language users saw it fit to differentiate between sexes as concerns animals, they created pairs of names by means of lexemic resources; cf. *kura//kogut* (hen/cock), *koń//kobyła* (stallion/mare), *pies//suka* (dog/bitch), *baran//owca* (ram/ewe), *indyk//perliczka* (turkey/turkey hen). But the hierarchy of gender in the group of animal nouns was not so obvious as in the case of personal nouns. While personal nouns were decidedly characterised by a masculine element, the animal ones were behaving in different ways – sometimes it was a masculine element that functioned as a generic term, and on another occasion it was a feminine one:

*od każdego konia jeden grosz, a od każdego wołu, krowy albo skocięcia półgroszka, a od trzech, czterech owiec jeden grosz, także od czterech koz, od czterech świni i od czterech gęsi po jednemu groszu zapłaci. KodŚw 111*

From the material presented by Marian Kucała, it transpires that up to the point when the masculine personal gender developed, masculine animal nouns had unestablished forms – next to such Polish forms as *koni*, *ptaszcy*, *skopowie*, *wężowie* there were also parallel forms functioning, such as *konie*, *ptaszki*, *tury*, *węże*, and in the case of numerous masculine animal nouns, nominative endings did not appear at all (in Old Polish *bobry*, *byczki*, *byki*, *koziółki*, *kozły*, *króliki*, *raki skoty*, *bachmaty* (“a dog breed”)), in the 16th century *baranki*, *bąki*, *kozły*, *woły*, *komory*, *kwiczoty*, *raki*, *robaczki*, *woźniki*, *jarząbki* (cf. KUCAŁA, 1978: 11–125). It is true that we can point to periods when masculine animal nouns gravitated towards solutions adopted in the case of proper names. Indeed, their properties were similar. But variety of configurations – on some occasions a masculine element prevailed, on others it was a feminine one – caused such pairs to be “shrunk” to the group of non-masculine nouns.

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The problem of mixed-gender groups raised in the article has crucial consequences in terms of the interpretation of historical inflectional patterns in Polish. If we assume that the shaping of the masculine and non-masculine personal gender in the plural nominative was initiated in multiple-gender groups, we should consistently agree with the idea that the rivalry between forms was going on along the horizontal axis of paradigms, and what it implies is that it is worthwhile to verify the thesis concerning the accusative origin of endings both in the noun declension as well as in the adjective and pronoun declensions. It appears that the changes on the vertical plane of the paradigm can occur only when grammatical cases fulfil similar syntactic functions. This is the case in Polish inflection with regard to the accusative and genitive cases. The interchangeability between the accusative and the nominative cases had to hinge solely on the passive voice. Regrettably, these kinds of interchangeability of forms are not observable in the singular, the latter being more frequent than the plural; nor are they observable in genders other than the masculine one. If we were to accept the suggestion about the rivalry of nominative forms, a developmental pattern would look as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The developmental pattern of nominative forms

Part of speech	Gender		
	masculine	feminine	neuter
noun	-owie, -i, -e ←	-y, -e →	(a)*
adjective	-i ←	-e →	(a)
pronoun	-i ←	(-y), -e →	(a)
verb	-i ←	-y →	(a)

masculine personal  
gender

non-masculine personal  
gender

\* The endings in parentheses have already disappeared.

In the case when the masculine personal gender and the feminine personal gender were confronted, the masculine gender was prevailing. But apart from this, the masculine gender gave way to the feminine gender, the latter being the fastest to have subordinated the neuter gender, and then it was winning in cases when the masculine personal gender was not able to assert itself. Thus, the feminine gender turned out to be the most expansive. And indeed, when we take a look at declension endings in the plural, it will transpire that numerous of them were subjected to the demorphologisation of gender due to the fact that feminine forms won (cf. *-ami, -ach*) (RZEPKA, 1985).

While introducing the subject, I mentioned that hypotheses regarding diachronic language phenomena have variable impact and generally do not come close to the absolute truth. The degree of certainty of judgements contained in the present article was dictated by the persuasive function; every author wants to have their readers convinced as to the rightness of their arguments. And even if my suggestions as to the role of mixed-gender groups in the development of the masculine personal gender may raise certain doubts, it is worth raising the issue of the plausibility of a long-established claim concerning the accusitival origin of nominative endings in the plural.

## Abbreviations

BZ – *Biblia królowej Zofii*.

Gn – Kazania gnieźnieńskie.

GrzegŚm – Grzegorz Paweł, *O prawdziwej śmierci*, 1568.

HAI – Historia Aleksandra Wielkiego.

KodŚw – Kodeks Świętostawowy.

L – S. B. Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, wyd. II, Lwów 1854–1860.

Otw.Ow. – Księgi Metamorpheseon, to jest Przemian od Publiusza Owidiusza Nasona wierszem opisane, a przez Waleriana Otwinowskiego..., Kraków 1638.

Reg – Reguła III zakonu św. Franciszka (początek XVI wieku).

Roty – Wielkopolskie roty sądowe XIV–XV wieku. Tom IV. *Roty kaliskie*, opr. Henryk Kowalewicz, W. Kuraszkiewicz, Wrocław 1974.

Rozm – Rozmyślania przemyskie.

StPPP – Starodawne Prawa Polskiego Pomniki, Warszawa 1856.

Ust – Ustawy i statuty zakonu premonstratorskiego, 1541 rok.

Warg. Wal. – A. Wargocki (tłum.) – W. Maksym, *O dziejach i powieściach pamięci godnych...*, Kraków 1609.

WKaz – Wstęp do kazania, 1510 rok.

ŻywAm – Żywot ojca Amandusa (XV/XVI wiek).

XV ek. Zab – J. Łoś, *Przegląd językowych zabytków staropolskich do roku 1543*, Kraków 1915 (koniec XV wieku).

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### Mixed-Gender Groups and the Problem of Genesis of the Masculine Personal Gender

#### Summary

The author discusses the topic of genesis of the masculine personal gender, which has been touched upon numerous times in Polish linguistic literature, but the concepts presented have not always been sufficiently cogent. She suggests that we take a closer look at the ways the problem of gender agreement in multiple-gender groups is solved. The historical material allows us to point to the following methods:

1. in strings a verb in the singular was employed, with only the first element of the group being obliged to reach gender concord (for example, *aże ciało w nim puchnęło i ręce, i około serca*. ŻywAm 65),
2. in attributive elements, the attribute related to all elements, including the ones not specified on the surface (for instance, *kolędzy brat i siostra mają się modlić za duszę jego*. Reg XIX 14),
3. nominal or pronominal generalisation, accompanied by enumeration (e.g. *A to jest podobieństwo utrapienia: uciski, nędze, śmierć i potem zmartwychwstanie i żywot wieczny*. GrzegŚm 37),



4. a verb was elided (when an existential predicate was involved) (as, for example, in *Wskazał jemu płomień, gdzie światłość i ciemność, smętek i płacz, i ciężkie wzdychanie*. XV ek. Zab. 356),
5. employing a prepositional phrase + the instrumental case – then the predicate was in the singular (*Jako się Stachna i s mężem zaprzała swego pana*. Roty 120).

Additionally, the research confirmed that in the oldest language relics, if the subject was “multi-gendered,” the masculine gender was highlighted, something that had a strong systemic motivation. The aforementioned thesis can be confirmed at levels others than the inflectional one, for instance in word formation (cf. e.g. morphological means of moulding female names on the basis of male ones by employing derivative formants like *-ka, -ica, -ina* and others). It is significant, however, that derivatives stemming from masculine names embraced semantically both the male sex and the female sex (e.g. *mistrzowski* < *mistrz*, *proroczy* < *prorok*). This testifies to the fact that it was possible for the masculine form to refer to the female designation. The difference of sexes was also pertinent to the animal world; here also a masculine element constituted the centre of a derivational nest, although in these cases it was not always of importance. Oftentimes in such situations lexemic resources were employed (e.g. *pies / suka*).

It is interesting that up to the point when the masculine personal gender developed for masculine animal nouns, there were appearing both types of forms (e.g. *ptaszki // ptaszkiwie, węże // wężowie*). The author, then, questions the thesis of the accusative origin of nominative endings in the plural by proposing that we consider the influence of mixed-gender groups on the development of the masculine personal gender. The analysis of endings for various genders clearly shows that the feminine gender is most expansive.

Key words: historical inflection, masculine personal gender, mixed-gender groups