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Contemporary Female Names: Tradition Discovered in the Interwar Period?

Współczesne nazwy żeńskie –
tradycja odnaleziona w dwudziestoleciu?

Abstract: In the introductory part, the article presents the latest work of Polish linguists on the heritage of the interwar period in the Polish language and contemporary communication practices. The main part is devoted to the intensifying contemporary tendency to create female names in Polish for those professions, positions and functions which so far had only masculine names, for instance, *architektka* from *architekt*, *psycholożka* from *psycholog*. The feminization of names is shown against the background of linguistic practices in the interwar period. The process of women's emancipation initiated at that time was reflected in the language. Contemporary disputes over the feminization of names are marked in terms of worldview and ideology. On the one hand, supporters of feminization refer to the tradition of the interwar period, while on the other, opponents reject it.

Key words: feminine names, heritage of the Second Polish Republic in the Polish language, emancipation of women

Abstrakt: W części wstępnej artykuł przedstawia najnowsze prace polskich językoznawców dotyczące dziedzictwa dwudziestolecia międzywojennego w języku polskim i współczesnych praktykach komunikacyjnych. Część główna jest poświęcona nasilającej się współcześnie tendencji do tworzenia w języku polskim nazw żeńskich dla tych zawodów, stanowisk i funkcji, które dotychczas miały wyłącznie nazwy męskie, np. *architektka* od *architekt*, *psycholożka* od *psycholog*. Feminizacja nazw ukazana jest na tle praktyk językowych w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym. Zapoczątkowany wówczas proces emancypacji kobiet odzwierciedlił się w języku. Współczesne spory dotyczące feminizacji nazw są nacechowane światopoglądowo i ideologicznie. Z jednej strony zwolennicy feminizacji nawiązują do tradycji dwudziestolecia, z drugiej strony przeciwnicy – odrzucają ją.

Słowa kluczowe: nazwy żeńskie, dziedzictwo II RP w języku polskim, emancypacja kobiet

Research concerning the past of a language is the domain of a sub-discipline of linguistics known as the history of language, pursued in Poland for at least the past 200 years. Up to now historians dealing with the Polish

language focused predominantly on the past, in particular the Old Polish era. Linguists representing the older generation treated the twenty-year interwar period rather as part of contemporaneity than as a closed, past stage in history. This is the reason why until recently linguists did not devote much attention to that particular period. Most recent years brought a change and publications concentrated on this particular period emerged. Mention is certainly due to at least three significant studies, the first being a book by Mirosława Sagan-Bielawa: *Dziedzictwo pozaborowe. Społeczna świadomość językowa Polaków w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (2014) followed by Ewa Woźniak's work bearing the characteristic title: *Przełomowe dwudziestolecie. Lata 1918–1939 w dziejach języka polskiego* (2020) [The Breakthrough Twenty-Year Period...], and a collective volume edited by Renata Przybylska, Barbara Batko-Tokarz, and Sylwia Pręczonek-Kisielak: *Niepodległa wobec języka polskiego* [Independent Poland and the Polish Language] (2019) – a reaction to the centenary of Poland's regaining of independence after the period of partitions. It is worth asking what has captured the interest of researchers examining the interwar period from the present-day perspective? Which problems and reflections dealing with language prove to be important for contemporaneity, and why?

It must be kept in mind that when writing about the Polish language during the interwar two decades we equate it with a general, nationwide language also described as a literary language or a cultural dialect, defined by, among others, Zenon Klemensiewicz as “the language of educated strata [of society] and perpetuated in literature”; Klemensiewicz, 1956: 133). In the opinion of researchers, only 8–10% of the population was capable of using this variant of the Polish language (Lubaś, 1989: 92), while the remainder of Poles spoke in dialects of Polish or other languages of ethnic minorities. This number corresponds to the approximate percentage of the participation of the intelligentsia in Polish society of the period.¹ The phenomena discussed in this text thus pertain

¹ The very concept of the intelligentsia and its population in the society as a separate social stratum distinguished in the society of the Second Polish Republic are subject of discussions and variously defined by sociologists and historians.

to the language of the Polish intelligentsia, although it must be stressed that during the interwar period and due to the social promotion of this stratum its members were gradually joined by representatives of other milieus. The democratization of Polish society also caused a democratization of the language and a necessary adaptation of colloquial variants, or those bearing social features, to the all-Polish standard.

Amidst the mentioned studies dealing with the language of the interwar period it is possible to select a list of problems particularly topical today, which, according to researchers, became conspicuous already during that time.

Mirosława Sagan-Bielawa, who in her study proposed to “take a look at the language of the early twentieth-century and the linguistic consciousness of that period from the contemporary point of view” (Sagan-Bielawa, 2014: 35), referred to an article by Irena Bajerowa (2002) and indicated the following phenomena assessed from the viewpoint of the criteria of linguistic correctness, which, contrary to appearances, possess an already rather long tradition dating back to the interwar period: “A tendency to avoid declining surnames, a debatability of creating and using professional female names and surnames, a limitation of names of degrees of kinship (such distinctions as *stryj*, *stryjenka* / *wujek*, *ciotka* [uncle/aunt]), an excessive terminologization of general language (colloquial, daily) (...), a vulgarization of the cultural (official) Polish language” (Sagan-Bielawa, 2014: 35).

Ewa Woźniak, in turn, analyzed the prestige of the Polish language during the interwar period against the background of the complicated ethnic situation of the Second Polish Republic and arrived at the conclusion that in the rebuilt Polish state native language played an integration-identification role within the range of three communities: national, state, and religious (Woźniak, 2020). She dealt in detail with the already mentioned problem of female names as well as the contribution of the interwar period to the creation of nomenclature within renascent Polish state administration, technology, military affairs, etc. In doing so she drew attention to the impact of the then newly introduced medium serving mass communication, namely, the radio, and to the role

of the press in shaping the Polish language. The author paid separate attention also to the influence of English on Polish language, which revealed its vigor precisely during the two decades in question. Woźniak also discussed the position of foreign languages in the school system of the Second Republic of Poland and in social life, indicating the diminishing role of Latin, the growing interest in English, the still high position of French, and – mainly for practical reasons – of German, and the low prestige of Russian. In a summary of her fragmentary studies she also listed certain issues characteristic for the Polish language of the interwar period, alive and discussed today: the immense increase of acronyms, the creation of feminatives, the internationalization of the vocabulary visible predominantly in forming composite words with foreign elements, such as: *auto-*, *centro-*, *fono-* *kino-*, *radio-* or *tele-*, and the borrowing of internationalisms, for instance, *automobil*, new borrowings, specially from the English, and numerous derivatives: by way of example, this was the period of the origin – and this might come as a surprise to some – of such Anglicisms as *cocktail bar*, *hot-dog*, *tabloid*, as well as the use of surnames as a derivative base, for instance *witosowcy* (from Witos), *korfantczyk* (from Korfanty). Within the sphere of language changes Woźniak pointed out to, among others, the increasingly strong brutalization of the language of politics and the introduction to an ever wider extent of everyday Polish into the press and lowbrow publications intended for the undemanding mass-scale recipient and, at the same time, described as “sensational and pornographic.”

Authors of the texts in *Niepodległa wobec języka polskiego* also approached numerous problems which from the present perspective appear important for the shape of the present-day Polish language as well as contemporary communication behavior and studies dealing with linguistic communication.

The above list of debatable linguistic problems, originating in the interwar period, is sufficiently capacious to allow us to agree with the stance represented by Ewa Woźniak, namely, that the period in question is of special significance in the history of the Polish language since it designates the beginning of a new epoch: post-neo-Polish (Woźniak, 2020: 193)

In this article I propose to take a closer look – from the viewpoint of a search for linguistic heritage – at only a single problem selected from the above list, that is, female names. The origin or even, as some claim, the artificial creation of female names on the basis of masculine ones is a question that to this day stirs up heated discussions. Female names, also known as so-called feminatives, comprise a word-formative category distinguished in descriptions of the word formation of the Polish language encompassing names of women derived from suitable names used for men, such as: *lekarka* from *lekarz* ('medical doctor'), *nauczycielka* from *nauczyciel* ('teacher'), *rozmówczyni* from *rozmówca* ('interlocutor'), *sędzina*² from *sędzia* ('judge'), *krawcowa* from *krawiec* ('seamstress-tailor'), etc. The origin of those names as well as their construction and functioning in texts are the object of interest of an entire separate discipline of contemporary linguistics, namely, gender linguistics.

The approach to such names involves two contrary confrontational attitudes motivated not only culturally but also from the viewpoint of the world outlook. Opponents of the multiplication of feminatives are of the opinion that "adding" female names to male names is unnecessary, constitutes an artificial procedure or even violation committed against the language, and remains contradictory *vis-à-vis* the traditionally comprehended so-called spirit of language to which we should remain loyal. In their opinion existing male names are sufficient for effective communication, and thus it is enough to say: *poseł Kowalska* ('deputy/MP Kowalska'), *Kowalska jest posłem z okręgu X O* (Kowalska is a deputy from constituency X), etc., since everyone understands the meaning of such utterance. New female names are not functional, because they often sound the same as already existing words, albeit possess a different meaning, for example, *pilotka* denotes not only a female pilot but also, or perhaps predominantly, a type of cap. Moreover, certain female names sound strange and are difficult to pronounce, for example,

² Today *sędzina* has two meanings: older – 'wife of a judge' and more recent, of interest to us – 'female judge' (wsjp.pl).

chirurgka from: *chirurg* ('surgeon') or *architektka* from: *architekt*. Some linguists substantiate this option with scholarly arguments – in the application of masculine gender names for women they perceive a so-called generic function of proper names, which as such could also refer to men and women alike and do not necessarily implicate information about gender. New feminatives are discussed not only by columnists and journalists but also researchers investigating language, who do not avoid such judgmental expressions as, for instance, *language curiosities* (Zieniukowa 2013).

On the other hand, supporters of the use of purposefully added female names are of the opinion that in this manner language ceases to discriminate women and "conceal" them in groups of persons dominated by men, and sometimes to outright exclude them, but instead brings to light the presence of women in numerous professions and social roles. It simply renders language impartial, or at least slightly more so, by treating both genders equally, and introduces desired gender symmetry of which the Polish language has been up to now deprived in numerous domains. "Speaking in favor of feminine names has currently become a symptom of progressiveness, modernity, leftism, and the feminist standpoint, while resistance or distance towards them – an interpretation of traditional and rightist views, confrontational *vis-à-vis* feminism" (Woźniak, 2020: 141–142). A survey of the Polish contemporary press makes it possible to define the world outlook option of a given title precisely upon the sole basis of the authors' attitude towards feminatives. By way of example, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and in particular its supplement *Wysokie Obcasy*, excels in the use of feminatives whenever it is possible and promotes new female names, for instance, *gościni* instead of *gość* ('guest'), *naukowczyni* instead of *naukowiec* ('scientist', 'scholar'), *krytyczka* instead of *krytyk* ('critic'), *powstanka* instead of *powstaniec* ('insurgent'), etc. The heated dispute concerning feminatives is convincingly demonstrated in the media, which return to this topic time and again. It is worth recalling if only the newsworthy discussion about the form: *ministra*, initiated by Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka in 2004 (Łaziński, 2006: 278) and subsequently resumed by Joanna

Mucha in 2012 (Bobrowski, 2012: 227; Breza, 2013: 70; Łuczyński, 2013: 100) as well as the expressive reactions of Krystyna Pawłowicz, who did not wish to be addressed as *posłanka* (from *poseł* – ‘deputy’, ‘MP’) and claimed: “The Constitution mentions deputies (*posłowie*) and not *posłanki* and *posłowie*. I am a *poseł*” [Krystyna Pawłowicz in conversation with Jarosław Kuźniar, 2013] (Stępień, 2008).

The Council for the Polish Language at the Praesidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences expressed its attitude towards this socially significant problem in a resolution of 25 November 2019,³ among others: “The controversy involving female names will not be resolved either by references to tradition (variegated in this respect) or rules of the system. Striving towards symmetry of the generic system possesses social foundations and only linguists can comment on them. The right to use female names should be left to the speakers, keeping in mind that alongside calls for the creation of feminatives, recently publicized in the media, there exists a resistance against their application.” Currently used female names became the topic of numerous detailed studies (Karwowska, Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2005; Łaziński, 2006; Kubiszyn-Mędrala, 2007; Małocha-Krupa, 2018; Stępień, 2018; Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2019).

What, however, was the status of feminatives and the attitude towards them in the decades between the two world wars? Ewa Woźniak, a researcher specializing in the interwar period in Poland, discovered and proved that it was precisely at that time that a *sui generis* “proliferation” of female names took place: “Numerous female names, which at that time enhanced lexical resources of the Polish language and during the period of People’s Republic of Poland found themselves outside the circulation are being restored to the user of the Polish language, although most often without an awareness of their linguistic continuity” (Woźniak 2020: 142). Not to be groundless, I shall follow the example of this author and cite names created already during the two inter-war decades, of which only some are known and disseminated today while others incorrectly appear to us to be contemporary neologisms against

³ See: <https://rjp.pan.pl> (access: 20.06.2022).

the backdrop of the customs of the second half of the twentieth century. The names in question pertain to assorted functions, professions, and social roles gradually accepted by women. They thus include predominantly names of professions particularly frequent at the time and associated with offices, banks, and commercial firms – hence: *bilansistka* ('accountant'), *biuralistka* ('clerk'), *buchalterka* ('bookkeeper'), *kancelistka* ('clerk'), *książkowa* ('bookkeeper'), *księgowa* ('bookkeeper'), *maszynistka* ('typist'), *sekreterka* ('secretary'), *stenotypistka* ('stenographer'), and *urzędniczka* ('clerk'), although there is no lack of names of heretofore male, prestigious freelance professions: *adwokatka* (from *adwokat* – 'attorney'), *architektka* (from *architekt*), *prawniczka* (from *prawnik* – 'lawyer') or offices in, for instance, the judiciary: *prokuratorka* ('prosecutor'), *podprokuratorka* ('junior prosecutor'), names of social functions linked with governance or the fulfillment of leading functions, such as: *polityczka* ('politician'), *posłanka* ('parliamentary deputy', 'member of parliament'), *senatorka* ('senator'), *gubernatorka* ('governor', in reference to non-Polish reality), special functions in various institutions and organizations: *chorążanka* ('standard bearer'), *podchorążanka* ('officer cadet'), *dyrektorka* ('director'), *kierowniczka* ('head'), *inspektorka* ('inspector'), *podinspektorka* ('junior inspector'), *prezeska* ('chairperson'), *prezydentka* ('president'), and women involved in sport or fans of certain hobbies: *pilotka* ('pilot'), *lotniczka* ('aviator'); *szoferka* ('chauffer'), *kierowczyni* ('driver'), *automobilistka* ('racing driver'); *jeźdźczyni* ('rider'), and *cyklistka* ('cyclist'). In the interwar two decades wider access to university studies produced the following names: *adiunktka* (from *adjunct* – 'lecturer'), *magisterka* (from *magister* – M.A., M.Sc), *doktorka* (from *doktor*), *profesorka* (from *profesor*), and *inżynierka* (from *inżynier* – 'engineer') as well as those referring to scientific specialists: *botaniczka* ('botanist'), *etnografka* ('ethnographer'), *okulistka* ('ophthalmologist'), and *psycholożka* ('psychologist'). A particularly astonishing copious assortment of names of women reflects their presence in the Army and Polish Legions and on World War I fronts: *dowódczyni* ('commander'), *kurierka* ('courier'), *legionistka* ('legionnaire'), *rycerka* ('knight'), *wartowniczka* ('guard'), *żołnierka* ('soldier'). There are even

female military grades: *kapitanka* ('captain') and *plutonowa* ('sergeant') as well as police ones: *komisarka* ('detective inspector') or functions, for example, *detektywka* ('detective'). Against this background it does not come as a surprise that the female counterpart of *powstaniec* is *powstańczyni*, probably a much later innovation, which *Wielki słownik języka polskiego PAN* [Polish Academy of Sciences Great Dictionary of Polish – wsjp.pl] mentions in as late as 1960. In the interwar period distinctly female names emerged also when a woman's function or role was not praiseworthy, as in the case of *szpiegini* ('female spy').

A supplementation of this quite sizeable collection of interwar feminatives present in the Polish language consists of names established due to a survey carried out in *Wielki słownik języka polskiego PAN*. By way of example, we come across such interwar neologisms as *ucho-dźczyńi* ('female refugee') from 1924 or *zamachowczyni* ('female assassin') from 1926.

An analysis of the names of associations in the Second Polish Republic, conducted by Małgorzata Karamańska and Ewa Młynarczyk (2019), reveals a series of successive new examples from the period. They include, among others, *akademiczka* – 'female student'.

The unique socio-political reality of the Second Polish Republic, in which the emancipation of women was inherently connected with a national-political struggle and patriotic upbringing, exerted an impact on the origin of such names as: *peowiaczka* – female member of POW – Polish Military Organization,⁴ *sokolica* (from *sokół* – 'falcon') – female member of the "Falcon" Polish Gymnastic Society,⁵ as well as

⁴ Polska Organizacja Wojskowa (Polish Military Organization) – a secret military organization active in 1914–1921 initially in the Kingdom of Poland and subsequently also in Russia and other lands of the Russian partition as well as the Austrian partition; its aim was to fight for an independent Poland (wikipedia.pl).

⁵ Polskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne "Sokół" ("Falcon" Polish Gymnastic Society) was created in 1885. It aimed at the spiritual and physical renaissance of society by cultivating national traditions, patriotic upbringing, and sport, mainly of a paramilitary nature (wikipedia.pl).

the above-mentioned *kurierka* and *legionistka* – both members of the Polish Legions.⁶

Once Polish women won the right to vote⁷ there opened up a path towards their participation in political life. Female names began appearing increasingly universally in, among others, political disputes and election leaflets, for example, “Female voters! (*Wyborczynie!*). Women and girls! Comrades! (*Towarzyszek!*)” in a pre-election manifesto of the Women’s Organization of the Polish Social-Democratic Party of Galicia and Silesia⁸ or “Comrades and *towarzyszek!* Citizens and *obywatelki!*” in a pre-election leaflet from the time of elections to the Municipal Board in Zduńska Wola in 1930.⁹

Already at that time the considerable word-formation potential of the Polish language involving the creation of female names caused discussions and disputes about choosing one of the possible formations and its dissemination as the most apt. In other words, proposals included not only *posłanka*, which, as is known, was universally accepted and up to this day is the only name describing a female parliamentary deputy, but also other formations: *posełka*, that is, with the suffix *-ka*, *poślina* with the suffix *-ina*, *poślica* with the suffix *-ica*, as well as *posełkini* with the suffix *-ini* and the connective *-k-*. Similar reflections pertained to choosing a female name for a pedagogue: *pedagogini*, *pedagogiczka*, or *pedagożka*, as well as for a woman driving a tram: *motorowa*, *motorka*, *motorówka* or *motorniczka*.

⁶ Polskie Legiony (Polish Legions) – Polish military formation comprising part of the Austro-Hungarian army, established on 27 August 1914 upon the initiative of Polish political parties in Galicia. In 1916 it became the Polish Auxiliary Corps. Polish Legions took part in World War I alongside the Central Powers (wikipedia.pl).

⁷ In Poland women theoretically won the right to vote after the regaining of sovereignty in 1918, that is, on 7 November 1918, the day of the establishment of the Ignacy Daszyński government.

⁸ The Tadeusz Reger Archive: <https://sbc.org.pl/dlibra/>.

⁹ See: <https://polona.pl/item/towarzysze-i-towarzyszeki-obywatele-i-obywatelki-incipit-zblizaja-sie-wybory-do,MTE5NTI0Nzk0/0/#info:metadata>.

During the twenty-year interwar period the above-mentioned female names, as Woźniak stressed distinctly (2020: 153), were not less valuable stylistically but remained stylistically neutral and equivalent to male names, a situation contrary to the present, when some female names “deteriorate,” at times become transferred to a lower register of the Polish language, and are disregarded.

At the time of the interwar period social approval of female names was greater than during the post-war years or even at present. The assessment of the aptness of new names from the vantage point of the system of the Polish language was much more favorable and fundamentally devoid of emotional-worldview aggravation; cf. “Prescriptivists of the period have nothing against *adiunktka* and recommend *doktorka*; one can also come across the use of university *docentka* and *profesorka*. Here, significance is certainly attached to the power of tradition and the recognition of feminatives as a symptom of ‘the spirit of Polishness’ and Polish linguistic-cultural specificity” (Woźniak, 2014: 304).

The process of rendering women linguistically visible in social life was linked with a custom practiced already in the interwar period, that is, to stress, while speaking about certain communities, that both men and women are involved. This tendency is expressed in parallel constructions comprising a conjunction of male and female forms, for instance, *Polki i Polacy, obywatele i obywatelki, bohaterzy i bohaterki, robotnicy i robotnice* (‘Poles, citizens, heroes, workers’). Interestingly, at present such an approach has even appeared in the Catholic Church, which promotes addressing the faithful as: *Beloved Brothers and Sisters*, (Wiewiór, 2012) although attention should be paid to the fact that the masculine grammatical gender of the *umiłowani* (beloved) adjectival attribute matches only the male noun and thus gender symmetry is incomplete.

Ewa Woźniak observed a characteristic evolution of attitudes towards new feminatives, which began already in the interwar decades and in her opinion was caused by decisive socio-economic factors. First, in the wake of World War I women were sought after as employees in all those domains where due to wartime losses men were lacking and women could successfully replace them. This situation favored the unhampered

creation and preservation of new names of professions, as testified in press announcements of the period seeking, among other, *urzędniczki* ('office workers'), *stenotypistki* ('stenographers'), etc. Subsequently, due to the economic crisis of the 1930s and huge unemployment women began to be perceived on the labor market as competition for unemployed men, a trend that created hostility both towards women and female names of professions. Finally, Woźniak maintains, "the fate of feminatives in the Polish language was further complicated by the attitude towards them at the time of the People's Republic of Poland, when they succumbed to stylistic degradation" (Woźniak, 2020: 188).

The approach towards gender and its reflection in language and daily communication could be legitimized by the above-described linguistic customs inaugurated on a larger scale during the interwar period. By selecting from the tradition of the twentieth century this currently highly sensitive social problem, researchers-linguists provide arguments for supporters of contemporary anti-discrimination discourses.

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