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LANGUAGE AND GENDER: SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS IN COMMUNICATION

Most papers on the relationship between gender and communication give the impression that this issue was first noticed by feminist critique. However, interest in language usage differences between the two sexes has a very long tradition. Accusations that the language system is sexist are groundless, as only language use in specific acts of speech can be sexually determined, depending on the communication conventions of a given culture. The paper discusses the social and psychological limitations of style and communication that culture places on gender understood as the determinant of social roles and as an inalienable element of psychological identity.

Introduction

Studies on the relationship between language and gender (the latter understood to mean a biological and a cultural category) have a longer tradition than feminist linguistics and critique, within which they are most often positioned. The first extensive studies on language-gender relations were conducted in the mid-1970s at the University of California. This initiative resulted in the seminars of Mary Key and Robin Lakoff, and in books whose titles are self-explanatory: *Female Language* and *Language and Woman's Condition*. In 1978 in Europe, the same topic was the subject of the eighth world sociology congress in Uppsala, and, in the following year, of an international symposium on feminist linguistics at the University of Osnabrück (Jurasz, 1994). Marina Yaguello's book *Les Mots et les Femmes* was published in Paris in 1978. With time, studies of these issues transformed into a separate, rapidly developing area of knowledge, which included strictly linguistic studies, describing the differences in language use between women and men, and studies of the cultural roles ascribed to gender. This range of issues surfaced in the United States in the years of intensified feminist movements and the simultaneous interest in the specificity of cultural differences separating ethnic groups. The sociologically focused American studies of minorities were followed by papers on language and communication styles in local subcultures.

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The existence of correlations between language and gender has been noticed practically from the very start of systematic reflection on language and speech, though they were interpreted differently in different periods of history. For example, Cicero believed women's speech to be the main carrier of linguistic tradition, as it was the women's task to teach children to speak properly, though – paradoxically – women's ways of speaking were considered a rather inferior counterpart of men's speech (Baron, 1986). The explanations of the differences were mythological, sociological or biological, depending on the viewpoint of the time. Baron says that the biblical myth of the creation of woman from Adam's rib largely contributed to female language being considered as less perfect (secondary), which was reflected among other things in the belief that all feminine gender forms were derived from masculine forms (Baron, 1986, p. 78). Female speech was not denied creativity, but in general it was the male patterns of speech that defined linguistic standards, as they were more lasting and more prominent (speaking in public). With time, social inequalities began consolidating due to the belief in the biological equipment of the genders, and thus beliefs regarding the language of women and men were related, openly or otherwise, to assessments of the value of gender, its social role and cultural identity.

Differences in the way women and men speak are unquestionable; they can be observed at every level of organization of language and speech: on the morphological, lexical and syntactic planes, and in the use of different styles and communication strategies. In some cultures, these differences are so obvious that they appear in the form of diglossia, which consists in using two separate languages whose distribution is strictly defined by the binding rules of conversation (social communication). Diglossia is most often treated as a variation of bilingualism, a case of functional specialization of different ethnic languages, one of which plays the role of the "high" language (for public speaking), and the other is the "low" or private language used in informal communication situations (Gołąb, Heintz, & Polański, 1968; Ferguson, 1977). A permanent separation of situations in which men and women speak a different language (in the sense that is very close to an ethnic language), allows these kinds of cases to be considered an unusual form of diglossia, in which the social function of different languages is additionally correlated with gender. Such situations are known to linguists and researchers of culture. For example, it is a fact that "among the Indian tribes in the Antilles, women's language preserves words from the language of a long extinct community, while men's language is that of the conquerors, e.g. among the Carib, the men speak Carib while the women speak Awak" (Gołąb, Heintz, & Polański, 1968, p. 292).

The marked dependence of means of communication upon the gender category is present in the Yana language (Sapir, 1963). Yana is one of the languages of North Californian Indians forming a closed community which is internally varied in cultural terms. There are four dialects of Yana: Yahi, Northern, Central and Southern. Sapir writes that Yana does not have the category of gender, instead using specialized inflexional forms in this role whose usage is strictly defined by the situation. The main reference system governing the distribution of these forms is, in fact, the gender of the persons involved in communication, as the forms are different when a man talks to another man, when a woman communicates with another woman, and different still when a woman talks to a man or a man speaks to a woman. In the Yana language, there is a strict distribution of dialects which defines the conventions of communication. Like classical rhetoric in Europe, the customs of the North Californian Indian community defines precisely what can be said, to whom

and how. In Yana, there are separate word forms denoting actions performed by women and men. Interestingly, feminine forms are three times more frequent in the Yana community than masculine forms: Men cannot use feminine forms in any situation, while women may use masculine forms for quoting men's words or for telling myths in which one male hero says something to another. This shows that women in this community have their unique social status, different from the men's, related to the means of representing forms denoting gender. One could conclude that the functional differentiation between male and female conversational customs is a derivative of the culture in which the Yana language exists, and not the intellectual makeup of the genders, given that the women may speak in the same way as the men (quoting, telling myths). Since gender differences are reflected on the plane of dialectal diversity of means of communication, gender differences being in line with linguistic differences, relations between gender and language can presumably be described primarily as stylistic differences related to the choice of communication strategies that are subordinate to specific goals and confirm the gender-related, and thus the cultural identity, of the speakers. The issue of differences in language usage, considered in the context of gender, are obviously linked to the issue of value judgment in language (Gołąb, Heinz, & Polański, 1968).

Gender of language or gender in language?

Feminist linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s quite often, and rather eagerly, hurled accusations at the language system. Arguments were provided by observations of the category of grammatical gender, the most obvious expression of sex differences and one that exists in most languages. This was due to the fact that in languages where grammatical gender corresponds to natural gender, asymmetry in treatment of the sexes opens up the possibility of far-reaching speculation or interpretation. This was perceived as one among many signs of the sexist attitude of language itself, which was for too long governed by men to agree to gender neutrality and forsake the desire for power over the opposite sex. Sexuality was treated as a feature of the language system governing the thinking and world of language.

Asked if the attitude toward the sexes is determined by the language system, feminist linguistics of the 1970s and 1980s gives a decidedly affirmative response. This is partly due to the well-known Barthes thesis on the absolute domination of the language system over speech, on the totalitarian nature of the language system (Barthes, 1978).

Let us consider whether one can speak about the sexuality of language in a different way, not just metaphorically.

Most European languages do not allow gender indefiniteness, nor do they allow emotional or social indefiniteness. Speaking to someone (for example, in Polish), we are forced to specify the position we have in relation to that person, by using the form "ty" (second personal singular pronoun) or the form "pan" / "pani" ("Mr" / "Ms" – third person singular) and making the whole utterance agree in terms of number and gender. This necessity stems from the restrictions inscribed in the system of the language we use. The area of freedom, though limited by the system's demands, does allow us to choose between masculine and feminine (e.g. in Lithuanian, which has two genders), or between masculine, feminine and neuter gender (in Polish). The Yana language confirms this general rule, though the means of expressing gender that it uses are fundamentally different from those we encounter in the majority of European languages.

Gender in language is usually defined by the relation between natural gender and grammatical gender (Handke, 1994a). In older treatises on language and speech, when considerations of grammar were linked as a matter of course with belief in the unequal worth of the sexes, words in language were usually ascribed the gender of the designates, which transferred the stereotypes of the sexes into the area of linguistic reflection. This practice had its exceptions, though; the differentiation between grammatical and natural gender has been known since the time of Aristotle who based his classification of nouns on it. Naturally, in linguistic reflection, views on gender are linked to cultural judgments on the social role of the sexes and its symbols. The grammatical masculine gender was treated as the equivalent of an active attitude, while the feminine gender was ascribed a passive role (similarly to women). Baron (1986) who analyzed English grammars of the 18th century in this context, writes that the statements on grammatical gender contained in those systems display a marked relation to valuation of the sexes. In his grammar written in 1751 (*Hermes, or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Universal Grammar*), James Harris assigns masculine gender to the sun because it radiates light, and the feminine gender to the moon because this celestial body only shines with reflected light, so it is passive, like a woman (after Baron, 1986). The explanation is in essence limited to personification of the stereotypes corresponding to the English words “sun” and “moon.” We do not find this kind of differentiation in the earlier Port-Royal Grammar (*Grammaire generale et raisonnée*) of 1660, which belongs to a completely different orientation of thinking. In the tradition of thinking about language that this work represents (Arnauld & Lancelot, 1991), what is pointed out is the linguistic role of grammatical gender which primarily fulfills syntactic functions, serving to match the word form between the noun (personal pronoun) and the adjective.

Linguistics today considers grammatical gender to be a morphological category subject to the syntax of agreement. In languages originating from proto-Indo-European, grammatical gender is usually based on differentiating between the sexes, but other facets can also be involved (lower-order categories differentiating between meanings, such as being animate or inanimate, personal or impersonal). Some languages that are exotic from a European’s viewpoint can have six different gender categories (Swahili, for instance), while others (closer to Western culture), such as Finnish or Turkish, do not have this category at all; in the latter case, an adjective’s link to a given noun is indicated by word order (Gołąb, Heintz, & Polański, 1968). Thus, from a strictly grammatical point of view, gender is a very important syntactic category that, like most linguistic categories, can be given semantic content, but in essence is arbitrary; it is not motivated (outside the act of speaking) and only takes on a specific meaning in speech (in a text).

Patrizia Violi (Violi, 1987) is against reducing grammatical gender to the class of linguistic phenomena of purely grammatical nature. She seeks “hidden,” “forgotten” motivations for the semantics of gender which reveal the human experience that is inscribed in language. Of course, Violi does not deny the existence of gender’s grammatical functions, but she protests against reducing this category to the role of exponent of syntactic relations. She refers to the well-known view that each of the grammatical categories of language can be given semantic content, be assigned meaning. The hidden, forgotten semantics of gender should be sought in the symbolic systems of culture, in mythical thinking. Attitudes toward the opposite sex and the attitude toward one’s own sensuality are an elementary cultural opposition that stratifies the behavior of a culture’s members, while the means by which sexuality is inscribed in language organizes our perception of the

world. The opposition of masculine and feminine is superimposed on oppositions like “day”-“night”, “light”-“darkness”, “activity”-“passivity”, thus gaining additional meanings. In this way, elementary life experience is inscribed within language.

Assymetry of gender categories

According to Violi, in this perspective the category of grammatical gender, which manifests itself in various ways in the lexical system of different languages, is the effect of semantic rules motivated by their internal meaning. The extra-linguistic order of speech is imprinted in it, which proves a lack of the language system’s neutrality toward the material determinants of our experience (Violi, 1987, p. 23).

There are many older and more recent papers on the category of grammatical gender that speak of the domination of masculine forms as the basic forms from which feminine forms are derived, which is linked to the above-mentioned asymmetry of the means of expressing sexuality in many languages. As researchers would have it, even today masculine styles of expression are considered neutral, while female styles are sometimes treated as inferior counterparts (Handke, 1994a). This state of affairs is noticeable in many European languages, including French and English. The occurrence of a linguistic asymmetry related to gender can be the cause of bending linguistic facts to obviously ideological ends, becoming a pretext for accusations directed at the power of the language system.

Asymmetry of gender is also a fact in the Polish language. This issue has been dealt with by Kwiryna Handke, whose many studies have little in common with feminism:

“Without going into the detail or into a more specific description of gender relations, one needs to emphasize that at the text level we have a twofold relation between masculine and feminine. In the singular, the relation is generally balanced (e.g. “ten mały chłopiec pisał” (this little boy was writing” – third person singular masculine) and “ta mała dziewczynka pisała” (“this little girl was writing” – third person singular feminine), but in the plural, the relation is asymmetric, with a marked domination of the masculine. The feminine is preserved only for feminine subjects, so we have “te małe dziewczynki pisały” (“these little girls were writing” – third person plural feminine) [...]. The masculine, on the other hand, expresses not only its own category, e.g. “ci mali chłopcy poszli” (“these little boys went” – third person plural masculine) [...] but also a series of subjects of different sex, so we have: “Anna i Paweł poszli” (“Anna and Paul went” – third person plural masculine); “Anna i Paweł są dobrzy” (“Anna and Paul are good” – third person plural masculine); “dziewczynka i chłopiec pisali” (“the girl and boy were writing” – third person plural masculine) (exponents of femininity are absolutely inadmissible here).” (Handke, 1994, p. 22)

The asymmetry in the use of pronouns in French was described in the 1980s by Luce Irigaray, a well-known and respected representative of feminist linguistics (Irigaray, 1990). In her opinion, language (*langue*) does not treat women and men alike, as it cannot be indifferent to sex, similarly to the culture of which it is an element, which orders relations between the sexes hierarchically. Because different types of behavior have been foreseen for women and men, this fact has to be reflected in speech in the form of different stylistic patterns, while the long-standing cultural domination of men is reflected, for example, in the structure of French idiomatic expressions. Thus, we say “il faut”, “il pleut” using the masculine personal pronoun, and not: “elle faut”, “elle pleut” with the feminine pronoun. Here is another example of linguistic asymmetry of gender as cited by Irigaray: In French,

the plural takes on the masculine grammatical form, even if the subject or predicate are feminine in the singular. Thus, language does not give the two sexes equal rights, and as a system discriminates against women. "I believe," writes the author, "that different languages express the inequality of the sexes in different ways." (Irigaray, 1990, p. 12). Seen in this perspective, discrimination against women would be a feature of the language system and a quality that likens different cultures to one another, since this area is similar – though there is some variation – in every language.

Weak and strong versions of gender – language relations

Irigaray clearly thinks of language (*langue*) as a system that is unjust toward the sexes. In the work of Irigaray's research team, the thesis of asymmetry in the way various languages treat gender can be traced on the basis of material from French, English and Italian. (The author used questionnaire materials, containing instructions such as: "complete the sentence starting with the word «child»,” or "build a sentence using the words «mother», «house», «gown», «herself», «see». The analytical material here is provided mainly by textual phenomena (sentence, statement, discourse). Observations derived from their analysis allow the author to formulate generalizations based on firm (it would seem) foundations, able to be reduced to the belief, described earlier, in the language system's role as a determinant of gender, which forces people to make utterances in a specific style, e.g., one that is described as sexist. I would call this thesis strong; feminist linguistics and critique consider it a certainty (Michard-Marchal, & Ribery). Like every view, this one, too, can be softened, if only by bringing issues of sexuality down from the height of the system onto the plane of speech, which though it is in essence an implementation of the system's rules, is also the area where stylistic changes, deviations and innovations appear. It is speech that marks the area where language norms and conventions are shaped which later gain the qualities of a system. I would call this way of approaching the issue of gender-language relations a weak version of the thesis on linguistic determinants of sexuality. This version is also widely supported, mainly in papers free from feminist ideology.

The weak version of the concept of gender-language relations is sounder, if one accepts the nature of the language system as proposed by de Saussure. Language is a system of norms, the play of differences, opposites and values, indifferent toward the subject of an utterance – neither bad nor good, not sectarian and not sexist, in a sense by definition. Thus, it represents neither sex, but regardless of structural type it needs to be capable of expressing sexuality. Every language has its own ways of expressing sexuality, and each is also a carrier of its stereotype. I think militant feminists should be talking not so much about the power of language to which our speech has been subordinated, but about the tyranny of languages exercising power locally. It is communication conventions and patterns of linguistic behavior that force us to take a stand toward sexuality. In a word: it is communication practice.

It is possible to overcome the opposition of the two versions of the thesis on language-gender dependences. As Mikhail Bakhtin wrote:

"When we decide upon [specific] words in the process of constructing an utterance, we hardly ever reach for the language system, for their neutral dictionary form. The words of a language belong to no one. But at the same time we only hear them in individual utterances, and read them in certain individual works." (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 385).

Strategies and styles of communication

The view that women and men use different strategies and styles of communication is considered a fact in the literature. (Handke, 1990; Tannen 1986, 1990). However, the “speech of the sexes” is described in a great variety of ways. The criteria here can be linguistic, sociological and psychological. Most often, writers point to the domination of certain forms in the utterances of a group of people in communication (women usually use diminutives, and in the Romance languages they use certain pronoun forms more often). As regards conversation strategies and the corresponding effects of communication, by using a certain style men try chiefly to define their own place in the hierarchy of the speakers, while women usually aim to confirm the character of relations linking the partners in the act of speech, to build bonds between the speakers. Both strategies have their own textual determinants. What is perceived as the linguistic norm in this case is either a masculine style of speech (this is the rule in older works) or (in more recent research) a specific form of language, e.g. colloquial style, speaking in private, unofficial situations, which provides a convenient point of reference for other, stylistically derivative, variations of language.

Normativeness of masculine styles

The normativeness of masculine styles of communication is supported by history. First of all, it is in a sense a legacy of rhetoric, which in the times of its greatest splendor was dominated by men and masculine styles of speech. It was the men who were widely admired speakers for years, and their style shaped canons and conventions – the patterns of communication and types of statement. The very possibility of public speaking was an exclusively male privilege for a long time. The normativeness of masculine speech was, therefore, derived from the mechanism defining the relations between the sexes in cultural space, and it is no wonder that women’s speech was perceived as an inferior variation of the same language. Perhaps what contributed to beliefs like this was the perception of the rhetorical figure, understood as a deviation from the norm, from the generally accepted manner of speaking. If the norm was defined by masculine speech, then women’s speech had to be perceived as a disturbance of the norm, a deviation from the general custom, a kind of figure. Secondly, the consolidation of this kind of belief was facilitated by the social position of women (who were less educated and did not occupy prominent public positions), which in the case of the Polish language was reflected, among other things, in the fact that feminine language was more resistant to change. Women’s speech was closer to tradition, and it was in female speech that dialectal, local elements remained entrenched longer than in men’s speech.

Lakoff’s view

The difference in the position that representatives of the two sexes assume toward language, which is complemented by the differences in styles of speech, is considered a very widespread phenomenon in the literature of the subject. It is known to practically all of modern patriarchal culture, which monopolizes language norms, while language derivatively models specific social behavior. As Lakoff writes, language uses us just as much as

we use language (Lakoff, 1980, p. 239). She believes that the differences in gender-correlated language styles are the effect of learning, socialization, and preparing women and men for specific roles (exercising power, raising children, etc.). Girls are taught to speak in a certain way, but when they grow up they are criticized for the very modes of speech they learned earlier, because communication patterns are determined by masculine style. Thus, women are subject to linguistic discrimination in two ways: they learn the “inferior” variations of language (“feminine” and “neutral” – as Lakoff calls them), and secondly, they are criticized for using those very variations, which proves that the way they speak reduces them to the role of a sex object or servant. Lakoff argues that differences in speech are present at every level of language, e.g. in vocabulary, in the kind of interjections used. Feminine speaking is much more “polite” than masculine, as demonstrated in the use of courteous forms (“Won’t you close the door” instead of “Close the door”), expressions weakening the force of an utterance (“y’know”, “I guess”, “maybe”), the use of tag questions (“It’s really cold here, isn’t it?”). These means of expression place women in a role corresponding to the stereotype of their social position. As Lakoff writes, a tag question is a kind of polite statement in that it does not impose assent or trust on the interlocutor (Lakoff, 1980, p. 239). The way we speak thus influences the way we are perceived, and this in turn strengthens our belief in the rightness (effectiveness) of the chosen style, which we cannot reject with impunity because social norms forbid this.

Lakoff’s statements on the linguistic situation of women are quoted in just about every work on speech-gender relations, and they have been verified in experimental studies confirming the view that women and men speak differently but also demonstrating that the perception of this fact only occurs in specific situational contexts (Newcomb & Arknoff, 1979).

The “sexuality” of utterance becomes prominent in every new speech situation, it is “defined” during verbal interaction by the partners of the communication act, which is effected chiefly with a view to the interlocutor. Depending on who is speaking and to whom, and on the goal the speaker wants to achieve, they select a specific style of conversation, most often one that is compatible with the binding convention and psychological predispositions.

Irigaray’s studies

The work of Irigaray’s team suggests that men do not address an organized message in the same way to their own and the opposite sex; they speak differently among themselves, and differently to women. The same applies to women’s speech. Irigaray’s research thus confirms the kind of conversation that is intuitively observable in our culture, assigning different social status to gender (Irigaray, 1990). The infusion of utterance with “sexuality” manifests itself, for example, in techniques of using personal pronouns. Irigaray argues that French-speaking men are more inclined to build their discourse in such a way that the speaking “I” fulfills the role of the subject, while in women’s utterances, the subject is more often denoted by a pronoun in the second or third person. Irigaray considers the determinants of sexuality in speech to be women’s inclination to use question forms (interrogative transformation), which suggests women have a predilection for dialogue (questions leave room for responses, and these provoke further questions), building “emphatic” utterances (sentences like “C’est la soleil qui m’a halée”, “C’est la table qui m’a

cognée” instead of phrases using deictic expressions – “ce”, “ces”), using reported speech (“Je m’aperçois que j’ai faim”) rather than the masculine direct address (“J’ai faim”). Correspondingly, the features of masculine speech include a tendency to use statements, negations and direct speech. Men are more specific in their utterances, but at the same time more stereotypical. They are inclined to objectify the statement’s object, while women more often link the utterance to the situation and introduce extra-linguistic references. Most of these differences should be interpreted in a broad linguistic, and thus cultural, context which significantly modifies the researchers’ conclusions. As a reminder – the author builds her generalizations on questionnaire studies, not on natural utterances made in typical situations – on the street, at home, etc.

Communication differences between women and men

Among the works on communication differences published over the past 15 years which take into consideration gender issues, the books of Deborah Tannen seem to have been the most influential (Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1994).

Tannen’s perspective

Tannen describes communication styles and strategies, and their effects, while a strictly linguistic analysis of statement construction is practically outside of her field of interest.

Women and men use different communication strategies, which is reflected in the way they communicate, in the stylistic structure of their utterance, in its pragmatics. A “strategy” is the acquired (not always consciously selected) way of speaking, used in the hope of achieving a specific goal. Tannen thinks that besides syntactic and lexical determinants, a strategy is characterized by such elements of speech as the tempo of speaking, an inclination to ask questions, and pausing. I do not think it against the author’s intentions if I ascribe to her a broad, semiological understanding of “style”, according to which style is defined through the use of certain language elements from among all possibilities. The strategy is realized with the help of a specific style capable of sustaining its requirements.

Tannen formulates her conclusions on gender-correlated speech differences chiefly in relation to American culture (or more broadly, Western culture). The research material Tannen interprets comes largely from recorded children’s conversations, observation of speech styles that dominate in various communities, and her own communication experience. The author analyzes conversations that accompany play, conversations at work and conference addresses – in other words, typical verbal situations, texts that were once spoken. Tannen states the frequently repeated view on the different expectations toward the effects of everyday communication as correlated to gender difference. Generally speaking, men (boys) tend to use language strategies that confirm their status within the group, while women (girls) aim to confirm relationships, to consolidate group bonding (“confirmation of relationships,” “aiming to maintain status” – these concepts refer to the psychological position of the speakers). To describe communication strategies, Tannen uses formulas similar to those through which Berne described human interplay in the well-known book (Berne, 1964). One could say (and Tannen does) that men play the game of “do you respect me?” and women’s game is “do you like me?”

The typical strategies used by representatives of the two sexes can be described through specific textual determinants. Female speech is usually more polite and gentler than male speech. Women use more operators that build a sense of community between the speakers and the person they are addressing. Thus, they will often use “maybe we could”, “would you”, “we have to do this” (in situations where it is obvious that the other person has to do something, at work for instance). Telling a story, they talk about others more often than about themselves, use indirect styles more often, and are more inclined to listen during a conversation (dialogue) than to interrupt. In a group, they tend to all speak at once, as they treat this kind of dialogue as cooperation – a joint product of discourse without polarity of positions. Tannen analyzes and verifies the stereotypes related to women’s and men’s verbal behavior such as the belief that women are more talkative by nature, that they speak more often and say more. In the social consciousness, certain types of utterance are reserved for a specific gender: Traditionally, gossip is seen to belong to feminine discourse, while swearing is a part of masculine discourse. Sociological studies show that these “truths” are only valid for specific situations and social groups. For example, in public, official interaction, it is men who say more and speak more frequently, and swearing does not distinguish the verbal behavior of either sex in the lower classes.

Tannen generally confirms the view that masculine communication styles dominate as speech patterns that are copied and associated with power. She argues that in similar situations, women adopt the male style, and not the other way round. Each of the sexes is able to use the language variation proper for the opposite sex’s conventions of speech, but the social assessment of the style used depends mainly on the speaker’s actual biological sex and not on the text’s stylistic qualities (its, so to say, gender status). That is why a woman speaking like a man is most often perceived as “haughty” and “peremptory” (negative judgment), while a man speaking in exactly the same way – as “dynamic” and “commanding” (positive judgment). It is impossible to get rid of sexuality, and speaking in the style of the opposite sex is often linked to the risk of cultural rebuke. We speak in a certain way not because it is the only way we know, but because the acquired norms require it of us: Girls are inclined to propose action by using the imperative mood in the first person plural, while boys often issue orders to one another (Tannen, 1986).

The explanation given for this is that the methods of socialization are distinct, people are raised to fulfill specific social roles – this is training that children are subject to from birth. Both the usage and assessment of conversation styles is culturally (environmentally) conditioned (Tannen 1990, 1994).

Those are Tannen’s views; for her, genderism’s essential environment is speech. The means of linguistic expression comprising the feminine style that has been practiced in Poland after 1945 have been characterized by Kwiryna Handke (Handke, 1990).

Handke’s work

This author describes women’s modes of speech as a style with distinct linguistic features, which developed within colloquial Polish. The reason why this feminine style emerged were the postwar changes in women’s social position and the concomitant increased freedom of language. According to Handke, the feminine style is a meta-style, which means it practically only exists in relation to other ways of speaking, taking its basic elements from them and only changing their frequency. Thus, augmentative and diminutive forms as well

as swearwords always functioned in the colloquial style, and only their frequency of use in women's utterances changed after 1945. Swearwords, for instance, did not appear so intensively before. Feminine style should therefore be characterized in relation to women's speech in past times and to other functional styles. Its most characteristic feature is expressiveness, displayed in a tendency for frequent use of means that reveal emotions: augmentative and diminutive forms, interjections, onomatopoeic words, expletives (considered a new element in women's speech). These are only some of the style-creating linguistic operations Handke presents. Her studies indicate that the speech of contemporary Polish women is different from that in the last century mainly in "negative expression" (expressing negative emotions by all available means), which encompasses a broad area of everyday communication situations.

Negative expression is a characteristic feature of the language of almost all Polish women today, regardless of education and social status. Negative expression appears both in private utterances (family talk) and in other contacts definable as public but unofficial. This way of speaking is preferred by women with a primary and secondary education, though the latter use it at work more often. As for women with a university education, a tendency to use negative expression usually depends on "certain predispositions or special circumstances" (Handke, 1990, p. 23). Handke considers the Polish writer Gabriela Zapolska to be the precursor of this variation of feminine style in the Polish language, and she treats the tendency to exhibit blunt expression as the effect of translocations within the paradigm of women's and men's social roles, which occurred together with the system changes. In effect, female speech became saturated with elements that are widely recognized as features of the male mode of expression (Handke, 1990, p. 12).

Conclusions

The question of language gender relations has provoked disputes and controversies for years. I would be inclined to relate the rather clear shift of accent visible in the 1990 literature on gender-language relations to the evolution of feminist reflection, among other things. It seems that over the past decade from a position of constant readiness to fight feminism has moved toward acceptance, reconciliation and recognition of the distinct character of the opposite sex. Studies of genderism as an important element of culture prove that stratification of behavior, utterance and discourse organized around this category, define the divisions of cultural space that are valid in all its variations and types. You cannot escape from genderism, but it should not be thought of as absolute, neither idealized nor demonized. That is also the conclusion springing from a work by Grażyna Borkowska, who writes about the evolution of feminist critique in recent years:

"It is not only gender that determines the types of relationships between people. They are a derivative of different factors, different existential situations, among which love and (expected) death are of decisive importance" (Borkowska, 1999, p. 42).

The type of relationship is also greatly influenced by the way we speak, stylistically correlated as it is with the "cultural gender," which does not mean that it is unequivocally determined as the attitude toward the opposite sex – an attitude that is in fact an attitude toward another person's separate identity.

According to Benveniste, speaking consists in a constant marking of the relation between "I" and other persons and the world. (Benveniste, 1971). The identity of the subject

is realized mainly through utterance, it is the identity of the speaking “I”. Language is the foundation of building an image of reality (supplying the categories for understanding it), so one can assume that identity is realized in the act of speaking, in discourse. Language is the object of cognition and the instrument of cognition at the same time. Only through the medium of language can we make contact with another person, with culture. Though language is a totality and a power from which we cannot completely free ourselves, in individual speaking, utterance and statements we are able to mark our distinct qualities, as individuals and personalities. This suggests that it is not language forms but their realization in utterance that builds the image of “I”, which – as I have suggested – is devoid of gender at the system level and only achieves a concrete subjectiveness in speech. The identity of the speaking “I” is a gender identity, but at the same time language allows for many different possibilities of expressing genderism. Following Benveniste, if language is the “interpreter” of society – meaning it offers the individual and the group the categories allowing for differentiation and thus for self-identification, then speaking (utterance, discourse) has by analogy to be the “interpreter of genderism”. Styles and ways of speaking place us in a specific role as a representative of the biological sex, determine the conventions of behavior assigned to the cultural sex, and label us in the eyes of the other. “You talk like a macho, an intellectual, a flirt, a lady, a hurt little girl” – classifications of this kind, with their reference to knowledge of speech conventions, largely determine the course of subsequent communication, and thus also the attitude toward the conversation partner. We mainly react to words, before we are forced to react to actions.

One could suggest that it is the “I” of the speaker (the discursive “I”) that is the main shifter of genderism (Jakobson, 1957). The degree in which this “I” is equipped with gender qualities is proportional to a text’s sexuality-related content, which could also be a measure of a statement’s individualization.

According to the interactive theory of communication, speaking consists in defining social relationships or confirming them. Since our verbal contacts are largely institutionalized, dependent on our position in the reference group, speaking is nearly always “speaking on the social stage” (Goffman, 1981). Referring to the concept presented by Erving Goffman, one might try to name the inalienable modulators of women’s and men’s conversation styles. I think that the use of a style is conditioned by the necessity to confirm gender identity and by the situation. While the latter permits a relatively free choice of gender-characteristic stylistic operators depending on the circumstances and the conversation partners, the former forbids one from stepping outside the conventions of speech as guarded by community norms.

Speaking in a specific style exemplifies one of the many possible variations of the stereotype of gender, which in itself is an important element of the linguistic image of the world.

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