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# Feminization of the Teaching Profession and the Androcentrism of the Polish Language – Will “Any Bread Be Made of This Flour”? Developmental Chances for Women’s Potentials<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

A critical review of educational institutions and processes using the paradigms of social anthropology, feminist and social constructivism allows us to perceive an extremely important and rarely addressed problem: What are the opportunities for developing the potentials of girls and women with the participation of a school that uses androcentric language? The author uses a term to which Helena Radlińska attributed the greatest importance in upbringing: the invisible environment. And it makes us realize that the native language is the most important element of the invisible living environment, at the same time being an invisible environment itself. Its meaning is not realized by teachers and tutors. Therefore it is worth looking at female teachers (representatives of a profession dominated by women) who, immersed in language and unaware of its power, stand guard over the patriarchal world, upholding the dominance of men.

## Keywords

invisible language environment; androcentrism of language; female teachers; women’s potential

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## Introduction

Cultural diversity of the modern world is a more vivid experience for individuals and societies than ever before. It can become a wealth (not a threat) if some developmental opportunities are provided for minorities and the potentialities are released of people from minority groups. In the undertaken discussion, only one minority will be focused on – women.<sup>2</sup> Girls and women are rarely seen as a minority group, although they are (or perhaps because they are) the largest minority of all.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing their specific status is extremely difficult, because – as Elizabeth Minnich puts it: “What we [feminists] do can be compared to the work of Copernicus, who overthrew the geocentricity of human reasoning, or of Darwin, who overthrew our species-centricity. We are overthrowing androcentricity, and this is a change of fundamental significance.”<sup>4</sup>

The problem, which in my opinion is by all means worth due attention, could be formulated as a question: **What are the developmental chances for the potentials of girls and women in the face of the participation of school with its androcentric language?** A question formulated in this way is aimed at provoking the reflection on the (Polish) language and the importance of language for the development of women’s potential (and subjectivity). This is what the coupling of two issues is supposed to serve: the **androcentric language**, which is the essence of patriarchy, i.e. the sex-gender-system,<sup>5</sup> and the **development of women’s potential** taking place in this culture. What is more, women will be presented here in two categories: as teachers, agents of school institutions, and as their charges, who should be supported and guided in their development and whose hidden human powers should be brought out in the process of education.

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction made on the basis of sex and gender needs to be supplemented with the statement that talking about two genders, women and men, is inadequate to the reality. While dealing with women, I am aware that one should rather talk about the entire gender spectrum. There are people who do not identify with either gender, and there are those who identify with both at the same time, the acronym LGBTQIAP makes this multiplicity clear.

<sup>3</sup> The question that arises concerns the term group itself – whether its use is legitimate here. See: A. Titkow, *Interes grupowy polskich kobiet. Zakres wątpliwości i szanse artykulacji*, [in:] M. Fuszara (ed.), *Kobiety w Polsce na przełomie wieków. Nowy kontrakt płci*, Warsaw 2002. Feminist literature says that women are not so much a minority group as they have the “minority status”. See: H. Mayer-Hacker, *Kobiety jako grupa mniejszościowa*, [in:] *Nikt nie rodzi się kobietą*, selection, translation and introduction: T. Hołówna, Warsaw 1982.

<sup>4</sup> E. Minnich: *A Devastating Conceptual Error: How Can We Not Be Feminist Scholars?*, “Change” 1982, 14(3), pp. 7–9. Quoted in: M. Humm, *Słownik teorii feminizmu*, trans. B. Umińska, J. Mikos, Warsaw 1993, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> This is how Gayle Rubin defines patriarchy in his study *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex*, [in:] *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. R.R. Reiter (ed.), Monthly Review Press, New York and London 1975. Quoted in: M. Humm, *Słownik teorii feminizmu*, op. cit., p. 159.

Referring to Helena Radlińska's concept of education, it should be reminded that the researcher took into account three developmental spheres in which the educational process takes place: the course of the individual's growth, the course of their growing into the society and the process of introducing them to cultural values. When Radlińska discusses growing into society and the educator's tasks, she mentions the "melioration" of the socialization environment and saturating its soil with some selected values. "... the role of education consists not in adapting the learner to the environment, but in helping to overcome the deficiencies of the environment and in using its values."<sup>6</sup> In the narration conducted here, attention is drawn to the fact that the value of the environment is language, and the use of this value is also important today – in the era of picture culture (and the devices that serve it: tablets, smartphones, laptops). Radlińska, a library science theoretician and readership researcher, talked about the importance of language, the national language belonging to the national culture, about "great" poetry, literature, art<sup>7</sup> and about working with the book as well. My intention here is to draw attention to a certain paradox – the native language, which is a value, also has the specificity of being androcentric. This dominant, not to say the stigma, and yet **an immanent feature of the language, which remains beyond the perception and awareness of female and male users**, makes it necessary to overcome certain shortcomings in the language.

What is more, the introduction into cultural values, the third of the above mentioned spheres in which the educational process takes place, is nothing else than the introduction with the help of the native language to the androcentric culture, representing the male point of view and favouring men.<sup>8</sup>

Mentioning Helena Radlińska clearly shows that in my research the paradigm of social pedagogy (which I refer to by the term social anthropology<sup>9</sup>) is used. Its subject matter involves humanity, environment, education (educational activities that stimulate individuals' internal strength and attitude of will) and values in the name of which the environment is processed and modernized. Using the paradigm of social anthropology takes place alongside the use of the feminist paradigm and, more broadly, of social constructivism (gender studies). It

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<sup>6</sup> A. Kamiński, *Wstęp – Zakres i podstawowe pojęcia pedagogiki społecznej Heleny Radlińskiej*, [in:] H. Radlińska, *Pedagogika społeczna*, W. Wyrobkowska-Delawska (ed.), Wrocław–Warsaw–Cracow 1961, p. XXVII.

<sup>7</sup> H. Radlińska, *Postawa wychowawcy wobec środowiska społecznego*, [in:] H. Radlińska, *Pedagogika społeczna*, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of androcentrism was first used by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her work *The Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture*, T. Fisher Unwin, London 1911. Quoted in: M. Humm, *Słownik teorii feminizmu*, op. cit., pp. 20–21.

<sup>9</sup> See: E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, *Polityka – edukacja – płeć kulturowa. Z perspektywy antropologii społecznej*, Katowice 2021, p. 22.

is a merger of the humanistic and social paradigm. My interest is in a human being<sup>10</sup> (especially a female human being) in their full development, a subjective and autonomous being, with the freedom to build their individual identity, but at the same time subordinated to social expectations, social constructs (gender, language), and within the operational scope of social (educational, cultural, care and educational) institutions.

## On the Invisible Environment of Life – the Immersion in Language

What seems of particular value in the analysis conducted here is the term invisible environment (coined by an American researcher Mary Hurlbutt), which Helena Radlińska made fully productive in terms of education.<sup>11</sup> She included everything that is referred to as spiritual culture, i.e. knowledge, art, beliefs, customs, concepts) into the components of the invisible environment. All these elements affect human mentality, although not all of them in the same way (and only when they are part of the subjective environment of an individual who decides what goods they reach for). The invisible environment plays a particularly important role in human life: it shows the hierarchy of values, influences the motives of conduct, and indirectly changes human life. The invisible factors of the environment were those to which the researcher attributed the greatest importance for education: "... owing to them, the transformation of life, that 'improvement' which is an educational goal, can take place."<sup>12</sup>

Even though culture provides one with ready-made contents (beliefs, convictions, views), thinking and formulating any beliefs would not be possible without language – words and entire language constructions. This is what educators (anthropology specialists) must not forget even for a moment.<sup>13</sup> Piotr Sztompka calls language a fundamental tool provided by culture.<sup>14</sup>

This issue, more specifically the very concept of a tool, deserves more attention. For many, the most important function of language is its communicative

<sup>10</sup> A human is a gendered being, and since sex is neither synonymous with a man nor with a woman, it can be said that a human is of two kinds: masculine and feminine. See: S. Agacinski, *Polityka płci*, trans. M. Falski, Warsaw 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in: A. Kamiński: *Wstęp – Zakres i podstawowe pojęcia pedagogiki...*, *op. cit.*, pp. XXXII–XXXIII.

<sup>12</sup> H. Radlińska, *Pedagogika społeczna...*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> I have addressed this issue in my publications for over two decades. See, e.g.: *Język – narzędzie oddziaływań wychowawczych. Szacunek, a równość płci w języku*, [in:] E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, *Polityka – edukacja – płeć kulturowa...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–144.

<sup>14</sup> P. Sztompka, *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*, Cracow 2002, p. 288.

function. In this sense, it is treated as a ready instrument, a tool for the communication of thoughts. Hence the popularity of learning foreign languages. However, Irena Bogocz highlights that “at least since the times of Wilhelm von Humboldt, there has been an alternative definition of language at the disposal.”<sup>15</sup> Compliantly with the latter definition, “language is not a result of an action, a product (*ergon*), but the action itself (*energeia*), a creative and cognitive process.”<sup>16</sup> The author recalls the statement of Hans-Georg Gadamer:

... language is not an instrument at all, it is not a tool. For a tool is, by its very nature, something the use of which can be controlled. A tool can be picked up and put away when it has done its job. ... And that is not the same. ... In all our knowledge of ourselves and of the world, we are already rather embraced by language.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Bogocz states: “Language connects us to society culturally, geopolitically, legislatively. Language cannot be ‘put aside,’ language cannot be freed from. It stays with one even when one learns another language, when one moves to other social structures, identifies with other ideologies, cultures, countries.”<sup>18</sup> In the words of José Ortega Gasset: “A human being cannot escape the society in which they were born and brought up, but – in this escape – the society accompanies them relentlessly, because a human carries this society within themselves.”<sup>19</sup>

What follows from the above is that language exerts its power over humanity, although it is itself a being dependent on people. Language and humanity are simply interdependent. In the words of Robin Lakoff, “Language uses us no less than we use language.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this is one of the reasons why language is so poorly recognized as a component of the environment of life, although it should be much better realized. Therefore, my thesis formulated over two decades ago should be repeated here: **language is the most important element of the invisible envi-**

<sup>15</sup> I. Bogocz, *Kilka pokornych i przekornych uwag na temat języka*, [in:] K. Marcol, J. Kajfosz (eds.), *Językowe i kulturowe modelowanie świata. Księga dedykowana profesorowi Karolowi Danielowi Kadłubcowi*, Czeski Cieszyń–Katowice 2017, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> See: B. Guzik, *Powinnościowy model języka w dyskursie edukacyjnym*, Cracow 2003, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Człowiek i język*, [in:] *Antropologia słowa. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, G. Godlewski, A. Mencwel, R. Sulima (eds.), Warsaw 2004, p. 155. Quoted in: I. Bogocz, *Kilka pokornych i przekornych uwag...*, *op. cit.*, p. 108. It is worth noting, as Bogocz reminds us, that “the use of language is not only a private matter of individuals, an individual is not in this respect someone sovereign.” *Ibidem*, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> I. Bogocz: *Kilka pokornych i przekornych uwag...*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset: *Mówienie jako zwyczaj społeczny*, [in:] *Antropologia słowa. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów...*, Quoted in: I. Bogocz, *Kilka pokornych i przekornych uwag...*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> R. Lakoff: *Język a sytuacja kobiety*, trans. U. Niklas, [in:] *Język w świetle nauki*, selection and introduction B. Stanosz, Warsaw 1980, p. 239. It could be said, following Ireneusz Iredeński, that “a human is immersed in language like a fish in water.”



**ronment of life**, and at the same time **it is invisible itself** (even in the written or printed form), in the sense that **its meaning is not realized** by educators and teachers. In-depth reflection on the invisible language environment is absolutely necessary in the field of social anthropology.

## Language – a Guide to (Androcentric) Culture

The mutual relationship between language and culture has intrigued researchers representing various fields of science, including German linguists and philosophers in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and American 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists. Noticing the permanence of the relationship between reasoning and language, the aforementioned Wilhelm von Humboldt indicated that language should be considered in direct connection with the culture and mentality of a particular society. Leo Weisgerber thought similarly, treating language primarily as a spiritual factor shaping the reality (*wirkende kraft*). He also emphasized the significance of the native language for shaping the worldview. Barbara Guzik points out that the concepts of the European school are in line with the theoretical and methodological assumptions of American linguistics, which altogether examine the interrelationships between the language and the culture of a particular community.<sup>21</sup>

Edward Sapir, an American anthropologist and linguist, recognized language as the key to understanding a human and their thoughts, culture and social reality. However, it should be considered that this human was understood in a universalistic way, which means that in practice this was a human-man. According to Sapir, language is a “symbolic guide to culture”<sup>22</sup> facilitating its deeper understanding. In the undertaken discussion, this sentence should be made more precise: to the culture of the system of power and domination of men over women, which through its social, economic and political institutions is a source of women’s oppression.<sup>23</sup> For the society, in Sapir’s opinion, language is “the force that consolidates and unifies the society” – let me add that only when the intention is to make society homogeneous by following the model of the dominant majority. “A perfect tool of expression and communication in all communities” – this term that Sapir uses for language refers to those who belong to the privileged majority. This is because the largest minority, which are women, for centuries has been advised to remain

<sup>21</sup> B. Guzik, *Powinnościowy model języka w dyskursie edukacyjnym...*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Sapir’s standpoint is presented following Barbara Guzik. See: the same author: *Powinnościowy model języka w dyskursie edukacyjnym...*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> This is how patriarchy, which is a key category of feminism, is defined. See: M. Humm, *Słownik teorii feminizmu*, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

silent.<sup>24</sup> In reference to the individual, according to the researcher, language is “one of the most powerful factors in the development of individuality.” Undoubtedly, this is true, language is conducive to the development of an individual as long as this individual belongs to the masculine gender and is of heterosexual orientation.

None of the scientific analyses of the relationship between language and society at that time indicated the relationship between language and cultural gender (because the term *gender* itself did not function), no reflection was undertaken on the value of language for the development of a specific type of person: male or female (not to mention non-binary people). The time for such research was yet to come – in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

However, even today – in the societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, **the issue of linguistic justice is not raised** (not noticed?), which is pointed out by Walter Żelazny. The researcher notices here an analogy between this and the neglect of women’s rights to education in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the common right to health care in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or a whole series of rights protecting various minorities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> While discussing national and “international” languages, Żelazny raises the question **whether language and culture are categories of social justice, the first principle of a modern state**. By enumerating three types of linguistic inequalities: the numerical, spatial and cultural-prestigious one, he makes one realize that the first and second are irrelevant when it comes to women.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is the cultural-prestigious type (associated with the historical, political-legal, cultural or religious status) that is relevant in relation to gender. Women, like indigenous peoples, with

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<sup>24</sup> Feminist literature uses the term feminine cultural area. Shirley Ardener, an anthropologist, refers to it as the “silent group”. This name is useful in the feminist literary theory, where it is consistent with the notion of absence (of women in literature). S. Ardener (ed.), *Women and Space. Ground Rules and Social Maps*, London 1981. Quoted in: M. Humm, *Słownik teorii feminizmu*, op. cit., p. 105. In many, if not all languages, one can see attempts to censor women’s speech, whether by silencing them or criticizing their supposed tendency to gossip. Maxims, proverbs and expressions that stigmatize women who speak out are aimed at this. Here are some examples: “A woman’s tongue is the devil’s broom” (Russian proverb); “Female talk won’t amount to anything” (Polish proverb); “Women and hens always cluck” (Spanish proverb); “He who has a wife has noise” (French proverb); “Many women, many words; many geese, many turds” (English proverb). See: E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, *Feministyczna lingwistyka*, [in:] E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, *Szkic do portretu Ślązaczki. Refleksja feministyczna*, Katowice 2000.

<sup>25</sup> The development of studies defined in English as gender and language studies or gender linguistics took place in the USA and Western Europe. In Poland, studies into gender linguistics were initiated in the 1990s. See: K. Handke, *Język a determinanty płci*, [in:] J. Anusiewicz, K. Handke (eds.), *Język a kultura*, vol. 9: *Płeć w języku i kulturze*, Wrocław 1994.

<sup>26</sup> W. Żelazny, *Czy jest możliwa sprawiedliwość językowa?*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2010, (2).

<sup>27</sup> The number of female speakers is not smaller than the number of men. The spatial type, concerning the territorial distribution of particular languages, is also out of the question.

their language, with their stories and all their culture, have been pushed to the sphere of civil privacy.

In the context of the issues presented here, it may be surprising that the recognition of linguistic injustice was made by a Polish linguist already in the interwar period. Jan Nieciśław Baudouin de Courtenay (according to Norman Davies, one of the most original Polish thinkers at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), in his text *Wpływ języka na światopogląd i nastrój /The Influence of Language on Worldview and Mood/* published in 1929, admitted: “The belief revealed in language that the masculine form is something primary, and the female form – derivative and secondary, contradicts the principles of logic and the sense of justice.”<sup>28</sup> The cited author wrote about making the Polish language male, about the “masculinization of linguistic thinking” and the unfavourable consequences of this phenomenon.<sup>29</sup>

## Androcentric nature of the (Polish) language in the light of feminist criticism

The Polish language, as the native language for its users, is referred to as *język ojczysty* (father tongue) and this name itself presents the androcentric perspective. For comparison, English for its users is referred to as native language or mother tongue, German as *Muttersprache* (mother speech), French as *langue maternelle* (mother language), Spanish as *lengua maternal* (mother language). It is interesting that the concept of maternal language was used in Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (interchangeably with the term natural language),<sup>30</sup> however, it did not survive.

The interest in studying the language in terms of language differences referring to men and women has not been in focus of traditional linguistics. Even after the rise of the modern feminist movement, it took many years for language to become a research object as important for feminists as social relations or cultural tradition.<sup>31</sup> The development of studies referred to as gender and language studies or gender linguistics took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the USA and

<sup>28</sup> J.N. Baudouin de Courtenay, *Wpływ języka na światopogląd i nastrój*, „Prace Filologiczne” 1929, pp. 231–232. Quoted in: M. Ciechomska, *Nieobecność*, “Pełnym Głosem” 1993, (1), p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> M. Karwatowska, J. Szpyra-Kozłowska, *Językoznawstwo*, [in:] M. Rudaś-Grodzka et al. (eds.), *Encyklopedia gender. Płeć w kulturze*, Warsaw 2014, p. 220.

<sup>30</sup> Karol Miarka (1825–1882), a Polish social activist in Upper Silesia, a teacher, writer and publicist, emphasized the importance of the maternal language as the basic factor in educating the spirit. See: M. Wójcik, *Program wychowania rodzinnego Karola Miarki*, [in:] B. Żechowska (ed.), *W kręgu problematyki i metod polskiej pedagogiki*, Katowice 1991.

<sup>31</sup> M. Ciechomska, *Nieobecność*, op. cit., p. 53.



Western Europe (and according to some sources, as much behind time as in the late 1970s). In Poland, since the 1990s, the following names have been used for this field of research: “*lingwistyka płci* (gender linguistics),” “językoznaństwo genderowe (gender linguistics)” or “*badania nad językiem i płcią* (language and gender studies).” In the research into language, two main trends can be distinguished that can be defined by slogans: “gender in language” and “language of gender.” In my analysis, the first one, which resulted in the concept of linguistic sexism, is more interesting. Thanks to American and French researchers, a definition of sexism has been developed, the oppression of women in language has been specified and its specific dimensions have been indicated, namely: (1) ignoring women and their experiences; (2) defining a woman in relation to a man, often as a subordinate person; (3) presenting women in a stereotypical way; (4) depreciation of women.<sup>32</sup>

As regards Polish studies in the field of gender linguistics (initiated in the 1990s), in recent years there has been an increased interest in these issues. At the same time, there is no unanimity among researchers in the assessment of asymmetry phenomena, their interpretations differ to the extreme: from not noticing or denying the problem to a very critical standpoint – demanding a reform of the language. It is regrettable that there is so little focus on the discussed issues among educators, including academics, who have left this area to linguists. Baudouin de Courtenay was aware of the sociocultural consequences of using masculinized Polish, at the same time being convinced that the language could and should be improved so that it could express the views of its users.

Educationalists and teachers seem to be unaware of the immersion in language, the invisible language environment is invisible to them. They diligently participate in the “natural order of things”, constantly reproduced through the dominant discourse – through language. They do it as representatives of school – one of the leading institutions of symbolic violence.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, if teachers, tutors, and educationalists happen to refer to language, it most often takes the form of rejecting feminine language forms – without a broader reflection on the significance of language for shaping one’s thinking, including thinking about oneself, fulfilling one’s own potentialities and abilities that affect the quality of life.

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<sup>32</sup> E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, *Myśl feministyczna jako nurt rozważań w pedagogice społecznej*, Myslowice 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, who drew attention to the permanence of the androcentric vision of the world and, therefore, the need to reflect on this fact, indicates the entities and institutions that in the course of history have managed to perpetuate the system of domination relations between the sexes. In addition to school, these are: family, church and state. He attributes the most important role to the family in the process of recreating the structures of male domination. See: P. Bourdieu, *Męska dominacja*, trans. L. Kopciwicz, Warsaw 2004, pp. 100–101.

## Is the Feminization of the Teaching Profession Beneficial for the Development of Girls and Women?

Teachers are one of the largest professional groups in Poland, and the dominant number of women in this profession is a permanent phenomenon.<sup>34</sup> Women working as teachers constitute the vast majority at all levels of school education. In 2019, women accounted for 82% of all employed teachers,<sup>35</sup> with the greatest disproportion between women and men occurring at the level of pre-school education (in 2019, the share of women was 98.15% in this sector). As noticed by Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik, the phenomenon of statistical domination of women in the teaching profession, especially at the level of kindergarten and primary school applies to almost all countries of the world.<sup>36</sup>

As far as the education of Polish teachers is concerned, it is high. In 2019, 95.1% had completed higher education (thus meeting the statutory requirement regarding qualifications), and 90.8% held a master's degree.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it could be assumed that such well-educated and prepared for work teachers, mostly female, guarantee favourable conditions for the development of their learners, and their influence is equally beneficial for girls and boys. Disregarding the fact that teachers are only one element of the entire educational system,<sup>38</sup> it is worth looking at this category more broadly – taking into account the sociological characteristics and historical perspective. Then, it will seem easy to see that the feminization of the profession was a “cumulative historical and social process” reflecting the “subtle patterns of socialization” of women and men in the Western culture that were related to the ideology of domestication. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the teaching profession was performed only by men, with time the perception of women in this profession began to change. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were already accepted in teaching, and the profession itself began to be treated as an excellent introduction to the career of a wife and mother. Yet, gender desegregation was related to a progressive

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<sup>34</sup> This does not mean it has always been like that. The problem of the gradual devaluation of this profession related to gender desegregation is presented by Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik in her article *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego – “różowe kołnierzyki” i paradoksy rynku pracy*, “Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych. Educational Studies Review” 2017, 2(25), pp. 75–90.

<sup>35</sup> In 2019, schools and public institutions employed 621,409 teachers, including 509,315 women working as teachers. Quoted in: J. Madalińska-Michalak, *Pedeutologia. Prawno-etyczne podstawy zawodu nauczyciela*, Warsaw 2021, p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego...*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> J. Madalińska-Michalak, *Pedeutologia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>38</sup> See: E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, *Feministyczna krytyka edukacji*, [in:] T. Pilch (ed.), *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, vol. 1, Warsaw 2003.

devaluation of the profession. Nowadays as well, there is a widespread belief that the work of a teacher is an ideal solution for women, as it does not only correspond to their natural predispositions (in the perspective of essentialism), but also allows them to divide their time between their home (the duties of a wife and mother) and work. It is also a profession with low prestige, offering low incomes.

However, teachers still have an immense impact on their learners' development, which is pointed out by sociologists of education. "The most important individual life chance in education which a child has as they climb the educational ladder is likely to be the quality and vision – or limitations – of teachers," wrote Eileen Byrne. "No single influence to preserve or change the status quo, nor creating insurmountable obstacles or new opportunities, will ever be as powerful as the influence of teachers of both sexes."<sup>39</sup> In the past, a common opinion was shared that natural personality traits of women created a good climate for educating girls and boys. Yet, it is now recognized with growing frequency that school problems and educational failure of boys are a result of the feminization of school.<sup>40</sup> It is argued that school, stereotypically perceived as a "female teachers' ghetto,"<sup>41</sup> is a terrible place for boys. Female teachers "make boys tender, quench the fire in them, imbuing them with matriarchal values."<sup>42</sup> Boys have lost control over their lives. Female teachers are also believed to bring feminine contents and methods into the curriculum that are closer to girls, owing to which they are successful. Similarly, it is believed that the rewarding system, dominant at school and typical for women, traditionally prefers typical behaviours of girls: diligence, politeness, kindness.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, some other questions are raised: To what extent do these girls' school successes translate into their development, the use of their personal potentials, the extraction of their hidden, dormant powers? To what extent are girls' typical behaviour patterns, consolidated at school, helpful to women who want to be economically independent, to climb the career ladder and, resigning from the attributes of traditional femininity, not to expect support from men any longer?

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<sup>39</sup> E.M. Byrne, *Women and Education*, Tavistock, London 1978. Quoted in: R. Meighan (with L. Barton & S. Walker), *Socjologia edukacji*, Z. Kwieciński (ed.), Toruń 1993, p. 334.

<sup>40</sup> A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego...*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> A. Gromkowska-Melosik evokes such a term, finding it in English-language literature. The same author, *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego...*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> D. Epstein, J. Elwood, V. Hey, J. Maw, *Schoolboy Frictions: Feminism and 'Failing' Boys*, [in:] D. Epstein, J. Elwood, V. Hey, J. Maw (eds.), *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement*, Open University Press, Buckingham 1998, p. 7. Quoted in: A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego...*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> J.J. Titus, *Boy Trouble: Rhetorical Framing of Boys' Underachievement*, "Discourse Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education" 2004, 25(2), p. 153. Quoted in: A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

In accordance with the idea of a self-made woman (a woman who “takes life in her own hands”), they want to fulfil their desires and dreams, they strive for self-fulfilment. What visions of development can the representatives of the feminised teaching profession, unattractive financially and not prestigious, spread before their learners when they themselves remain in the enclave of a neoliberal reality and its typical free competition?<sup>44</sup> – a reality in which (as the dominant discourse says) an individual is fully responsible for their fate and committed to success.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, teachers fall into the category of pink collar occupations, typically female ones, which, in the common opinion, require little competence and education, **less reflection and critical attitude** [bold: E.G.-Z.].<sup>46</sup>

When the androcentrism of language is discussed, a reflective and critical attitude is a key competence, absolutely necessary to deconstruct the narratives in textbooks and school materials, to notice the striking underrepresentation of women, and to avoid the use of masculine language forms. This also requires the courage to pose a problem and the willingness to face it and to think about it. In other words, it is necessary to problematize the phenomenon of the **invisible language environment** and then to transform it. Helena Radlińska, quoted many times here, observed that “a human being adapts to the environment, or is influenced by it, or has the power to transform this environment; it is mainly children who adapt, mostly weak or weakened individuals and groups (e.g. the ailing) are influenced, the overcoming of the environment is a privilege mostly of adults and the strong (in a broad sense).”<sup>47</sup> Female teachers appear to be a weak group. They are rather guardians of the patriarchal world consolidated in language,<sup>48</sup> they themselves have a problem with the conceptual category of gender (which they do not know and resist getting to know),<sup>49</sup> with feminist issues that seem alien to

<sup>44</sup> A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego...*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the belief is maintained that the attribute of gender and other identity determinants (e.g. sexual orientation or social origin) do not matter in the fight for success, it depends only on the competence of the individual and their determination.

<sup>46</sup> R.E. Weir, *Pink Collar Workers*, [in:] R.E. Weir (ed.), *Class in America. An Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, Greenwood Press, Westport 2007, p. 614. Quoted in: A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Feminizacja zawodu nauczycielskiego...*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kamiński, *Wstęp – Zakres i podstawowe pojęcia pedagogiki...*, *op. cit.*, p. XXXI.

<sup>48</sup> Irena Bogocz, referring to Krystyna Kleszczowa, expresses the conviction that of the two beings – thought and language – language is definitely more conservative; “in language, fossilized ideas about the world are stored,” which the development of science and technology neither strengthens nor confirms. On the one hand, the creative aspect of the use of linguistic means is emphasized, but on the other – the widespread use of clichés and “ready-made sentences,” not only in colloquial speech, but also in expert (scientific) texts. I. Bogocz, *Kilka pokornych i przekornych uwag na temat języka...*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>49</sup> See: E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, *Polityka – edukacja – płeć kulturowa. kultura...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–64.

them and completely unrelated to their professional activity,<sup>50</sup> as well as with the language they use. They do not object to the fact that the applied grammatical gender is incompatible with the natural one. Moreover, they deliberately use the masculine gender, convinced that in this way they build the prestige of the profession and increase their social position.

In the article *Wychowawca, dziecko i świat szerszy* /*The educator, child and the broader world*/, published in 1947, its authoress writes: “You need to recognize essential values and creative forces.” She draws attention to the negligence in finding and using the good. “Do I know beautiful books and songs and do I use them?” – she notices that this is a question that should be included in children’s and youth’s examination of conscience.<sup>51</sup> However, when the problem is considered of developing the potential of girls and women through the operation of school and teachers, the resources that could provide nourishment and encouragement for the development of women should be sought elsewhere than in the texts of course books and school materials.

At this point, it seems justified to recall Jan Szczepański’s memories of school and getting to know the world through school, through books and their contents.

I have been reading books passionately since the second class. Then I began to leave the world of peasant absolutism. Above the ground, grass, crops, house, cows, bread, there was another world. Other than the world of fairy tales. Invisible like a fairy tale world, yet real. A world enchanted into books. At that time, school turned out to be a window to this other world as well.<sup>52</sup>

In order to leave the world of male absolutism, androcentric language and androcentric perspective of viewing the world with which the school texts are permeated, in order to perceive a world other than male stories, other than his-story,<sup>53</sup> one should introduce an invisible or barely visible (yet so real) everyday world of women: her-story and her present time. It would not be difficult, considering that reconstructing women’s history and updating it has been carried out in Poland for many years, and many fascinating texts are available not only thanks to transla-

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<sup>50</sup> “One of the most common mistakes made by professionals is to be interested only in a specific field of work, not paying attention to its connections with the whole culture, with spiritual life. ... It is rare, unfortunately, to get passionate about hidden sources of power outside of one’s specialty” – this statement by Radlińska, strikingly accurate, invariably retains its relevance. H. Radlińska, *Spojrzenie na rzeczywistość*, [in:] the same author, *Pedagogika społeczna*, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>51</sup> H. Radlińska, *Wychowawca, dziecko i świat szerszy*, [in:] the same author, *Pedagogika społeczna*, op. cit., pp. 82–83.

<sup>52</sup> J. Szczepański, *Korzeniami wrosłem w ziemię*, Poznań 1993, p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> Also HiT-story, a coursebook for secondary schools *Historia i teraźniejszość 1945–1979* by Wojciech Roszkowski, is definitely androcentric both in terms of content and visual materials.



tions from foreign languages, but also thanks to the writing achievements of native authoresses. This other world, which is a medium for the development of women, could manifest itself, for example, in this way:

It's snowing, sleigh bells are ringing, and dumplings won't be made themselves. ... So we emerge for you from behind the bubbling pots and wave our hand smeared with Christmas Eve dishes. ... Christmas is coming, so we guard the sacred fire of family and tradition, we come into contact with cabbage and mushrooms to mould the food. Providing food is our female duty. We are responsible for home peace, and professors for analyzing our attitudes.<sup>54</sup>

Will and when will the texts similar to the one quoted above be enchanted into books? Will and when will school (school in general and Polish school in particular) turn out to be a window to this other world?

## Ending

If the native language is recognized as a particularly important value in the implemented educational policy (and this is a postulate worthy of something more than a declaration) and if the language environment is intended to become visible (i.e. its importance for the development of an individual, a woman and a man, is realized), it will not be possible to ignore the **masculinization of linguistic thinking (androcentrism of language) and the adverse consequences of this phenomenon** any more. Without a doubt, so far this is a poorly recognized problem of education (embedded in a particular culture) and related sciences. The game is about the power in language, which would serve girls and women in their emancipation process. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the awakening of language awareness is also an opportunity for boys and men to get out of the shackles of the male stereotype and to build their identity in a conscious way.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the discussed issue should be taken into account in the course of pedagogical and teacher studies, during the preparation of candidates for the profession of an educationalist (of various specializations) and a teacher. This, in turn, would mean the inclusion of a feminist policy of viewing,<sup>56</sup> taking into account the

<sup>54</sup> S. Chutnik, G. Plebanek, *Życiowo bardziej ostrożne*, "Polityka" 2016, (52/53), p. 157.

<sup>55</sup> See: b. hooks, *Gotowi na zmianę. O mężczyznach, męskości i miłości*, trans. M. Kunz, Warsaw 2022.

<sup>56</sup> See: the opinion of Monika Głosowicz in: A. Kałuża, M. Głosowicz, K. Szopa, M. Staśko, A. Byrska, Z. Sala, *Ankieta: jak różnica płciowa przekształciła krytykę literacką*, "art. Papier" 2018, (5), <https://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=343&artykul=6678&kat=17> [accessed: 14.07.2023].

feminist criticism demanded by Inga Iwasiów, who claims that it should belong to the educational offer of modern university.<sup>57</sup> This should be the university whose natural force is disagreement with the state of the world, which is reminded by Tadeusz Sławek.<sup>58</sup> The cited author points to the need to acquire the art of reading and states that university should focus on this if it wants to serve knowledge and wisdom at the same time. It ought to be added that this must be a special art, which allows one to capture the presence or absence of women in texts (not only read but also spoken or listened to) and results in the awakening and opening to the developmental potential inherent in discovering the presence of women in history, including their participation in the development of knowledge. What is needed is the art of reading, which would result in noticing the agency of language and in discovering that change and liberation begin with language.

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<sup>57</sup> I. Iwasiów, *Opowieść i przemoc*, [in:] S. Walczewska (ed.), *Feministki własnym głosem o sobie*, Cracow 2005, p. 177. The author points out that this is not only about the amount of knowledge, but also about encouraging specific actions, meetings, discussions – leading to the reconstruction of consciousness.

<sup>58</sup> T. Sławek, *Antygona w świecie korporacji. Rozważania o uniwersytecie i czasach obecnych*, Katowice 2002.

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