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## Baudouin de Courtenay on Language and Gender - the Past and the Present Context

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## BAUDOIN DE COURTENAY ON LANGUAGE AND GENDER – THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEXT

W związku ze wzmożonym zainteresowaniem problematyką wzajemnych relacji między językiem a płcią, określanych mianem lingwistyki płci (*gender linguistics*), które można zaobserwować w polskim językoznawstwie ostatniej dekady, autorka artykułu przypomina często pomijane i zapomniane zasługi na tym polu jednego z największych polskich językoznawców Jana Baudouina de Courtenay, sytuując jego poglądy zarówno w perspektywie historycznej, jak i współczesnej.

Pierwsza część artykułu relacjonuje najważniejsze obserwacje Baudouina dotyczące asymetrii rodzajowo-płciowych w języku polskim, które cechuje maskulinizacja (dominacja rodzaju męskiego nad pozostałymi) oraz wiryliczacja (wyodrębnienie i uprzywilejowanie rzeczowników męskoosobowych w gramatyce polskiej). Zjawiska te przejawiają się m.in. w istnieniu rodzaju męskoosobowego i niemęskoosobowego w liczbie mnogiej, gatunkowości rzeczowników męskoosobowych czy derywacji form żeńskich od męskich. Baudouin nie poprzestaje na suchym opisie tych faktów, ale krytycznie ocenia je jako niesprawiedliwe i pozbawione logiki. Podkreślając ścisły związek między myśleniem i językiem, uznaje, że maskulinizacja oraz wiryliczacja polszczyzny, wynikające z tradycji patriarchalnej, mają negatywny wpływ na myślenie i działanie jej użytkowników.

Poglądy Baudouina na kwestie języka i płci zostają następnie usytuowane w kontekście zarówno współczesnych jemu badań tej problematyki, jak i prac najnowszych. Autorka wykazuje, że polski językoznawca znacznie wyprzedzał swoją epokę, porównując jego postępowe podejście z typowym dla tamtych czasów stanowiskiem Otto Jespersena, które dziś określić można mianem seksistowskiego. W najnowszych badaniach nad asymetriami rodzajowo-płciowymi w języku polskim wyodrębnia kilka stanowisk: niedostrzeganie problemu, podejście informująco-relacjonujące, podejście relacjonująco-krytyczne, negacja seksizmu językowego oraz językoznawstwo feministyczne. Dowodzi, że poglądy Baudouina de Courtenay są najbliższe temu ostatniemu nurtowi, ze względu na jego bardzo krytyczny stosunek wobec zjawisk maskulinizacji i wiryliczacji oraz ich społeczno-kulturowych konsekwencji, jak również traktowanie języka jako narzędzia, które można i należy usprawniać tak, by wyrażało poglądy posługujących się nim ludzi.

## 1. Introductory remarks

In Poland recent years have witnessed a mounting interest in gender linguistics which for a long time has been a largely neglected area of study. After the publication of Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska's (2005) widely-reviewed book, many papers and some monographs (e.g., Łaziński 2006, Nowosad-Bakalarczyk 2009) have appeared, and some linguistic conferences and conference sections have been organized to deal with gender issues in Polish. In this context it seems important to highlight the significant contribution to this field made by the father-figure of Polish linguistics – Jan Baudouin de Courtenay. He was not only the first linguist to recognize and analyse the major aspects of the unequal representation of men and women in Polish, in more recent studies frequently referred to as linguistic sexism or androcentrism, but also a scholar who surpassed both his contemporaries as well as the majority of modern researchers in his radical and highly critical views on this issue.

The aims of the present paper are twofold. First, we intend to briefly characterize Baudouin's approach to gender-related asymmetries in Polish as it deserves to be popularized among Polish and foreign scholars. Secondly, and more importantly, we attempt to place his views on gender and language in both the past and the present-day context by juxtaposing them with, on the one hand, the stance of his well-known contemporary, a Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, and, on the other hand, with the approach of modern Polish linguists. We shall argue that very few of them have reached Baudouin's level of sensitivity and understanding of linguistic androcentrism and its social consequences.

## 2. Baudouin de Courtenay on language and gender

Baudouin's views on language and gender are discussed in detail in a number of studies (e.g. Rothstein 1975, 1976, Duda 1998, Marszałek 2002). Therefore, in what follows we focus only on the major aspects of his approach to this issue, particularly relevant for further discussion.

The linguist dealt with the problem of gender differences in language in a number of lectures and papers presented and written throughout all his life. The fullest exposure of his views can be found in his *Einfluss der Sprache*

*auf Weltanschauung und Stimmung* (published in 1929) and in *Charakterystyka psychologiczna języka polskiego* (1915).<sup>1</sup>

He claims that the Polish gender system is characterized by the presence of three features: **sexualization** (*seksualizacja, upłciowienie*), **masculinization** (*maskulinizacja, usamczenie*) and **virilization** (*wiryliczacja, umężczyźnienie*).

**Sexualization** means that all Polish nouns, both animate and inanimate, personal and nonpersonal possess grammatical gender (masculine, feminine or neuter). According to Baudouin, this fact is relevant for our linguistic thinking, which is deeply rooted in the gender system. Its importance can be seen, for instance, in myth formation, where various objects are personalized as males or females depending on their grammatical gender in a given language (e.g. *the sun, the moon*, etc.). In de Courtenay's opinion, the presence of grammatical gender is both a curse and a blessing since, on the one hand, we are slaves of the way it categorizes the world, but, on the other hand, it provides inspiration for various artists, such as poets or painters.

**Masculinization** refers to the dominance of masculine forms in different areas language and **virilization** means linguistic isolation of men from the rest of the world as well as generalizing the use of masculine forms over the remaining genders. Both masculinization and virilization are responsible for the existence of numerous asymmetries in the gender system of languages such as Polish.

The linguist isolates several phenomena in the structure of Polish which reflect either masculinization (masculine forms are dominant) or virilization (men stand grammatically apart from non-men) or both.<sup>2</sup> In modern terminology these are cases of gender-related asymmetries, often referred to as linguistic androcentrism or sexism.

Virilization can be illustrated with some facts taken from the Polish gender system. Baudouin observes that in Polish there are only two grammatical genders in the plural forms, known as masculine (virile) and nonmasculine (nonvirile). The former category comprises personal masculine nouns while the latter all the remaining nouns. This means that Polish grammar divides nouns into two unequal groups isolating men not only from women, but also from children, objects and animals. This division manifests itself in the phonological shapes of roots and stems, in different declensional paradigms and different morphological endings of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and numerals, e.g.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper we make use of Baudouin's study in its version found in the volume entitled *O języku polskim* published in 1984 and edited by Basara and Szymczak. All the quotations are taken from this source.

<sup>2</sup> All examples in this section are taken from Baudouin's works. It should be added that the distinction between masculinization and virilization is not sharp and many examples provided by him can be viewed as instances of both these phenomena.

*ci* ‘these, masc.’ – *te* ‘id. nonmasc.’ *nasi* ‘our, masc.’ – *nasze* ‘id. nonmasc.’  
*dobrzy* ‘good’ – *dobre* ‘id. nonmasc.’ *mili* ‘nice’ – *miłe* ‘id. nonmasc.’

Thus, Polish makes a systematic distinction between males, as in *ci, dobrzy, nasi chłopcy / górnicy / strażacy* ‘these, good, our (masc.) boys / miners / firemen’ and nonmales, i.e. all other types of nouns, as in *te, dobre, nasze dziewczynki / konie / stoły* ‘these, good, our (nonmasc.) girls / horses / tables’.

The linguist refers to this phenomenon (1984: 220) as “*odróżnienie męzczyzn od reszty świata, czyli “zwirylizowanie” myślenia językowego*” (isolation of men from the rest of the world, that is „virilization” of linguistic thinking).

Baudouin (1984: 220–221) points out that the pronouns that refer to both sexes, e.g. *kto* ‘who,’ *ktokolwiek* ‘whoever,’ *każdy kto* ‘everyone who,’ *w każdym z nas* ‘in each of us’ are always masculine, which requires the use of masculine forms of verbs after such pronouns, in accordance with the Polish rules of grammatical gender agreement, as in the following question, *Kto przyszedł?* ‘who (masc.) has come (masc.)?’ This question can be answered either as *brat przyszedł* ‘brother (masc.) came (masc.)’ or *siostra przyszła* ‘sister (nonmasc.) came (nonmasc.)’ This, in Baudouin’s view, constitutes yet another case of “*virilization of linguistic thinking.*”

Baudouin sees masculinization, i.e. the dominance of the masculine gender in Polish, in the fact that personal masculine nouns have two meanings and can be employed not only in reference to men, but also to denote both men and women, or persons whose sex is either unknown or irrelevant. In modern terminology this phenomenon is known as the generic function of such nouns. For instance, the forms below,

*autor* ‘author’ *wyborca* ‘voter’ *przestępca* ‘criminal’  
*świadek* ‘witness’ *stuchacz* ‘listener’ *członek towarzystwa* ‘member of a society’

are used to refer to male authors, voters, witnesses, etc., but also to groups of both male and female members. Feminine nouns, however, such as *autorka* ‘authoress,’ *stuchaczka* ‘female listener,’ or *członkini* ‘female member,’ have exclusively female reference.

This holds true also in the case of plural forms, which, in spite of their masculine gender, comprise both sexes. Thus, nouns such as *Polacy* ‘Poles,’ *Francuzi* ‘the French,’ *Niemcy* ‘Germans,’ *Czesi* ‘Czechs,’ *Rosjanie* ‘Russians’ are used in reference to males only, but also to males and females of these nationalities. The reverse, however, is not true and the feminine forms *Polki* ‘Polish women,’ *Francuzki* ‘French women,’ *Niemki* ‘German women,’ *Rosjanki* ‘Russian women’ denote only women and never men.

Baudouin (1984: 221) observes that *wszelkie prawidła, maksymy, ustawy, artykuły praw, trzymane w tonie ogólnym i stosujące się do wszystkich miesz-*

kańców, redagowane są w rodzaju męskim, dokładniej „mężczyźnianym” (wirylnym). Wobec tego, jeżeli artykuł prawa kryminalnego, mówiący tylko o „przestępcach”, stosujemy także do „przestępczyń”, czyli do kobiet, to również brak wzmianki o kobietach np. w ustawach uniwersyteckich nie powinien być tłumaczony w sensie ograniczających, ale przeciwnie, w sensie rozszerzającym (all rules, maxims, laws, legal acts written in a general way and applicable to all citizens are formulated in the masculine (virile) gender. Thus, if an article of the penal code which mentions only “masculine criminals” is applied also to “female criminals,” it follows that the lack of reference to women, for instance in university regulations should not be interpreted in a narrow sense, but, on the contrary, in its broader sense).

It should be added that de Courtenay made this comment in connection with a well-known and frequently quoted case of a Russian woman M.D, who (Rothstein 1975: 393) “shortly before World War I applied to Moscow University for certification as a Privatdozent. The University was willing, but Education Minister L. A. Kasso refused his approval on the grounds that the statutes provided only for docenty, and not docentki.” The linguist blames the Polish gender system for this situation stating that (1984:221) *oczywiście przy redakcji praw i przepisów w językach bezrodzajowych, tj. w takich gdzie istnieje tylko jeden wyraz wspólny dla „nauczyciela” i „nauczycielki”, dla „wyborcy” i „wyborczyni”, dla „świadka” i „świadkiny”, dla „przestępcy” i „przestępczyni” itp. wszelkie takie wahania i wątpliwości są absolutnie wykluczone* (obviously in the case of laws and regulations written in genderless languages, that is those in which one common word denotes both „a male teacher” and „a female teacher”, „a male voter” and „a female voter”, „a male witness” and „a female witness”, “a male criminal” and “a female criminal”, etc. all such doubts and hesitations are absolutely impossible). This quotation and Baudouin’s active involvement in the case described here indicate that he was convinced that language not only reflects, but also perpetuates gender inequalities.<sup>3</sup>

Baudouin (1984: 221–222) observes that the dominance of the masculine over other genders is also visible in the use of masculine nouns in such forms of address as

*doktor Dobrska* ‘doctor (masc.) Dobrska (fem.)’

*doktor Zawadzka* ‘doctor (masc.) Zawadzka (fem.)’

where there is a clash between the masculine noun *doktor* ‘doctor’ and the feminine form of the surnames that follow it.

<sup>3</sup> To be fair, the gender system of Polish is not so much to be blamed here as the Russian official’s bad will and sexist attitude.

The linguists (1984: 221–222) also notes that in Polish women can ‘drown’ not only in their husbands’ surnames, but even their first names (*utonięcie kobiet nie tylko w nazwiskach, ale nawet w imionach mężów*), as seen in what are now old-fashioned forms, such as

Marianowie Skołowscy ‘Mr and Mrs Marian Skołowski (masc.)’

Konradowie Dobrscy ‘Mr and Mrs Konrad Dobrski (masc.)’

Baudouin (p. 222) adds a comment that *kobietę pojmuje się zawsze jako dodatek albo do ojca, albo też do męża* (a woman is always seen as an appendage either to her father or to her husband).

Finally, Baudouin de Courtenay (1984: 222–223) argues that “*maskulinizację myślenia podtrzymują stosunki morfologiczne*” (masculinization of thinking is supported by morphological relations). He refers here to the fact that in Polish feminine nouns are formed from the masculine nouns through suffixation, e.g.

*bóg* ‘god’ – *bogini* ‘goddess’

*nauczyciel* ‘teacher, masc.’ – *nauczycielka* ‘id. fem.’

*sąsiad* ‘neighbour, masc.’ – *sąsiadka* ‘id. fem.’

Although the facts presented above certainly do not exhaust the long list of gender-related asymmetries found in Polish (for a fuller presentation of these and many other relevant issues see Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005), no doubt they constitute the core aspects of androcentrism in this language.

It is important to add that Baudouin de Courtenay does not limit himself to presenting the most striking cases of gender differences in Polish, but also comments on the sources of this phenomenon. He sees them in the patriarchal tradition, supported by the Judeo-Christian religion. The following lengthy and strongly worded quotation appears to reflect best the linguist’s attitude towards the inequalities in the Polish gender system (1984: 223),

*Odpowiada to pewnemu stadium w rozwoju pojęć socjalnych, a mianowicie stadium wybitnie patriarchalnemu, kiedy i żony, i dzieci, i niewolnicy stanowią własność patris familiass, jako ich władcy i „głowy rodziny”, kiedy pierwiastek męski jest początkiem wszystkiego, kiedy istota najwyższa, „Bóg”, może być tylko rodzaju męskiego. Stąd dalsze wyniki i powstanie całej mitologii erotycznej. Bóstwo się umęczyżnia i usamcza, a dla jego potrzeb stwarza się harem wszechświatowy. Bezpośrednimi sługami bóstwa, kaptanami, mogą być również tylko mężczyźni.*

*Zgodnie z poglądami społecznymi skryształizowanymi w dekalogu, a stawiającymi kobietę, „żonę”, obok wołu, ośla, domu i innych rzeczy, kobieta, jako coś pochodnego, jako rzecz, zrodzona z mężczyzny, a więc jego własność, zajmuje stanowisko podrzędne i usuwa się na plan dalszy. Dlatego np. w genealogii Chrystusa słyszymy tylko o jego przodkach mężczyznach, poczynając od Abrahama, z zupełnym pominięciem matek.*

(This corresponds to a certain stage in the development of social notions, namely a typically patriarchal stage when wives, children and slaves constitute a property of *patris familias* as their master and “head of family”, when the male element is at the beginning of everything, when the highest being, “God”, can only be masculine. Hence further consequences and the rise of the

whole erotic mythology. The divine being becomes masculine and virile, and to satisfy his needs, a worldwide harem is created. His immediate servants, priests, can also be exclusively men.

According to the social views expressed in the Ten Commandments, which regard the woman, "the wife", alongside the ox, the donkey, the house and other objects, as something derivative, as a thing coming from man, and hence his property, she occupies a secondary position. That is why, for example, in Christ's genealogy we hear only about his male ancestors starting with Abraham with no mention of mothers.)

This passage clearly demonstrates that Baudouin took a very critical view of what is now termed linguistic sexism and its social and cultural implications. He (1984: 225) argued that *ten ujawniający się w języku światopogląd rozpatrując pierwiastek męski jako pierwotny, pierwiastek żeński zaś jako pochodny, jest sprzeczny z logiką i poczuciem sprawiedliwości* (the Weltanschauung according to which the masculine is something basic and the feminine is something derived offends logic and one's sense of justice.)<sup>4</sup>

It should be emphasised that in Baudouin's (1984: 218) view language and thinking are mutually interdependent<sup>5</sup>, *myślenie językowe rozwija się pod wpływem myślenia i życia psychicznego w ogóle, a ze swej strony musi na nie oddziaływać* (linguistic thinking develops under the impact of thinking and internal life in general, but it must also have an impact on them). This means that language shapes the way we think and, consequently, act. In fact, according to Baudouin, language constitutes a kind of filter through which we perceive the world and which often distorts our perception. As many Indo-European languages, including Polish, have highly developed systems of grammatical gender with the striking dominance of masculine forms, this fact exerts a powerful influence on the way Indo-Europeans think and behave. This impact can be observed in various spheres: in mythology, metaphysics, art, social institutions, etc. In most cases – to use modern terminology – androcentrism encoded in the structure of languages such as Polish brings about negative social consequences, but can serve as inspiration for artists.

It is also worth pointing out that de Courtenay's evaluation of linguistic sexism is in accord with his attitude of disagreement with any forms of discrimination: sexual, religious, ethnic, etc. As argued by Rothstein (1975: 393), he was *sensitive to limitations on the rights of individuals, whether individual persons or individual nations*.

It should be added that for the modern reader many of Baudouin's views are highly controversial and some of his conclusions are difficult to accept.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Rothstein's (1975: 393) translation.

<sup>5</sup> A more detailed discussion of this aspect of Baudouin's work can be found in Duda's (1998) and Marszałek's (2002) papers.

<sup>6</sup> For example his views concerning the impact of grammatical gender systems on the cruelty of their users pointed out by Łaziński (2006).



Nevertheless, the undeniable importance of his work on language and gender can be seen in the following:<sup>7</sup>

- He was the first scholar to analyse the most important aspects of gender-related asymmetries in Polish.
- He identified the historical and cultural causes of this phenomenon.
- Baudouin examined the complex relationship between language and culture as well as language and thought. He regarded language as a kind of filter through which the world is perceived and categorized.<sup>8</sup>
- He approached linguistic androcentrism critically, pointed to its impact on thought and behaviour, and indicated its mostly negative consequences.

### 3. The past context – Baudouin versus Jespersen

In his approach to the issues of gender and language Baudouin de Courtenay departs radically from the views of his contemporaries. As pointed out by Marszałek (2002), his views remain in striking contrast with those of another father-figure of modern linguistics, i.e., Otto Jespersen, and the famous chapter 13, called “The Woman,” of his *Language, its Nature, Development and Origin*, (1922). In this chapter Jespersen does not deal with the question of the linguistic representation of the sexes, but discusses another important aspect of gender linguistics, namely differences in the verbal ability and speech of men and women. Jespersen’s major ideas can be summarized as follows:

- These are men rather than women who introduce new vocabulary and contribute to the development of language. Women are passive consumers of language.
- The vocabulary of women is less extensive than that of men. Men use abstract nouns more often than women.
- Women use extensively the so called ‘empty’ adjectives, such as *pretty* and *nice* and adverbs of intensity, such as *so*. This reflects their fondness for exaggeration.
- Women often do not finish sentences because *they start talking without having thought out what they are going to say* (Jespersen 1922: 250).
- Men use more complex sentence structure than women. The former employ mostly subordinate clauses, the latter simpler coordinate clauses.

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<sup>7</sup> For further comments on the role of Baudouin’s work in gender research, see Marszałek (2002).

<sup>8</sup> Similar ideas constitute a basis for Sapir and Whorf’s theory of linguistic relativity, according to which language provides people with a key to interpret social reality.

As the above lists demonstrates, Jespersen was convinced of women's linguistic and intellectual inferiority.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore not surprising that in more recent times his views were considered to be blatantly sexist and were fiercely criticized. It should be remembered, however, that, as pointed out by Cameron (2008), there was nothing unusual in Jespersen's opinions which were shared by the majority of his contemporaries. It is in this context that Baudouin's views on language and gender can be appreciated as being not only unique, but truly revolutionary and well ahead of his time.

#### **4. The present context – Baudouin versus modern Polish research**

Although interest in gender and language has a long history, systematic studies of this issue started to appear in the late 1960s and early 1970s in several western countries together with the second wave of feminist movement.<sup>10</sup> As noted by Weatherall (2002:3), *around that time a number of articles and books were written which voiced two questions [...]. The questions asked about the nature and significance of gender bias in language and of gender differences in language use.* This initial agenda for research subsequently expanded to cover other areas as well and within several years gender linguistics was established as an interdisciplinary field of study with connections to anthropology, psychology, sociology, cultural and ethnic studies, etc. In many countries research into gender and language has been accompanied by the campaigns to reduce and/or eliminate the most blatant cases of linguistic sexism.

It is striking that the issues in question were not only a subject of scholarly disputes, but became well-known to broader public as well. Linguistic sexism and its negative consequences have been discussed in the media, at universities and in parliaments. Hundreds of publications devoted to gender and language appear every year and many universities offer courses on gender linguistics. As argued by Crystal (1987: 46), *The relationship between language and sex has attracted considerable attention in recent years, largely as a consequence of public concern over male and female equality. In many countries, there is now an awareness, which was lacking a generation ago, of the way in which language can reflect and help to maintain social attitudes towards men and women.*

In this respect the situation in Poland is very different. Not only is there no general social and cultural awareness of these problems, but, as pointed

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<sup>9</sup> It should be added that Jespersen's ideas were based on very little empirical research, but mostly on common prejudices.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief history of research on gender and language see Weatherall (2002).

out by various researchers (e.g. Miemietz 1993, Marszałek 2002, Koniuszaniec and Błaszowska 2003, Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005), the issue of gender and language constitutes an understudied and underrepresented area of contemporary Polish linguistics. In other words, although a number of publications on gender linguistics have appeared within the last twenty years (for a comprehensive bibliography see Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005), they occupy a marginal position in current linguistic research in Poland. Marszałek (2002: 84), asks the following question: *gibt es eine Genderforschung in der modernen polnischen Sprachwissenschaft?* (Is there any research into gender in modern Polish linguistics?) and answers it in the negative criticising not only the small number of such studies, but also their quality which often leaves much to be desired.

As noted by several scholars (Rothstein 1975, 1976, Duda 1998, Marszałek 2002), it is striking that Baudouin's work in this field has received fairly little attention and subsequent continuation. In fact, as argued by Marszałek (2002), his views became largely forgotten or perhaps ignored as being too radical or even embarrassing. Also Duda (1998: 668) observes that *warto przypomnieć Baudouina, tym bardziej, że nawet wśród polskich badaczy podejmujących zagadnienia feminizmu o tezach tego uczonego się nie pamięta* (Baudouin's work is worth recounting since even Polish researches who undertake feminist issues fail to remember this scholar's claims). This is clearly seen in the fact that in the majority of relevant publications Baudouin's works are not even mentioned (Marszałek 2002). Moreover, according to Marszałek (2002), research in this area in Poland has followed more Jespersen's rather than Baudouin's tradition.

Before we make an attempt to define more precisely Baudouin's position in relation to current gender and language studies, we shall take a closer look at the most commonly occurring current approaches these issues present in Polish linguistics. In Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005), the following ones are isolated:

- failure to acknowledge the problem;
- factual description with no comments;
- factual description with critical comments;
- negating the existence of linguistic sexism;
- feminist linguistics approach.

In what follows we shall characterise each of them briefly focusing on representative recent publications that exemplify these views.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A fuller account of this issue can be found in Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005).

#### 4.1. Failure to acknowledge the problem

It is striking that the majority of works whose aim is a comprehensive description of Polish as well as reference books such as linguistic dictionaries and encyclopedias which have been published within the last decades fail to address the issues under investigation. We have been unable to find any entries devoted to gender-related asymmetries, linguistic androcentrism/sexism, gender linguistics and similar terms in any editions of, for example, *Encyklopedia języka polskiego* (1999) and *Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego* (2003).

Such omission can probably be attributed either to the editors' lack of awareness of linguistic gender issues or to viewing them as unimportant and not worthy of even a brief mention. This is surprising in view of the widespread character of the phenomena in question in Polish and the importance attached to gender research in other countries.

#### 4.2. Factual description with no comments

As most scholars assume that the task of linguistics is an objective analysis and description of language structure and use without any evaluative comments and judgements, the latter are generally avoided in many accounts of gender-related asymmetries.

This approach can be found, for example, in Grzegorzczkova, Laskowski and Wróbel's (1984) *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego. Morfologia*, where the formation of feminine forms from masculine ones is described in a matter-of-fact manner devoid of any comments. The same feature characterizes Polish grammar books such as, for instance, *Gramatyka języka polskiego* by Bąk (1984), *Gramatyka języka polskiego* by Wróbel (2001) or *Słownik gramatyki języka polskiego* by Bralczyk (2002), to mention just a few representative examples.

#### 4.3. Factual description with critical comments

In their analyses of gender differences in Polish, some researchers do not confine themselves to the presentation of bare facts, but express their critical attitude towards the biased linguistic representation of the sexes. In other words, they regard such asymmetries as sexist or unfair, even if the former term<sup>12</sup> is not

<sup>12</sup> It should be added that the terms *seksizm* 'sexism' and *seksistowski* 'sexist' are new in Polish and were fiercely criticized when it was used in Karwatowska and Szypra-Kozłowska's (2005) book. Five years later they are in common use. Moreover, these terms found their way into some Polish dictionaries published within the last decade, e.g. *Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego* (2003) or *Współczesny słownik języka polskiego* (2007).

employed. This holds true of numerous publications by Handke (e.g. 1986, 1989, 1994), who initiated modern research into gender and the Polish language. Other studies within this approach comprise, for instance, papers by Peisert (1994), Łobodzińska (1994) and Pajdzińska (2001).

These linguists argue that the inferior status of women and male dominance are reflected in many areas of Polish. Pajdzińska (2001: 153), for instance, in her study of Polish phraseology, argues that *niemal wszystko, co językowo wiąże się z kobietą, jest gorsze* (almost everything which is linguistically connected with women is inferior). Nagórko (1998: 95) in her *Zarys gramatyki polskiej* ("An Outline of Polish Grammar") states explicitly that *bez większej przesady możemy więc powiedzieć, że gramatyka polska uprzywilejowuje mężczyzn* (without much exaggeration we can say that men occupy a privileged position in Polish grammar).

#### 4.4. Negating the existence of linguistic sexism

The authors of some studies dealing with gender issues in Polish, while being fully aware of the biased linguistic representation of men and women, deny, however, that they are sexist in character and treat them as a natural and sometimes even positive result of language development. While such views can be found in older works, for example those published at the beginning of the twentieth century, similar opinions have also been expressed in more recent studies.

Klemensiewicz (1957), for instance, in a discussion on the use of feminine and masculine names of various professions, regards the replacement of the former by the latter, which increases the so-called linguistic invisibility of women, as an expression of language progress. Similarly, Nowosad-Bakalarczyk (2009) also maintains that the expansion of masculine forms is a desirable phenomenon since it simplifies Polish grammar.

Łaziński's (2006) book is written in a similar vein. Its author denies the existence of linguistic sexism<sup>13</sup> claiming that language systems are neutral and cannot discriminate against any sex, and it is only language use which is responsible for such cases. He also rejects any connection between language and its impact on the attitudes and views of its users.

#### 4.5. Feminist linguistics approach

The most radical approach to linguistic androcentrism is adopted by the so-called feminist linguistics. Its advocates are concerned not only with identifying,

<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, he rejects the term 'linguistic sexism' as unscientific and opts for 'gender-related asymmetries.' It should be pointed out that the very choice of terminology is significant as it frequently defines the scholar's stance to language and gender issues.

documenting and describing cases of gender bias in language, but they regard it an important social problem. They believe in strong ties between language and human behaviour, and maintain that linguistic sexism is harmful as it helps to perpetrate sexist attitudes in society. If the latter are to be changed, a non-sexist language reform is needed. Consequently, feminist linguists are actively involved in planning and implementing such changes.

Several papers and books on linguistic androcentrism in Polish express views close to the agenda of feminist linguistics. They include articles by Herbert and Nykiel-Herbert (1986), Jaworski (1989), Miemietz (1994, 1996), Marszałek (2002), Koniuszaniec and Błaszowska (2003), and three monographs: two written in English by Nalibow (1973) and by Jaworski (1986), and one written in German by Miemietz (1993). All of them were published in Germany.

Their authors analyse various aspects of linguistic sexism in Polish and point to its negative social consequences. Herbert and Nykiel-Herbert (1986: 64) state that, *a language such as Polish encodes sexist values, ensures the perpetuation of such values in language acquisition, and in this way contributes to a maintenance of the sexist status quo. That is, children acquiring Polish learn that males and females are treated in different fashions grammatically and that males [...] are more highly valued than nonmales.* Jaworski (1986: 46) is of the same opinion claiming that, *there is no doubt that the linguistic sexism of Polish does reinforce the social inequality of the sexes.*

Herbert and Nykiel-Herbert (1986), Miemietz (1993), Koniuszaniec and Błaszowska (2003) go even further and argue for the need to reform Polish in order to reduce linguistic sexism present in it. The latter authors put forward several suggestions as to what should be done in this respect.

It is important to add that all these publications have been written either in English or in German and published outside Poland.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the authors must have been convinced that voicing such radical views in this country might be problematic and has little chance of meeting with general approval.

#### 4.6. Baudouin – a representative of feminist linguistics?

It seems appropriate to close these remarks with a brief discussion concerning the position of Baudouin's writings on language and gender in relation to the contemporary studies outlined in the preceding section.

There is no doubt that the linguist can be claimed to be the forerunner of modern gender linguistics. What is more, he certainly cannot be identified with three of the five approaches presented here and referred to as 'failure to acknowledge the problem', 'factual description with no comments' and 'negating

<sup>14</sup> With the exception of Herbert and Nykiel-Herbert's (1986) paper.

the existence of linguistic sexism'. As demonstrated in section 2, Baudouin did not only analyse gender-related asymmetries, but also took a very critical view of them. This should place him within the approach dubbed here as a 'factual description with critical comments'.

The question that arises is whether he would also subscribe to the feminist linguistics perspective, as suggested by the title of Duda's (1998) paper *Jan Nieciśław Baudouin de Courtenay – prekursor "Lingwistyki feministycznej"* ("J. N. Baudouin de Courtenay – the forerunner of 'feminist linguistics'"). In spite of this title, Duda has some doubts whether de Courtenay would support feminist linguists in their attempts to reform languages and eliminate sexism from them. Thus, he ends his considerations with the following open question (p. 670): *Czy Baudouin-publicysta, może nawet wbrew Baudouinowi-lingwiście, opowiedziałby się po stronie 'lingwistyki feministycznej'?* 'Would Baudouin the publicist, perhaps even against Baudouin the linguist, subscribe to 'feminist linguistics'?

While we can only speculate what the answer to this question would be like, there are some good reasons to believe that Baudouin de Courtenay would, indeed, support this most radical approach to gender-related asymmetries. First, he fiercely criticized the biased linguistic representation of men and women. Secondly, the linguist believed that language people used had a powerful impact of their thinking, attitudes and behaviour. As demonstrated in section 2, he showed how harmful linguistic sexism could be when it served to justify discriminatory practices against women.

Nevertheless, would he also support a non-sexist language reform advocated by feminist linguistics? The reason why it seems very likely that this question would have been answered by him in the affirmative is provided by the following passage (after Rothstein (1976: 59): *Responding to neo-grammarians criticism of international languages such as Esperanto, Baudouin raised the question: 'Does man exist for language or language for man?'* His answer was unequivocal: *'Language is neither a self-contained organism nor an untouchable fetish; it is a tool and an activity. Man not only has the right, but also the social duty to improve his tools in accordance with their purpose, and even to replace the existing tools with better ones'*.

As for Baudouin de Courtenay gender-related asymmetries in Polish were both unfair and illogical, we feel justified in concluding that he would consider it his social duty to improve the imperfections of language through reducing or even eliminating sexist elements from it.

## 5. Conclusion

In spite of over 80 years that have passed since Baudouin de Courtenay's death and an unprecedented development of linguistic research that has taken place since his times, the linguist's views on various aspects of language cannot fail to impress contemporary scholars with their broad scope, analytic depth, as well as wide social, historical and cultural perspective. Undoubtedly, this is also true of his approach to gender-related asymmetries in Polish. As we have attempted to demonstrate in this paper, Baudouin remains a lonely figure in world linguistics of his days in his radical and uncompromising evaluation of linguistic sexism, which becomes particularly conspicuous when we compare it with the stance of his famous contemporary Otto Jespersen. But even a juxtaposition of Baudouin's views on language and gender with those of various contemporary linguists who deal with this issue shows that there is still much we can learn from him, if only the courage to voice and defend our opinions in public.

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#### BAUDOIN DE COURTENAY ON LANGUAGE AND GENDER – THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEXT

The present paper sets itself two major goals. First, it intends to review Jan Baudouin de Courtenay’s largely and unjustly forgotten views on language and gender. Secondly, it attempts to place Baudouin’s ideas both in the past and the present perspective by comparing them with, on the one hand, the stance of his famous contemporary, a Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, and, on the other hand, with the current Polish research on gender linguistics. We argue that Baudouin’s critical attitude towards linguistic sexism, his conviction of its negative impact on people’s way of thinking and acting as well as his view that language should be modified to fit the needs of its users allow us to regard him as a genuine forerunner of modern feminist linguistics.