Gender-Inclusive Language and Anti-Discriminatory Language Policy

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Scheller-Boltz, D. / Reuther, T. (eds.). 2019. *Language Policies in the Light of Antidiscrimination and Political Correctness. Special Issue.* Wiener Slawistischer Almanach 84.

In 2018, while working at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), Dennis Scheller-Boltz organised the international symposium 'Language Policies in the Light of Discrimination and Political Correctness: Tendencies and Changes in the Slavonic Languages', the contributions to which have now been published in a special issue of the *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* (volume 84), edited by Scheller-Boltz and Tilmann Reuther.

The special issue comprises 18 articles as well as a short preface by Scheller-Boltz; it also contains three independent articles, which will not be discussed in this review. The articles are mostly in English, with two in German, two in Polish, and one in Russian.

In the German-speaking world, Dennis Scheller-Boltz is well known for his research in gender and queer linguistics with a special focus on Slavic languages and countries. Thus, it is no surprise that this volume also focuses on the gender aspects and the use of gender-inclusive language in various Slavic languages. It may have been helpful if this specific orientation had been mentioned in the title, which, in my opinion, is a little too broad and might arouse false expectations in potential readers.

All 18 contributions address aspects of gender and sexuality (although one does so only in passing), and 10 are concerned with gender-inclusive language in various Slavic languages. A central role in the individual contributions is played by Polish (6), Czech (4), Slovak (3), Ukrainian (2), Slovenian, Russian, and Serbian (1 each). Other Slavic and non-Slavic languages are mentioned as well, especially in Scheller-Boltz's introductory article (after the aforementioned preface), which, in addition to basic considerations, also provides a general overview for many of these languages. Croatian is referred to several times, including in the article on Serbian, which presents a historical overview of the situation of 'Serbo-Croatian' up to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. While, in terms of the South Slavic area, neither Bulgarian nor Macedonian is represented, this does not diminish the fact that the volume offers a very comprehensive overview of the situation relating to gender and language(s) in Slavic countries.

Scheller-Boltz points out early on (p. 9) that the anti-discrimination and anti-sexism discourse – referring primarily to discussions concerning gender-inclusive language use – is much more advanced in many Western countries than in the Slavic countries. Nevertheless, the general discussion has also reached the Slavic countries – at the very least, a number of dedicated linguists have taken a closer interest in the topic. Many of these linguists have either contributed to this special issue themselves or are referred to in the contributions.

In any case, the special issue can enrich any reader's understanding on at least four levels: (1) The contributions provide new ideas for any discussion of the topic, including beyond the specific Slavic contexts. (2) They present concrete research activities on gender and discrimination in Slavic countries. (3) They discuss concrete linguistic possibilities or problems regarding gender-inclusive language in various Slavic languages (for example, compared to languages with different morphological structures, such as English and German). (4) They inform the reader about the prevailing academic and folk attitudes on these issues in Slavic countries. It is especially important to distinguish between points 3 and 4 because structural arguments are often used – especially by conservative linguists – to justify or obfuscate more fundamentally negative attitudes towards gender-inclusive language as such. (These arguments include: 'Our language makes it structurally difficult or impossible to achieve gender-inclusive communication'; 'In our language, the generic masculine is the only possible gender-neutral form', etc.)

Let us now turn to the individual articles: The first contribution, as already mentioned, is by Dennis Scheller-Boltz. It is not, as is often the case, merely an overview of the contributions that follow. It basically constitutes an independent article – and one that is very rich in content at that. At the same time, this editorial, which mentions many of the scholars represented in the special issue itself, only barely refers to these contributions – for example, by summarising and comparing them. The section headings in the editorial once again draw on the rather general terms that make up the title of the conference and the anthology, but the article itself, like the entire special issue, focuses strongly on gender-inclusive language. Additionally, the structure of these sections could perhaps have been made a little clearer – for example, by using numbers (2., 2.1., etc.). Interestingly, according to Scheller-Boltz, Croatian and Slovenian are the most progressive languages in terms of anti-discrimination; Polish and Serbian are currently undergoing a 'paradigm shift'; and there has been little research on Belarusian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, or Ukrainian. The editorial ends with a particularly rich bibliography.

Scheller-Boltz's article is followed by three contributions of a relatively general nature. First, Heiko Motschenbacher offers an overview of 'Methods in Language, Gender and Sexuality Studies'. Motschenbacher is an English studies scholar and one

of the best-known gender and queer linguists internationally. His article gives a methodological overview of linguistic gender and sexuality research. His schematic comparison and mutual demarcation of feminist linguistics, lavender linguistics, discursive gender linguistics and queer linguistics (p. 44) is particularly interesting, though certainly not definitive. Owing to its general orientation, the article seems a little out of place in the volume (and does not contain any Slavic references). Nevertheless, it is a very special theoretical treat and should be compulsory reading for all linguists working on gender and language.

The next contribution, by Kinga Kożmińska, bears the very (or perhaps overly?) general title 'Language and Ideology'. Given that discussions about gender-inclusive language are, without a doubt, always 'ideological' and the term 'language ideology' has come to be widely used over the past few decades, one might approach this contribution with high expectations. However, while it contains some interesting details, I found neither its general nor its gender-specific part to be particularly convincing or innovative. (I would like to pose a basic question for all researchers working on language ideology here: Which ideologies are actually being examined: only laypeople's or linguists' as well? Or are the latter seen as 'free of ideology' or as only ever potentially having 'better' ideologies to offer than non-linguists?)

In the fourth contribution, the Ukrainian linguist Oksana Havryliv, who works in Vienna, examines 'aspects of linguistic violence'. The contribution focuses on the mutual relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic violence and between violence and aggression.[1] The article discusses questions such as whether unintended violence or violence that is not perceived as such is violence at all; whether only speech acts can be violent or whether language elements (such as swear words, slurs, etc.) contain violence regardless of their current use; what role ironic speech acts can play in this, and much more. Gender aspects are only addressed in passing – such as 'violence via non-mention' (see the discussion about including women in national anthems) or the special role of women's use of taboo words (see the 'mat' phenomenon in Russian). All in all, the article is rich and easy to read, with examples especially from the Ukrainian context. While its focus differs from that of the other texts, there are undoubtedly also many points that connect it to the theme of the entire issue.

Since the introduction of a very conservative and restrictive abortion law in Poland a few years ago, the country has seen numerous women's protests. In her contribution 'Polka walcząca! The Language of Women's Demonstrations and the Discussion about Political Correctness', Magdalena Steciąg describes and analyses the different types

[1] It is a cruel irony of fate that these lines are being written just at the beginning of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, where the bombs and other weapons are naturally much more violent than the discourses of war on the level of language.

of slogans that are found on women's placards at these protests. These slogans often contain intertextual allusions and puns (e.g. – translated into English – the title of the national anthem 'Poland is not yet lost' is transformed into 'The Polish woman is not yet lost'), as well as self-ironic statements that may themselves not always be 'politically correct' – a fact the author is critical of (because women have been advocating for a new 'equality discourse' to overcome the general androcentrism that has been common to now).

Lujza Urbancová ('Feminist Impulses in Slovak Linguistics') points out that Slovak linguistics is, in part, still close to the Czech linguistic tradition. The Prague School in particular positioned the opposition between marked and unmarked forms as central, and this was and still is used as a justification for the generic masculine: 'The unmarked masculine can represent or replace the marked feminine.' Alongside a discussion of very conservative opinions, the article traces the evolution from an originally very binary to a more differentiated gender-oriented linguistics, which has also led to efforts for gender-sensitive or – as she prefers to call it – gender-balanced language. In Slovakia, so-called 'xenolinguistics' (a term that seems somewhat problematic to the reviewer) also plays a role in this discussion (p. 135).

This is followed by the contribution by Alla Arkhanhelska, Marianne Dilai, and Olena Levchenko: 'Linguistic Research on Gender in Ukraine'. The extensive bibliography alone indicates the amount of intense work on gender linguistic topics that has been done in Ukraine. The article discusses various aspects of the overarching topic, first in relation to the language system (grammar, lexicon, and especially phraseology), then in relation to communicative behaviour. Almost all levels of language have already been examined in relation to gender, except possibly phonetics (p. 152). Special emphasis is placed on text-discourse-oriented topics, especially business discourse (also p. 152). Non-verbal communication and gender aspects in literary texts are also addressed (p. 154), as are methodological questions and the metalanguage of linguistic gender studies (p. 156). The authors also emphasise how gender linguistic research, once influenced primarily by Western experiences, has increasingly addressed the concrete historical, political, and social situation in Ukraine.

Jelena Filipović and Ana Kuzmanović Jovanović ('Serbian Gender Linguistics') point out that in communist Yugoslavia the generic masculine was very much promoted as a (supposedly) neutral form and as an expression of equality, an argument that is still put forward again and again in Western and Slavic countries alike. Overall, somewhat patriarchal structures still prevail in Serbia today, and patriarchal attitudes are further supplemented by linguistic arguments such as the claim that gender-inclusive expressions are difficult to produce in Serbian for formal reasons alone. In the Yugoslavian era, within what was then called 'Serbo-Croatian', Croatian (such as the Zagreb variant) was somewhat more progressive than Serbian regarding the use

of specific feminine forms for agent nouns. Nowadays, however, there are numerous works in Serbia that draw on feminist influences (in critical discourse analysis, critical sociolinguistics, narratology, etc.), which are presented in this article. Since the Serbian government is also increasingly working on initiatives for gender mainstreaming, the authors express the hope that these developments will lead to more gender-inclusive language and that the patriarchal structures mentioned above will gradually dissolve.

The special issue then contains a second contribution by Lujza Urbancová, 'Slovak: Gender-Balanced and Gender-Neutral'. The order in which the contributions are presented can be explained by the fact that overviews of the situation in the various countries are followed by articles that focus on specific linguistic questions in a narrower sense. In her contribution, Urbancová draws on numerous examples to show how feminisation and neutralisation are dealt with in Slovak and what kinds of attitudes exist towards gender-balanced language (GBL) and gender-neutral language (GNL). She distinguishes between the 'users' of GNL, the 'declarers' of GNL (which I might instead call 'disclaimer users'), and the 'preservers of traditional language with generic masculine'. In her opinion, gender-inclusive language will not become established through official declarations from above. Instead, she argues that dissemination in schools and the media will mean that increasingly more people will start using it, which will gradually lead to a new standardisation.

The next contribution, 'Slovak Pride and Prejudice in Gender-Related Issues' by Marilena Felicia Luța, left the reviewer somewhat perplexed. The author analyses fixed expressions in Slovak – partly from a gender perspective – drawn from a single Slovak dictionary of phraseology, without providing a definition of her 'leitmotif' of pride and prejudice for this context. The article begins with 'General considerations on the grammatical gender in Slovak', which appears utterly out of place in this contribution. In fact, one gets the impression that the author was asked to include such a section after the fact, so that the contribution would fit better into the overall concept of the volume. Even if the contribution contains some interesting observations, it is not very convincing overall, especially from a theoretical perspective. For example, it contains assertions such as 'The Slovaks are friendly', which are inappropriate for a scholarly essay: 'On the other hand, the Slovaks are friendly and tend to tolerate and to accept others easily, they call themselves *holubí národ* [sic; 'the dove nation'; it should be 'holubičí', MSt.] as they consider themselves to be peace-loving, tolerant and hospitable' (p. 222).

Jana Valdrová, the author of the next contribution, 'Masculine Generics in Czech', has been campaigning for gender-inclusive language in Czech for many years and offers a clear and concise summary of recent Czech discussions of this topic. The article by Vít Kolek and Dennis Scheller-Boltz, 'The Use and Perception of Masculine Generics

in Czech, German, and Polish: A Cognitive Study', draws on several studies that prove that even grammatically masculine forms intended as 'generic' or 'neutral' are often associated with the male sex/gender. The authors find differences between singular and plural forms, differences related to the semantics of these nouns ('film director' carries different associations from 'hairdresser'), differences related to whether the subjects assessing these gender associations are men or women, and finally differences between linguistic-cultural environments. For example, it appears that the generic masculine is avoided more often in German than in Czech.

The next contribution is Irena Masojć's '(A)Symetria żeńskich i męskich form adresatywnych w polskim dyskursie medialnym na Litwie' (The (a)symmetry of feminine and masculine forms of address in Polish media discourse in Lithuania). Here, TV discussion programmes are analysed in regard to whether women participants – usually already a minority on such programmes – are addressed differently than men (i.e. with or without 'pani'/'Ms', with or without a title, with 'Ms + surname', or with first name + surname). The result is not surprising: men are usually addressed more 'politely' and more formally than women – with an additional difference lying in whether they are addressed by a moderator or another participant. Notably, the research is based on data from Lithuania drawn from a programme for the Polish minority who live there. The form of address 'first name + surname' may be more common in Lithuania than in Poland because of the somewhat less formal Lithuanian rules of address.

The contribution by Kristina Rutkovska, 'Żeńskie nazwy osobowe w warunkach wielojęzyczności i wielkokulturowości: ujęcie etnolingwityczne' (Women's personal names in multilingual and multicultural conditions: an ethnolinguistic approach), also draws on the context of the Polish minority in Lithuania. Rutkovska finds that even when Polish has already been abandoned as a colloquial language, the feminine form of a personal name (or the use of a double form, e.g. *Molisowa – Molienė*, p. 275) is often retained to express a connection with one's own history or one's position in the borderland.

Saška Štumberger's contribution is titled 'Personal Designations for Women in Slovenian Texts'. The theoretical underpinnings of her overview of this subject derive mainly from the work of Ursula Doleschal, who works in Klagenfurt / Celovec (Carinthia, Austria). Štumberger begins by describing a number of phenomena that are well-known by now because they apply to many other languages as well, such as the fact that grammatical gender and biological sex cannot be equated in Slovenian (p. 279). However, her critical remarks on the partial introduction of the generic feminine at the University of Ljubljana are very interesting. On the one hand, this regulation is not followed consistently in all texts, and, on the other hand, it sometimes creates new problems for comprehension as it is not always clear whether, for example, regulations refer only to women or to persons of any gender.

Alla V. Kirilina's contribution, 'Современные тенденции развития русского лексикона в сфере обозначения лиц женского пола и видов сексуальности' (Current trends in the Russian lexicon in the field of denoting female persons and types of sexuality'), provides a comprehensive overview of the specific features and recent developments in the use of not only gender-related but also sexuality-related language in the particular conditions of post-Soviet Russia. In this context, we can observe both a renaissance of patriarchal gender models and the adoption of the 'new' plural gender concepts that are becoming more and more widespread globally. Other points of interest are the frequent discussions about same-sex marriage, trans people, etc., where the media mostly report on developments abroad (in the context of which legal restrictions on information distribution, which have been in place for several years 'for the protection of children', do not apply directly).[2] The article contains a great deal of other interesting data, some of them corpus-based, which cannot be reported here in full for reasons of space.

Vít Kolek also provides a second contribution to this volume, titled 'Options for Labelling Non-heteronormative People: a German-Czech Comparison'. The author proceeds from the observation that several versions of gender-inclusive language do not overcome binary gender models (such as using both masculine and feminine forms or the German 'Binnen-I'). For non-heteronormative gender identities, so-called 'neutralisation' is an obvious solution, but other typographic solutions are presented as well (the asterisk, the underscore, etc.), complementing previous overviews presented by other linguists. Kolek refers to Slovenian to debunk the common claim that these typographic solutions cannot (easily) be employed successfully in a language such as Czech (p. 311). Slovenian is closely related to Czech and provides a context where the underscore has become relatively established. Interestingly, the speed of developments in this area is made apparent by two points on which the article could be considered outdated. First, the colon, which has been booming in German for some time (e.g. Freund:innen), is not mentioned at all, and second, the phonetic transposition of various characters by the glottal stop, which Kolek seems somewhat sceptical about (p. 311), has come to be used regularly by some news presenters on Austrian television.

Sorin Paliga poses a very interesting question in his article: 'Should *pani Nováčková* Be Translated as *Mrs Nováčková* or *Mrs Nováček*?' These feminine forms of names, which are common in some Slavic languages (and sometimes also applied to foreign names, e.g. Merkelová), are a linguistic phenomenon that even non-Slavists and non-linguists notice readily. Interestingly, recent laws in the Czech Republic now also allow

[2] In the meantime, new legal regulations are apparently being prepared that will restrict information on LBTIQA+ issues even more,

Czech women to not use this feminine form and to keep the (neutral? masculine?) – for example, 'Nováček'. Paliga's contribution is pleasant to read and provides many examples, including ones drawn from translation practice and from other languages (such as Lithuanian). However, the article is more anecdotal and essayistic in character, and a more systematic examination of the topic in the future will be important.

Overall, the special issue is an important reference work for anyone interested in gender linguistics, gender-inclusive language, and, to some extent, queer linguistics both within and beyond Slavic studies. I have already pointed out the somewhat unfortunate choice of title, which might lead to the volume being overlooked by researchers interested specifically in gender linguistics. The book may be a little difficult to access in places for non-Slavists (and Slavists who do not understand all Slavic languages equally well) because some longer passages, especially examples and quotations, are rendered in Slavic languages and quoted without a translation, even in contributions otherwise written in German or English – an editorial decision in which spatial considerations probably played a role.

It appears that the *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* does not usually include abstracts with the articles (possibly also in languages other than the language of the article itself). Doing so has become a widespread practice in academic journals and would offer interested readers a better first orientation (and also make the writing of reviews somewhat easier).

There are a few typos and similar minor errors in the volume: for example, the superfluous hyphen in 'Dole-schal' (p. 280); 'Koffhoff' instead of 'Kotthoff' (p. 312); 'the following table shows …' (p. 237) – even though the table had been moved further up for formatting reasons and was no longer 'following'; 'či' not translated into English as 'or' ('as in *Studierx, Doktox* či *Angestelltx*', p. 307). However, these are minor issues, and despite my occasional critical remarks, I hope that this volume will make its way into the hands of many readers.