The Opposition in Polish of Genus and Sexus in Women's Surnames

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A NEW SYSTEM OF GENDER MARKING, which uses the masculine form in surnames for both men and women, has been introduced into contemporary standard (Warsaw) Polish.[1] This new system is the result of a change in the status of the modern Polish woman, or more precisely, of her participation on a larger scale in professional, social and economic activities.

In Polish, the masculine-gender surname for a woman imparts a special, metaphoric, expressive meaning; it is, in effect, more honorific. This phenomenon exists because in Polish there is a possible choice of gender forms.[2] Traditionally, the masculine-gender form of the surname is altered to indicate the relationship of a woman to a man or to indicate marital status. To surnames which are not adjectival forms and which are not of

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[1] Kenneth L. Nalibow, "The Gender of 'Profesor Nowak' in Polish," *The Polish Review*, 16, No. 3 (1971), 71.

[2] Gender-marking in Polish is of significant importance. Polish maintains four genders in the singular and two genders in the plural (Roman Jakobson, "On the Rumanian Neuter," *Cetări de Linguistică*, III, Suppl., 1959, p. 237). The singular is comprised of neuter, feminine, masculine animate, masculine inanimate. In the plural, the two genders are virile (= masculine personal), non-virile. The singular and plural are characterized by different inflectional and syntactic gender patterns. The sub-category of animation is extremely important. In the singular, there are four gender groups with an opposition between masculine animate and inanimate. In the plural, the gender group referred to as non-virile includes singular masculine animate nouns referring to non-human entities, singular feminine nouns and singular neuter nouns. In the plural, virile nouns refer only to masculine human beings.

In the Slavic languages, grammatical gender need not coincide with physical gender. Compare:

Wróbel jest ptakiem. "The sparrow [masculine] is a bird [masculine]."

Sroka jest ptakiem. "The magpie [feminine] is a bird [masculine]."

Cielę jest zwierzęciem. "A calf [neuter] is an animal [masculine]."

These are three equational statements. In the first sentence, the nouns agree with one another on the basis of grammatical gender. In the subsequent statements, the grammatical genders of the nouns do not coincide. In none of the sentences does the grammatical gender of the nouns specifically refer to the physical gender of the entity named. For instance, the grammatical gender of "bird" derives not from the physical gender of the entity but rather from the morphology of *ptak*. For lower entities, such as animals, special semantic meanings are not imparted by a lack of agreement between physical and grammatical gender.

foreign origin, the suffixes *-owa* / *-ina* are added for wives; *-ówna* and *-anka* / *-'anka* are used for daughters. Thus *Kowalowa* is related to *Kowal* as wife; *Kowalówna* is related to Kowal as daughter. Names of non-Polish origin which fit the normal declensional patterns for masculine-gender surnames take suffixes: *Fischer*, *Fischerowa* (wife), *Fischerówna* (daughter). Surnames of foreign origin such as *Pini*, *Lange*, and *Boutroux* which do not fit normal masculine-gender declensional patterns cannot be adapted to the system of suffixation heretofore described. Such surnames retain a fixed morphology and refer either to men or to women. Since *Pini* can refer to Mr./Miss/Mrs., an indication of marital status and sex of the referent must come from somewhere other than the surname.

Agreement between genus and sexus is, on the other hand, inherent in surnames which have adjectival endings. The masculine-gender ending *-ski* always refers to men; the feminine-gender ending *-ska* must refer to women. To such surnames one cannot add a system of suffixes.

From the preceding explanation, it will be noted that 1) surnames with adjectival formations in *-ski*, *-ska* (*Szaniawski/Szaniawska*) are always characterized by agreement between the physical gender of the referend and the grammatical gender of the surname;[3] 2) surnames of foreign origin which do not fit masculine-gender declensional patterns in Polish become fixed formations and apply to men or to women, and 3) that category of surnames which can be expanded by suffixation is the one in question since it allows for a choice of forms.

In practice, the new system of gender-marking for surnames is tied to a similar problem involving professional and working titles. The following statement is semantically correct. It contains a surname and a professional title:

> Kowal jest profesorem języka rosyjskiego.
> "Kowal is a professor of Russian."

Both *Kowal* and *profesorem* are masculine-gender forms. In an equational statement of this type, these forms could refer either to a man or to a woman. To indicate that *Kowal* is a woman, there would have to be some reference showing that *Kowal* was *not* a man. Such is indeed the case.

A recent study deals with gender-marking in Polish.[4] More than 400 necrologies were collected from the contemporary Polish press, each necrology considered to be a complete text. Within each text, even though

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[3] For a discussion of *referends* and *referentials* see M. Z. Brooks and K. L. Nalibow, "The Gender of Referentials in Polish," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, 13 (1970), 136 ff.

[4] Kenneth L. Nalibow, "The Declensional Patterns of Feminine Professional, Working Titles and Surnames in Contemporary Standard Polish," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1970.

entire sentences appear to refer to a man, there is at least one clue word indicating a female referend. The clue word is often the surname.

Slightly less than half of the single-word surnames referring to women were masculine-gender forms or *deviations*.[5] However, slightly more than half of the hyphenated surnames referring to women were masculine-gender forms. For example:

NORMS	TEXT	DEVIATIONS
	W dniu 13 stycznia 1969 r.	
zmarła	zmarła po długiej i ciężkiej	
Janina	chorobie Janina Polak,	Polak
	wieloletni i zasłużony	
	pracownik Ministerstwa	pracownik
	Kultury...	
	1/16/69[6]	
	"On January 13, 1969,	
died	died, after prolonged and grave	
Janina	illness, Janina Polak,	Polak
	a long time and dedicated	
	worker in the Ministry	worker
	of Culture..."	

In the preceding text, there are two clues to the actual sex of the referend. The past tense verb *zmarła* (died) as well as the first name *Janina* indicate a female; marital status, however, is masked.

The trend toward deviation on the part of surnames is balanced by stability in two specific areas, past tense verb forms and first names. More than 98 percent of the verb forms collected were categorized as norms.[7] Among all the examples, a first name often supplies the only clue to the physical gender.

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[5] For the purposes of this study, names and working titles are categorized as *norms* or *deviations*. A *norm* is defined as any word or group of words whose grammatical gender matches the physical gender of the referend to which it refers. A *deviation* is defined as any word or group of words whose grammatical gender does not match the physical gender of the referend to which it refers.   [6] From *Życie Warszawy* ("Life of Warsaw").

[7] In Polish, the past tense verb form is said to agree with its subject in number and gender. For instance: *Zmarła Józefa Wrzodak*, "Józefa [feminine] Wrzodak [masculine] died [feminine]. The verb agreement is with the first name. However, the sequence: *Zmarła profesor Zybert*, "Professor [masculine] Zybert [masculine] died [feminine]" requires explanation. Feminine-gender forms appear to be absent. The native speaker is indicating his awareness that *Zybert* was a woman. Nevertheless, after the physical gender of the referend has been established, subsequent references may be completely masculine in gender. For instance: *Zmarła profesor Szejer. Odszedł od nas zasłużony i ceniony pedagog.* "Professor [masculine] Szejer [masculine] died [feminine]. Departed [masculine] from us a dedicated [masculine] and valuable [masculine] pedagogue [masculine]." The second sentence contains no feminine forms. Taken out of context, it would be misleading. Within a complete text, its reference is clear. Premeditated ambiguity does not appear to be a function of gender-marking *per se*.

NORMS	TEXT	DEVIATIONS
	Kol.	
Marii	Marii Leśniak-Jackl	Leśniak-Jackl
	wyrazy głębokiego	
	współczucia z	
	powodu śmierci	
	matki...	
	2/20/69	
	"To colleague	
Maria	Maria Leśniak-Jackl,	Leśniak-Jackl
	expression of deepest	
	sympathy on the occasion	
	of the death of	
	(her) mother..."	

The abbreviation *kol.* has both a masculine and a feminine-gender form in Polish. As the abbreviation stands, it cannot tell us the physical gender of the deceased. The first name *Maria* is the single "clue "word in this sentence. A text of this sort is interesting in yet another way.

Polish is an inflected language. The expression "To colleague Maria Leśniak-Jackl" is in the dative case. Only the name *Marii* is inflected. The form *kol.* is unmarked because it is an abbreviation. *Leśniak-Jackl* is a masculine-gender surname and is undeclined. Without exception, masculine-gender surnames referring to women remain indeclinable in oblique cases. This phenomenon must be contrasted with masculine-gender professional and working titles. When they function predicatively or in post-position to a name, such forms are declined according to the inflectional patterns for masculine nouns. (When professional and working titles precede a name and function with it as a title, they are indeclinable.)

Gender marking may be observed at two levels: the grammatical level; the semantic level. As gender marking assumes semantic function and indicates higher orders of meaning, the gender concordance characteristic of the grammatical level may tend toward modification. The widespread appearance of masculine-gender surnames for women in contemporary standard Warsaw Polish is evidence of such a change. As this new style of gender marking assumes popularity, one notes the possibility of ambiguity as to the sex of the referend. But almost akin to that theory of physics which states that "... energy can neither be created nor destroyed ...," one notes the preservation of a certain degree of linguistic energy. Clarity as to the sex of the referend is preserved. As the trend toward employing possibly ambiguous gender forms broadens, the use of clearly feminine-gender first names remains constant. The sex of the referend is clear; only her marital status may be obscured.

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