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Academic Language of Instruction in Polish Higher Education: A Contrastive Analysis of Female and Male Discourse in Presentations

Abstract. The focus of this paper is to analyse the variation of female and male genderlects in the field of the Polish language, precisely, academic discourse used in presentations given by students of higher educational schools. The analysis is based on the research material gathered by means of surveys and observations carried out among students, as well as interviews with lecturers. The first part concentrates on presenting theoretical knowledge from the scope of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Then, the methods used to obtain the research data are outlined. The gatherings were analysed and contrasted with the findings of previous sociolinguists to see whether any differences between the speech of women and men exist in academic discourse.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, academic presentations, genderlects, Polish, academic discourse

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1. Introduction

The language in use is influenced by various factors, both internal and external. One of such variables, among many others, is gender, studied more closely within the scope of sociolinguistics. Over the years, the majority of research on the effect of the gender factor on the Polish language has been limited mostly to everyday contexts. In comparison, little attention was given to the discourse used in situa-

tions of higher social status. The present study researches the discourse of female and male students giving academic presentations in Polish higher educational schools to see whether any differences can be seen between the genderlects in a more formal setting. The analysis relies on previous findings of sociolinguists, such as Peter Trudgill (1995), Robin Lakoff (1980) and Deborah Tannen (1986) on the plane of the English language, and Kwiryna Handke (2021), Małgorzata Kasperczak (2004) and Marcelina Zuber (1999) on the plane of the Polish language, viewed from the perspective of the Polish academic discourse, as described by Aleksander Wilkoń (2000) and Kazimierz Ożóg (2001). Subsequently, the paper speculates what these differences, or lack thereof, may mean for the Polish educated youth, as well as discusses other potential variables which may influence their discourse in the context of an academic presentation.

2. Discourse, Gender, Style and Communication Strategies

Academic presentations are an oral form of assessment commonly used in Polish universities. A student is tasked to prepare and present a speech in front of the group, either individually or in pairs, usually with the aid of a visual presentation displayed in the background. Although students commonly use notes to remember the details of the contents of the topic discussed, academic presentations rely on spoken language, as it is their main mode of communication. Because an academic presentation is a social situation, the language used in its implementation is influenced by external factors. As such, the language occurrences used in academic presentations should be considered as *discourse* in opposition to *text*, which is a pure linguistic occurrence that does not consider the external factors of the situation of communication, such as who the recipient of the message is or what social context they are in at the moment of its creation (Kramsch, 1998).

The term *discourse* refers to a broader spectrum in which a message is produced. It is the language in practice, which, as Brown and Yule state: “cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs” (1991, p. 1). Discourse takes into account not only the essence of what has been said but also the socio-cultural context in which the sentence was made. It is influenced by external factors, deemed by Labov as *linguistic variables* (1966, p. 15). The central variable that this study is based on is the variable of *gender*. Although it can be confused with a similar term *sex*, linguists use the first one to refer to biological differences between men and women, and the latter to single out social, cultural and psychological characteristics between the two (Giddens, 1989, p. 158, in

Wodak, 1997, p. 3). This differentiation suggests that the concepts of *masculinity* and *femininity* are not always bound to correspond to the adequate biological sex (although this is the norm in Western cultures), but rather depend on the social role a person is to play in society (Wodak, 1997, p. 4).

The relation between gender and language has been prominent in society since the very early ages of human culture. Kloch (2000, p. 51) points to rhetoric as the early source of differentiation between feminine and masculine speech. Because in the past, the greatest rhetoricians were primarily men, their variety of speech became a widely-considered norm in Western societies, with feminine speech seen as its inferior variant. These varieties of language spoken by either men or women are called *genderlects*. The origins of studies on genderlects date back to the 1950s, when a sociolinguist Uriel Weinreich in his work, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (1953) claimed that gender is a relevant factor in language variation. Since then, numerous linguists attempted to test this theory, yet it was only in the 1970s when the term 'genderlect' was first used (Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2016, p. 1193).

As Trudgill points out, in most languages masculine and feminine speech are not significantly different from each other, with the main divergences relating mainly to the frequency of usage of certain elements. As such, variation among genderlects reveals not fundamental truths, but rather tendencies in the language between genders. That being said, Trudgill does not negate the variation that does occur on the linguistic plane, such as grammatical endings or masculine-feminine pairs of vocabulary (2003, pp. 54–55). Since grammatical and lexical variation are inherent features of the Polish language, the research in this paper will be narrowed down to study the discursive tendencies in the language used by male and female students in the Polish academic environment.

Another linguistic variable which can be observed is the variable of *style*, which refers to the way an utterance is shaped through different choices of linguistic elements, and is directly related to the formality expected of a statement in a situation of a set social importance. The speaker will use more sophisticated vocabulary and phrase sentences with more care when in a situation of higher social status, such as during a meeting in an office, than if the context was less formalised, for example, during a casual meeting in a bar. Similarly, if the status of the person spoken to is regarded as higher than the speaker's, for instance when a student is talking to a university lecturer, the style of the language will be more formal than if the student were conversing with another student, his "equal" in the social hierarchy of academia. This change, whether conscious or subconscious, is called *style shifting*, and is closely related to the adaptation of a communication strategy suitable for the given situation. As for measuring the

degree of formality of an utterance, there is no fixed rule to assess the style of a sentence: styles are usually divided on a continuum from very formal to highly colloquial. However, in general, written language is considered to be more formal than spoken language due to the presence of spontaneity in the latter (Trudgill, 1995, pp. 85–86; 2003, pp. 129–130).

Over the years, many linguists have noticed the different relations between gender and style in everyday discourse. In the English language, Trudgill observes that women in general use more sophisticated vocabulary and make fewer grammatical errors than men (1995, pp. 71–72). Lakoff in her research (1980, pp. 258–259, in Kloch, 2000, p. 52) noted that feminine speech is more polite in comparison to masculine speech, whereas Tannen suggests that women are more prone to use submissive language (1986, in Kloch, 2000, p. 54). In a similar way, the two groups also seem to follow separate communication strategies: Tannen suggests that women strive to maintain the relationship with the speaker, whereas men usually use communication to affirm their status within a social group (in Kloch, 2000, p. 53).

In Polish, the feminine language uses more fixed expressions, diminutives, exclamations and interjections, and is characterised by valuation and textual redundancy, resulting in more complex descriptions. Men, on the other hand, use more colloquial vocabulary and may appear less comfortable in formal situations than women (Handke, 2021 pp. 19–20; Kasperczak, 2004, pp. 75–79). As for the communication strategies of Polish people, Zuber's research is compliant with that of Tannen's, additionally suggesting that for men the main aim of communication is to exchange information or to achieve a set goal (Zuber, 1999, p. 39).

3. Polish Academic Discourse

The findings mentioned above were mainly formulated based on the observations of speakers in everyday situations, which means that the language studied was less formal than the language present in Polish academia would be. Formal settings, such as assessment at university, call for formal language, characterised mainly by vocabulary differences and syntactic differences, for example the passive voice, which is much less frequently found in colloquial speech (Trudgill, 1995, p. 91).

This study aims to research the qualities of semi-formalised speech as used by students in academia while being assessed on a presentation. What differentiates such language from everyday discourse is not only the diverse physical environment of communication, but also the main objective behind the communicative act, which is the showcasing of knowledge on a particular subject (Łyda, 2007a,

pp. 37–38). As suggested by Wilkoń (2000, pp. 48–49), Polish academic discourse is a subcategory of the literary variety of general spoken language, operating as a secondary realisation of the scientific written variety. Some of its features are the general adherence to traditional literary models; lexical richness and significant stylistic variation; selectivity in the choice of vocabulary; as well as high frequency of courteous language and higher forms of expression, which define the style of literary Polish as formal. In a separate analysis, Ożóg (2001, pp. 86–87) emphasises the deliberate intention to speak properly and with care, and notices that in literary discourse the speaker tends to avoid emotive lexis.

Oral presentations are one of the many forms of assessment in which a student is expected to use academic discourse. The widely accepted structure for academic oral presentations consists of three basic components: the introduction, where the speaker introduces oneself and presents the topic of discussion; the body, which serves as the main core of the speech, providing the audience with information; and the conclusion, which is a concise summary of the information gathered around the topic (Gareis, 2006). The most often used type of presentation in Polish academia is the extemporaneous presentation, which is a speech drafted beforehand and presented in one's own words, with limited access to notes (Gareis, 2006, p. 20). Since the presentations take place in an academic setting, the language should be adjusted to the status of academia; however, because spoken language adheres to less rigid norms than written language, some less formal structures are becoming more acceptable as they both express the student's engagement and engage the audience in the topic of the speech (Łyda, 2007b, pp. 110–111). As such, extemporaneous presentations in Polish will serve as the main background for the study of the differences in the discursive tendencies of the male and female groups of students.

4. Research Outline

The main aim of this study was to analyse the differences between the Polish genderlects in their literary variant used by students in academia, particularly during oral presentations. The research strived to answer whether or not the current generation of male and female students followed similar language patterns as those mentioned above. Subsequently, the gathered results were analysed to try and answer if the expectations towards young people in academia differ according to their gender. As a side thread, the study also sought to find which other socio-cultural factors currently may have an impact on students' language in an academic setting.

In order to assure a higher accuracy of results, the data required for the research part of this paper has been obtained through three distinctive methods: a survey among Polish students, observations of students giving a presentation in an academic setting and interviews with lecturers. The data gathered was then collated through contrastive analysis, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, which allowed for an in-depth description of the female and male genderlects.

The most extensive information was gathered anonymously through the form of a questionnaire given to 80 students (40 women and 40 men, approx. 18 to 25 years old) of 14 higher education schools in Poland, the majority of which were students of the Silesian University of Technology and the University of Silesia in Katowice. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions regarding the participants' use of language as well as personal opinions on the significance of gender and other factors influencing language variation. The questions included in the survey were inspired by a similar questionnaire created by Kasperczak (2004, pp. 29–33).

The second source of data came from anonymous interviews with some of the lecturers of the Department of Applied Linguistics within the Faculty of Organization and Management at the Silesian University of Technology. The lecturers were asked about their reflections on language differences between female and male students in academia, together with potential causes for language variation among students.

Lastly, observations of students giving presentations at university were conducted. The observations were carried out anonymously at the Silesian University of Technology in two groups. The first observed group consisted of 33 undergraduate students of the Department of Organisation and Management, 23 women and 10 men, who gave their presentations in the class: "Cultural competence workshops", led by two university lecturers with PhDs in French and German philology. The second group comprised 23 male students of the Department of Electrical Engineering, giving their presentations in classes: "Fundamentals of conducting business" and "Selected issues of organisation and management in electrical power engineering", led by lecturers with PhDs in Electronics and Electrical Engineering respectively. The data gathered referred mainly to the formality of speech of the student and the extent to which the presenter used notes. Additionally, in this stage individual discourse markers were gathered and, based on their frequency, served as suggested answers in some of the multiple-choice questions of the survey.

5. Differences in Genderlects of Students in Academic Presentations in Polish

In order to determine whether any differences between the feminine and masculine discourse exist in academic language, the participants of the survey and the observations were examined based on the language they used and the way they carried out the in-classroom discourse. The participants were not divided by their exact age, study programme or university; the sole variable taken hereby into account was gender. As a third information source, a discussion with university lecturers with a linguistic background was carried out, and the interviewees were asked to share their own insights into the variation between genderlects in academia, based on many years of previous experience with students.

In open-ended questions to the survey, where the participants were asked to quote themselves on what words they would use in each section of a presentation, both genders were somewhat similar in their responses. In the introduction part of the presentation, both female and male students used similar vocabulary for greeting and addressing the audience. The reason why is that most of the responses offered (such as: "Dzień dobry Państwu, dziś chciałbym przedstawić..." – "Good morning ladies and gentlemen, today I would like to present...") are fixed expressions used very frequently in presentations. Length-wise, the average word count for the responses was also very similar: 6.62 for women and 6.57 for men.

The answers in the body part of the presentation were also mostly similar: both groups have primarily introduced the contents of the slide (30 women and 25 men), and secondly developed on the topic (15 women and 12 men), using roughly the same vocabulary to do so. Both groups used the 1st and 2nd person plural form of verbs in a similar way (1st person: 12 women, 13 men; 2nd person: 4 women, 2 men), with a much smaller tendency for the usage of the latter form. Impersonal forms (such as: "Jak widać na slajdzie..." – "As can be seen in the slide...") and passive voice (such as: "Na podanym slajdzie zostały przedstawione..." – "...have been presented in the given slide") have not been proposed often by either group. The form which has been used the most by women is the 1st person singular (17 times); male respondents used the same linguistic device only 8 times in total. This suggests that female students may be more inclined to mark their presence as the speaker. In this section, women also wrote longer responses than men, with an average word count of 10.5 compared to 8.35 on the part of men. On the other hand, men were more likely to introduce rhetorical questions to their speeches (4 male responses compared to just 1 female).

Similarly to the introduction, the conclusion of an academic presentation contains many fixed phrases which either mark the end of the speech (“To już wszystko [co chciałem przedstawić]” – “That is all [I wanted to present]”) or a thank you to the audience for listening (“Dziękuję za uwagę” – “Thank you for your attention”). Almost all women used such an expression in their conclusions (37), men used them slightly less frequently (29). Worth noting is that the majority of female respondents limited their conclusion to just this expression (27), whereas men did so only 14 times. On all other occasions, men added extra elements, such as invitations to ask questions (“Czy mają Państwo jakieś pytania?” – “Do you have any questions?”), or additional remarks summarising the body (“Podsumowując, [stwierdzam, że]...” – “To summarise, [I conclude that]...”) or expressing the hope of having achieved the aim of the presentation (“Mam nadzieję, że [prezentacja była dla was ciekawa]” – “I hope that [the presentation was interesting to you]”). In comparison, these elements appear scarce in the women’s speeches, thus making their conclusions much shorter (on average 6.85 words per answer compared to men’s score of 8.53).

Having analysed the written responses to the questions presented above, another interesting pattern has been observed. On average, though still in the minority of all the responses, informal language in various forms (both colloquial vocabulary and loose expressions) tended to appear in answers given by male students. In total, informal phrases appeared 15 times in 9 men’s quotes and only 4 times in 4 women’s responses. This suggests that in general, men are more likely to use informal language in their speeches. This thesis was confirmed in the follow-up question, where the respondents were asked to mark which of the linguistic devices they considered appropriate in an oral academic presentation.

Table 1. Linguistic devices suitable for academic presentations according to the respondents of the survey

Linguistic device	No. of votes	% of votes	Female votes	Male votes	Percentage difference
Impersonal form (e.g. “trzeba, należy...” – “one must, one should...”)	58	72.5%	31	27	13.8%
Addressing the audience in the 1 st person plural (e.g. “zauważmy, że...” – “let us note that...”)	57	71.3%	30	27	10.5%
Passive voice (e.g. “została zapoczątkowana...” – “it was initiated...”)	55	68.8%	30	25	18.2%

Linguistic device	No. of votes	% of votes	Female votes	Male votes	Percentage difference
Referring to something that has already been said (e.g. "tak jak już mówiłem..." – "as I have already mentioned...")	49	61.3%	28	21	28.6%
Specialist language	49	61.3%	26	23	12.2%
Rhetorical questions	39	48.8%	19	20	5.1%
Informal examples	31	38.8%	15	16	6.5%
1 st person singular (e.g. "myślę, że..." – "I think that...")	27	33.8%	9	18	66.7%
Colloquial language (e.g. "gadać", "ten pan", "to się może źle skończyć" – "chatter", "this fellow", "this might end poorly")	15	18.8%	5	10	66.7%
Interjections, interludes (e.g. "oczywiście", "no", "właśnie" – "of course", "well", "actually")	15	18.8%	5	10	66.7%

Source: The authors

The underlined rows highlight the linguistic devices with a percentage difference of $\geq 25\%$ between the female and male groups for a total number of votes ≥ 5 . Answers with less than 10 votes in total were not included. Regarding the top linguistic devices suitable for academic presentations, the surveyed students did not show any major differentiation regarding their gender. Only the act of referring to what had already been mentioned earlier was considered as more fitting for female respondents rather than male respondents. Interestingly enough, men showed a greater tendency to use linguistic devices such as 1st person singular, colloquial language and interjections – forms considered by the overall respondent group as less fitting in an academic environment (having obtained less than 37.5% of all answers). Together with the data gathered from the open-ended questions in the survey, this suggests that male respondents are more willing to use less formal structures than female respondents.

The participants of the survey were also invited to elaborate further as to why they considered the linguistic devices mentioned as suitable. The respondents pointed out that the impersonal form and passive voice allow for an objective portrayal of the subject, which adds formality to the speech given and makes the presentation sound more professional. On the contrary, the use of 1st person singular adds a subjective element to the presentation. Other forms such as the use of 1st person plural, rhetorical questions, colloquial language and informal examples serve primarily as a means of engaging with the audience and communicating information to them in an accessible way.

In another question, the participants were asked to mark which of the presented fixed expressions they consider suitable for an academic presentation as well as which they use in practice. The list consisted of vocabulary used by students during the observation stage of the study. The general tendencies for which exact fixed expressions can be, and still are, used in an academic presentation are similar for both genders. The respondents generally reported using less appropriate discourse markers when giving an actual presentation compared to what they stated was suitable in theory. The research has shown that certain vocabulary, such as: "..., czy też...", "gdyż" and "jest to..." ("...", or...", "since" and "it is..."), is more accepted as suitable by female students, whereas other phrases, such as: "po prostu", "praktycznie" and "właśnie" ("simply", "practically" and "actually"), are more considered as such by men. This, however, may be the tendency of this particular research group, as all of the vocabulary included as examples in the survey are not culturally restricted to any gender.

As mentioned above, women wrote longer responses when quoting themselves in the body part of the presentation. In a similar manner, their number of marked responses to questions regarding the appropriateness and the use of certain discourse markers was higher than in the case of men (668 and 634 responses compared to 605 and 532). However, in the conclusion part of the presentation, it was the men who proposed longer answers. When asked directly in the survey, the students remained neutral in the responses, which of the genders produced more extensive speeches. Furthermore, the analysis of the duration of the presentations studied in the observations phase of the research could not be objectively conducted due to the different expectations of the lecturers towards students of different courses. In one class, it was acceptable for a presentation to be carried out in pairs and take around 5 minutes, whereas in a parallel class, a presentation done by just one student lasted up to 15 minutes. All things considered, although the interviewed lecturers mostly agreed with the statement, pointing to the fact that women in general pay more attention to detail which may extend the duration of an academic presentation, the results of the research conducted proved too inconclusive to determine with certainty that the language of women in academia is indeed more descriptive.

Another factor studied was the extent to which each group relies on their notes when giving an academic presentation. When the student research group was asked about this issue in the survey, both men and women claimed to read from their notes on average 50% of the time. Yet, despite the results of the survey, the observations show that both groups either tend to read the majority of information from their notes or choose to speak predominantly from memory. Thus, the results gathered refer more to the likelihood of a member of each gender using

their notes. With that, the observations have found the female research group to be less likely to use their notes than men (on average 37% of the time, compared to men's score of 63.5%). Initially, the results were thought to influence the student's formality of speech, since a written text is usually more formal than spoken language. However, the results gathered through observations have proven this to be untrue.

Table 2. The formality rate of the students' language in presentations

Formality rate [%]	Average		
	Total	≤30% of presentation read	≥70% of presentation read
Female speakers	55.9%	47.5%	75.7%
Male speakers	42.0%	43.5%	46.5%

Source: The authors

The findings demonstrate that in general, the students use a semi-formal style when giving academic presentations, with a tendency for female respondents to sound more formal than men. It is important to note that the language of male students did not alter significantly, whether a presentation was read out or not. Women, on the other hand, sounded more formal, the more they read from their notes. Personal observations, however, contrast with the interviewees' claim that it is the men's language that is slightly more formal in academic presentations, as opposed to the opinions of the surveyed students, who did not see a difference in style between men and women in academic speech. While these results are mutually exclusive, personally, the present authors are more inclined to recognise the discourse of men as slightly less formal due to the more frequent occurrence of informal vocabulary and expressions.

As for other characteristics, the interviewed lecturers mentioned that women, in general, appear more prepared and pay more attention to the overall style of their speeches, and not just their linguistic elements, but also to the aesthetics of the audiovisual presentation. One lecturer noted that women may be inclined to use more adjectives and concentrate on details within a certain topic. Women also implement more subjective elements to the contents presented through emotional valuation and are more likely to admit, in front of an audience, to being nervous about public speaking. This may give the impression that women generally tend to show more attention to detail when giving an academic presentation than men, who, by contrast, are more specific in their performances; they usually stick to the given topic and give straightforward and objective presentations.

Whether a conscious or subconscious choice of the speaker, the characteristics mentioned above serve as a means to achieve a set goal for communication.

Sociolinguists such as Tannen (in Kloch, 2000, p. 53) and Zuber (1999) argue that such communication goals are different for each gender in an informal setting. In a similar way, the participants of the survey were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how relevant a certain goal of communication is in the context of an academic presentation. Based on Tannen's and Zuber's research, two communication goals were presumed: the self-presentation of one's knowledge, assigned to the language of men, and the aspect of being understood by the audience, as noted in the discourse of women. In practice, what Tannen considered to be a masculine communication goal turned out to be of moderate importance for both research groups in an academic setting: the scores in favour of self-presentation averaged 3.48 for women and 3.25 for men. The students almost unanimously agreed with the second statement, regarded by Tannen as a more feminine approach, with the mean score amounting to 4.48 for women and 4.43 for men. For both women and men, the familiarisation of the audience with the subject was considered more significant than self-presentation.

The whole premise of this study was to single out different characteristics of genderlects which may exist in academic Polish. According to the participants of the research, both the students and the lecturers, the differences between female and male discourse either do not exist or are not significant in academia. However, an initial analysis of the language used by both groups has shown that there are certain differences between the genderlects of the language of instruction as part of academic presentations performed in Polish.

6. Comparison of the Results with Previous Studies

Having studied the characteristics and opinions of this particular research group, it is best to analyse them in comparison to previous studies by sociolinguists who focused on the role of gender in language change. The following discussion will compare the conclusions drawn on the results presented in this study with the findings mentioned above, namely by Trudgill, Lakoff, Tannen, Handke, Zuber and Kasperczak. The analysis will be placed in the context of the literary Polish language of an academic presentation according to Wilkoń and Ożóg.

Judging by the extensiveness of their statements in the body part of the presentations and the overall tendency for men to use more of colloquial vocabulary, this study suggests that the language of women may appear more formal, and consequently, more polite than men's, which is compliant with Lakoff's theory. Women are more willing to mark their presence as the authors of speech through the use of 1st person singular and express their subjective opinions and emo-

tions. They are more likely to pay attention to detail, which has been noticed by Kasperczak in her study. Contrastively, men stick to the main premise of their presentations and do not elaborate on unnecessary elements. As a result, their speeches may appear more straightforward, which is in line with Kasperczak's observations, who has also mentioned that men tend to use informal vocabulary more often than women – a phenomenon which has also been observed in the present research, however to a lesser degree due to the academic context in which the presentations were carried out.

In comparison to the characteristics of the language used in Polish academia, as proposed by Wilkoń and Ożóg, it appears that, apart from the aspect of emotional valuation, feminine speech is generally more compliant with the norms of the literary variant of spoken Polish. It is the discourse of women which appears to be more careful, lexically rich and composed of more complex structures. This is consistent with the fact that, as Kasperczak mentions, women may seem to navigate the formal style of speech with more confidence. In contrast, men are more likely to implement a more laid-back approach, allowing themselves for shorter statements and some colloquial expressions. That is not to say that the language of men should be considered “improper”: such linguistic freedom is allowed in an academic presentation as a result of the shift from the focus on self-presentation to the accessibility to the audience (Łyda, 2007b, pp. 10–11). The two genders apply distinctive communication strategies, yet with the same goal in mind. While the traits proposed by Tannen and Zuber may apply to everyday discourse, in an academic setting, it is the establishment and maintenance of contact with the listeners which is most relevant to students when giving an academic presentation, regardless of their gender.

Because of the limitations of this research, not all characteristics of genderlects in academia were measured. For instance, it could be interesting to investigate whether Trudgill's (1995, pp.71–72) hypothesis regarding women making fewer grammatical errors than men applied to the academic setting. As for Handke's (2021, pp. 19–20) claim that women use more fixed expressions, both female and male students utilised them to a similar extent due to being restricted by the structure of the presentations. In the same way, it was not proven that women use adjectives, pronouns and adverbs to a higher degree than men.

The differences found throughout research for this paper may appear rather insignificant. Perhaps that is why so many students and lecturers with a linguistic background had problems with identifying any distinctive characteristics of Polish genderlects in academia. However, such small divergences were to be expected. In the Polish language, there are no such linguistic devices, other than relating to grammatical gender, which would restrict their use to just one group.

Therefore, as Trudgill (2003, pp. 54–55) states, any variations between genderlects do not point to absolute rules, but rather tendencies which could perhaps be measured more effectively by means of more extended research.

7. The Socio-Cultural Situation of Female and Male Students in Poland

Over the past few decades, the social situation for young people in Poland has changed significantly, especially for women. With higher education now accessible to people of all backgrounds, the potential findings of differences between female and male speech in an academic environment may indicate that Polish society continues to set distinctive expectations for educated young men and women, despite the push for gender equality in the Western world. Therefore, it is interesting to look at the results of this study from a broader perspective.

As has been observed above, the academic discourse of male and female students does not vary significantly. During the interviews, one of the lecturers suggested that such language variation between the male and female discourse of students in Poland may have been more prominent in the past when certain social roles were imposed on each gender with greater effect. Nowadays, however, with the general trend for gender equality, the expectations for students have become identical, as the main aim of academia is to educate learned people, regardless of their gender. This would also explain the unanimous approach of students to the main objective of an academic presentation, as the expectations set by the lecturers are the same for both genders.

This trend has also been shown in the answers of respondents to the survey. The participants in general remained neutral towards the claim that there is gender equality in academia, but were more inclined to agree than disagree, marking a score of 3.28 on a scale from 1 to 5. In the same way, as in the question presented above, the participants in the survey were asked to state whether or not they agreed with the two following statements: “Women express themselves more neatly, more diligently and use more sophisticated vocabulary than men do”, and “Men speak more directly, whereas women create elaborate descriptions”. In both cases, the scores remained neutral: 2.74 and 3.13 respectively, which may suggest that the students themselves did not want to assign any features which may have appeared prejudicial or stereotypical towards either gender. All of these responses suggest that any imbalances between the treatment of female and male students in the learning process at higher education schools in Poland are not

widespread and that the teaching staff of lecturers is concentrated on teaching the Polish youth equally, without aggravating disparities in society.

Apart from gender, there are many other variables influencing the speech of students. As a side thread to the main objective of this research, the study also sought to find other sociocultural factors currently with the most impact on students' language in an academic setting. Both the students in the survey and the interviewed lecturers were asked to suggest what other linguistic variables affect a student's speech in academic presentations. Among many proposed factors, the most frequently suggested were: one's knowledge of the topic presented, which subsequently translates into the speaker's stress levels; the lecturer's attitude towards the subject and the students; the characteristics of the audience to which the presentation is given; and previous experience resulting from the age of the presenter. Other secondary variables were: the presenter's social status within the group, the importance of the presentation, one's nurture as well as the physical and psychological disposition of the day.

8. Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to see whether and in what way the phenomenon of genderlects in the Polish language persists in the academic setting. As may be inferred, certain differences between female and male discourse in the language of instruction can be found. Feminine language is generally more adherent to the presupposed norms of academic discourse, which in turn makes them sound more formal and polite. They tend to refrain from using their notes, and overall appear to pay more attention to the aesthetics of their presentation, both visually and linguistically. Men, on the other hand, keep their presentations more concise and objective. Though they are more likely to aid themselves with notes, they nevertheless strive to make a connection with the audience, for instance, through the use of informal elements of discourse. There may be a slight tendency for the use of a certain vocabulary unit or a language structure by one of the genders, but that does not exclude the possibility of its appearance in the speech of a member of the opposite gender.

The findings of this study point to a conclusion that, although there are slight differences in the speech patterns of female and male speakers in the Polish language of instruction in academic presentations, they are not major and do not point to any variation between how the members of each gender are treated in academia. While giving a presentation at university, both women and men might utilise slightly different communication strategies, and, consequently, distinctive

language units, but the overall purpose behind such variation remains the same. Both groups of students are first and foremost expected to speak in such a way as to present their knowledge to the audience in a most effective way. Any stronger variation between genderlects in the Polish spoken language can most likely be found in everyday speech, which is subject to less rigid norms than academic discourse.

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Akademicki język wykładowy polskich szkół wyższych: analiza kontrastywna kobiecego i męskiego dyskursu w prezentacjach

Streszczenie. Przedmiotem zainteresowania niniejszego artykułu jest analiza zróżnicowania genderlektów żeńskich i męskich w obszarze języka polskiego, a dokładnie dyskursu akademickiego używanego w prezentacjach wygłaszanych przez studentów szkół wyższych. Analiza opiera się na materiale badawczym zebranym za pomocą ankiet i obserwacji przeprowadzonych wśród studentów, a także wywiadów z wykładowcami. W pierwszej części skoncentrowano się na przedstawieniu wiedzy teoretycznej z zakresu socjolingwistyki i analizy dyskursu. Następnie przedstawiono metody wykorzystane do pozyskania danych badawczych. Zebrane dane zostały przeanalizowane i zestawione z ustaleniami wcześniejszych socjolingwistów w celu sprawdzenia, czy w dyskursie akademickim istnieją jakiegokolwiek różnice między mową kobiet i mężczyzn.

Słowa kluczowe: socjolingwistyka, prezentacje akademickie, genderlekty, język polski, dyskurs akademicki

