You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: Metaphors of femininity

Author: Ewa Jakubowska

UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI W KATOWICACH

Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Śląskiego

Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

METAPHORS OF FEMININITY

Ewa Jakubowska

In every culture there exists a certain **gender order** which specifies the patterns of power relations connected to particular types of masculinity and femininity (CONNELL, 1987; GIDDENS, 2006). Over the time the existing types of masculinity and femininity turn into cultural **stereotypes**. Their stereotypical nature is confirmed by the language we use. Some stereotypes are translated into metaphors, which are realized in language as metaphorical expressions. The main assumption of the paper involves the one-way dependency:

gender order → gender stereotypes → gender metaphors

In other words, the language reflects the gender order specific for a particular culture.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the metaphors related to the types of femininity specific for Polish culture. Polish culture can be characterized as a culture "in transition", which since 1989 has been undergoing significant transformations (cf. LUBECKA, 2000). These transformations are visible also in social life and social relations. Certain changes can be noticed in gender order and the types of femininity. The main research questions are the following: Are the changes above mentioned reflected in the Polish language? And if so, how do they affect the "metaphors we live by"?

The study is to be of interdisciplinary character. It is to merge sociology with linguistics. Thus, three theoretical frameworks are going to be employed, Robert W. Connell's theory of gender, the linguistic approach to stereotype and Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive theory of metaphor.

1. THEORY OF GENDER

In Western capitalistic societies, gender relations are determined by patriarchal power (CONNELL, 1987). CONNELL'S (1987) theory, presented in his book *Gender and Power*, is one of the most thorough theories of gender, according to which the social power kept by men creates and maintains gender inequality in society. He distinguishes three aspects of the society which form together the gender order. These are work, power and interpersonal/sexual relations. Gender relations performed in these three social areas create a particular structure of gender order.

Connell writes about the gender hierarchy in the society, within which he discusses various types of masculinity and femininity. At all social levels, from the individual to the institutional, different types of masculinity and femininity are organised according to the simple assumption of the male dominance over women. All the types of femininity, in Connell's hierarchy, are subordinated to hegemonic masculinity (the dominant form of masculinity, associated with marriage, power and physical strength):

— **emphasized femininity**, which complements hegemonic masculinity and is oriented at satisfying the men's interests and needs,
— **resistant femininity**, referring to femininity represented by women that reject conventional norms of femininity and assume the emancipated style of life.

Emphasized femininity is femininity as understood in a traditional sense. It is related to the social roles of wife and mother, performed by women in patriarchal societies. While, resistant femininity is a new, modern category. It has appeared as a result of the socio-economic changes in the society, and is in opposition to emphasized femininity.

Gender relations, as Connell maintains, are neither static nor invariable. Gender order is dynamic, and both gender and sex are socially constructed. As a consequence, together with socio-economic changes, there occur changes in individual gender identities, which are constantly adapted to current situations.

2. STEREOTYPING AND STEREOTYPES

Stereotyping is said to be omnipresent in human life (ŁYDA and GABRYŚ-BARKER, 2004). This has strong implications for (un)successful "communication and understanding between various groups. [...] it is understood as performing a social interpersonal function which might result in imposition of

one's own system of values and norms of behaviour [...]. It can also have an intrapersonal dimension, affectively motivated and determining in- and out-group identity" (ŁYDA and GABRYŚ-BARKER, 2004: 175). In everyday life, **stereotype** is understood as "a one-ended, exaggerated and normally prejudicial view of a group, tribe or class of people" (ABERCROMBIE, HILL and TURNER, 2000: 346). Understood in this way, stereotypes are often resistant to change or correction, because they create a sense of social solidarity. PICKERING (2004) claims that they involve the "stunted abbreviation of the Other."

Besides, stereotype is an academic concept of interdisciplinary character which has been subject of investigation in sociology, social psychology, theory of literature and linguistics. In sociology, stereotype is associated mainly with social norms and patterns of group behaviour. In psychology, it is related to perception and categorisation, to attitudes, beliefs and biases. In theory of literature, it is classified as a conventionalised means of expression, and put together with *cliché* and *topos* (CHLEBDA, 1998). In linguistics, there are three different approaches to stereotype, according to which it is interpreted as (CHLEBDA, 1998: 32):
— a reproducible linguistic expression — phraseologism,
— a specific mental construct,
— a specific mental construct, rooted in our consciousness by means of a linguistic sign.
All these approaches combined can be found in the concept of linguistic stereotype presented by BARTMIŃSKI, for whom **stereotype** is "a subjectively determined representation of an object including both descriptive and evaluative features, which are the result of the interpretation of reality within social cognitive models. This understanding of stereotype takes into account both its semantic and formal aspects" (1998: 64; cf. TERMIŃSKA, 1998). For Bartmiński, stereotyping involves the semantic as well as formal plane of the language. He distinguishes the following types of linguistic stereotypes:
— topics, semantic combinations, expressing widely-held beliefs, such as: *Shoemakers drink a lot*,
— formulae, common semantic and formal combinations, such as: *Pije jak szewc* ('*He drinks like a shoemaker*'), or *As drunk as a lord*,
— idioms, common combinations of linguistic forms, such as: *Jak się masz?* ('*How are you?*'), or *How are you?*
Such stereotypes are elements of the linguistic picture of the world. However, this picture, or the linguistic-cultural model of the world, is an interpretation and not a reflection of reality (BARTMIŃSKI, 1998). Most of the researchers investigating the problem stress the simplified character of stereotyping. HOFFMAN and HURST (1990: 197; BOKSZAŃSKI, 1997) maintain that:

> Stereotypes belong to a class of "schemas" that, in general, are thought
> to have as their goal the representation of external reality (even though
> they may achieve only a selective or simplified version of this reality).
> In the case of stereotypes, however, this is tantamount to saying that
> they contain at least a kernel of truth [...].

Thus, as a cultural representation of a group of objects or people, stereotype is motivated by objective properties of the group as well as by subjective (socio-psychological) factors. And it is usually emotionally loaded (LIPPMANN, 1961). Summing it all up, every stereotype includes:
— a descriptive content,
— an affective content,
— an axiological content (a system of values, norms and patterns of behaviour) (BARTMIŃSKI, 1998).
Stereotype, however, is not a fixed set of behaviours which exists somewhere, "but the hypothesised version of the stereotype is something which is played with by those arenas where our 'common' experience is mediated, for example on television, in advertising, newspapers, and magazines" (MILLS, 2003: 184—185). So, along with some changes and transformations in our social world, the ways we stereotype it are changing as well.

3. GENDER STEREOTYPES IN POLISH CULTURE

The common understanding of gender differences is reflected in the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity that function in the society. Gender stereotypes are said to arise in response to a sexual division of labour. They "rationalise the distribution of the sexes into social roles" (HOFFMAN and HURST, 1990: 197). According to the evidence presented by EAGLY (1987; quoted by HOFFMAN and HURST, 1990), in the core of the stereotypes there is the idea that men are more "agentic" (self-assertive and motivated to master) than women, and women are more "communal" (selfless and concerned with others) than men. This conviction results mainly from the observation of the differences between social roles traditionally performed by men and women. Women are generally perceived as "homemakers" and "child raisers", while men as "breadwinners" (HOFFMAN and HURST, 1990).
    Caring, selflessness, and concern with one's appearance are features prototypically ascribed to women and said to be a biological part of being female. Aggression and dominance are features which are a biological part of being male. Traditionally, femininity is associated with child rearing and

man/husband caring, with the expressive and the private. Masculinity "is often described in terms of battle and warfare" (MILLS, 2003: 188), and is associated with the intellectual and the public (PEISERT, 1994; cf. HOFSTEDE, 1998).

Even though stereotypes usually involve prejudicial views, they may also refer to positive as well as negative features shared by the group of people in question. Having analysed data from everyday Polish, Peisert distinguishes between positive and negative features ascribed to men and women, respectively. The positive features typically granted to women include emotionality, perceptiveness, personal commitment and gentleness, while the negative ones include irrationality, inconsistency, unsteadiness and an inability to objectively look at problems. The positive features typical for men are chivalry, initiative, firmness and effectiveness, while negative ones are aggression, indifference, tactlessness and emotional coolness.

The psychological dimension of stereotype is "always realized within certain social and historical contexts which condition and direct it as a process" (PICKERING, 2004: 21). In other words, the process of stereotyping and stereotypes, the results of this process, must always be interpreted in relation to such contexts. Gender stereotypes include both universal views and culture-specific elements. In Polish culture, defined as a "culture in transition", stereotypes, like other cultural elements, are undergoing great changes.

In former times, the prevailing stereotype of femininity was the stereotype of *matka Polka* ('*the Polish mother*') (JAKUBOWSKA, 2007). It was created in Polish patriotic literature of the 19th c. In particular, it can be traced back to Adam Mickiewicz's poem, "Do matki Polki", in which the poet creates an idealised picture of the mother making her son ready to suffer and die for his country. The 19th-c. variant of this stereotype is a combination of the much older stereotype of *matka-ojczyzna* ('*mother-homeland*'), *matka Polska* ('*mother Poland*') and *Matka Boska* ('*Mother of God*'). This is a stereotype which can be treated "as »a model«, embedded in an idealising, obligational modal frame" (BARTMIŃSKI, 1998: 78). The social role of the mother is narrowed here to "the national programme". *Matka Polka* is somebody that is "worthy of admiration, good, protective and fertile, but at the same time she is a patriot, [...] [she — E.J.] gives birth to and brings up homeland defenders, and guards national values [...] [She is — E.J.] full of kindness and dedication, bringing love and the virtue of Christian purity of heart" (MONCZKA-CIE-CHOMSKA, 1992: 95—96). Although nowadays in Poland, mothers do not have to prepare their sons for fighting and dying for their homeland, the stereotype of *matka Polka* still exists. However, it is a narrowed and modified version of the 19th-c. stereotype. It is devoid of its patriotic and national aspects. In the 21st-c. Poland, *matka Polka* is a woman who entirely devotes herself to her husband and children, and has no other interests than her home. What makes her different and "special" in her own eyes is her readiness to sacrifice herself for

her family. This is the specific for Polish culture variation of the universal ste-
reotype of woman as homemaker and child raiser, with special emphasis on the
latter. It epitomises the traditional, Catholic values, among which family is one
of the most important. The stereotype of *matka Polka* can be said to stem from
the type of femininity, called by CONNELL (1987) emphasized femininity,
which, as mentioned above, complements hegemonic masculinity and is ori-
ented at satisfying the men's interests and needs. It is considered a relict of the
past, when there was a traditional division between men's and women's social
roles, but the relict which is still extremely powerful.

After the Second World War, during the communist era, social life in Po-
land was undergoing gradual changes. This also influenced the gender order.
Men were no longer the only breadwinners in the family. More and more
women entered work organisations. They did so mainly out of necessity, they
still believed in the traditional model of family and the traditional division of
gender roles. Nowadays, women try to reconcile their career with family life
and bringing up children, to be perfect wives and mothers and at the same
time develop professionally. This task, almost impossible to achieve, often
leads to frustration and makes women internally torn. This situation is respon-
sible for the appearance of the stereotype of *split femininity* (JAKUBOWSKA,
2007). It can be described as connecting the private with the public. By anal-
ogy to split personality (Dissociative Identity Disorder), this stereotype depicts
a woman that displays multiple distinct identities connected with different so-
cial roles, each with its own patterns of perception and interaction with the
environment, and what is most important each involving different, often clash-
ing requirements. As in every stereotype, in this one there is a kernel of truth,
or more: the majority of Polish women both are housewives and work to earn
money. They do their best to be perfect mothers/wives and good employees,
which is impossible to achieve, and this makes them feel *split*. As a product
of socio-cultural changes, the stereotype of *split femininity* is hard to classify,
as it cannot be said to directly stem from any of the types of femininity. It in-
volves selected elements of both. On the one hand, to a limited extent, it is
a picture of femininity oriented at satisfying the men's interests and needs and
making the whole family happy (emphasized femininity). On the other hand,
it is a picture of femininity which, without rejecting its conventional norms,
assumes the style of life which is to some extent emancipated (resistant femi-
ninity).

The two stereotypes presented above constitute only a selection from among
many stereotypes of femininity existing in Polish culture. I have chosen these
two, because of their different origin; the first one can be said to be a product
of Polish history and tradition, while the second one has appeared as a result
of the socio-cultural transformations of the second half of the 20th c. These
two stereotypes, however, do not create an opposition. The stereotype of *split*

femininity can be described as a picture containing both traditional and modern elements.

4. POLISH METAPHORS OF FEMININITY

On the basis of the stereotypes existing in culture, there may appear metaphors. They are usually related to the properties specific for a particular stereotype (HABRAJSKA, 1998). Here I will present the metaphors arising from the two stereotypes of femininity discussed above. The theoretical framework of the study is the cognitive theory of metaphor (LAKOFF and JOHNSON, 1980). For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (LAKOFF and JOHNSON, 1980: 3). Our conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is **metaphorical** in nature. Metaphorical are also our conceptions of gender and gender order existing in our culture and society.

The stereotypes of femininity include descriptive and evaluative features which are the result of the interpretation of the types of femininity existing in our society. The related metaphors belong to the Subject-Self metaphor system created by LAKOFF and JOHNSON (1999). According to them:

> a person is divided into a Subject and one or more Selves. [...] The Subject is that aspect of a person that is the experiencing consciousness and the locus of reason, will, and judgement, which, by its nature, *exists only in the present*. [...] the Subject is always conceptualized as a person. The Self is that part of a person that [...] includes the body, social roles, past states, and actions in the world. There can be more than one Self. And each Self is conceptualized metaphorically as either a person, an object, or a location (LAKOFF and JOHNSON, 1999: 169).

In this metaphor system, the Subject controls the Self. For example, one of Lakoff and Johnson's metaphors — the Scattered Self (e.g., '***Pull yourself together***', '*She hasn't **got it together** yet*', '*He's pretty **scattered***'), which is based on two basic assumptions:
— "normal self-control is conceptualized as the Subject and Self being at the same place",
— "When the Self is scattered, Subject and Self cannot be in the same place and control is impossible" (LAKOFF and JOHNSON, 1999: 276),

ATTENTIONAL SELF CONTROL IS HAVING THE SELF TOGETHER

A Person   → The Subject
A Unified Container   → The Normal Self
The Container Fragmented → The Scattered Self (LAKOFF and JOHNSON, 1999)

By analogy to the above-presented metaphor, the Sacrificed Self metaphor and the Split Self metaphor are constructed. The metaphors of femininity are their specific cases.

4.1. THE SACRIFICED SELF

The stereotype of *matka Polka* has triggered the appearance of the **Sacrificed Self** metaphor:

SUCCESSFUL SELF CONTROL IS HAVING THE SELF SACRIFICED
A Person   → The Subject
An Object of Value that is left to itself → The Normal Self
An Object of Value that is given up   → The Sacrificed Self

A WOMAN'S LIFE IS A SELF-SACRIFICE
The property of the *matka Polka* stereotype that has been used in this metaphor is readiness to sacrifice oneself (one's whole life, interests, aspirations and wants) for the good of the family. This property is perceived positively in Polish culture:

SELF-SACRIFICE IS GOOD
SELF-NEGATION IS GOOD

However, the situation has been changing for some time now, and such an attitude to one's life as presented by traditionally thinking women is criticised by those representing the more non-conventional views on the problem.
The Sacrificed Self metaphor is reflected in everyday Polish by the expressions:
Poświęciła się *dla dzieci, a teraz została zupełnie sama.*
Poświęciwszy *im całe **swoje** życie, trudno jej było pogodzić się z ich odejściem.*
*Stała się **ofiarą na ołtarzu** ogniska domowego.*
***Poświęcenie**, na jakie się zdobyła, opiekując się niepełnosprawnym mężem, u wielu wywołało podziw.*
To, co sama czuła, nie miało dla niej większego znaczenia, liczył się mąż i dzieci.
***Swoje** potrzeby zawsze spychała na dalszy plan, najważniejsze było to, czego chciał on.*

4.2. THE SPLIT SELF

The stereotype of *split femininity* is the basis for the **Split Self** metaphor:

SUCCESSFUL SELF CONTROL IS HAVING THE SELF AS A WHOLE
A Person   → The Subject
A Unified Container   → The Normal Self
The Container Split into Two   → The Split Self

A WOMAN'S LIFE IS SPLITTING THE SELF
A WOMAN'S LIFE IS A LOST FIGHT FOR THE INNER BALANCE/
HARMONY
LACK OF INTERNAL BALANCE/HARMONY IS BAD

The Split Self metaphor is reflected in the everyday Polish by the expressions:

*Była ciągle **rozdarta** między pracą a rodziną. I to wewnętrzne **rozdarcie** nie pozwalało jej poczuć się szczęśliwą.*

*Wychodząc do pracy i zostawiając dziecko pod opieką niańki, czuła się winna i wewnętrznie **rozdarta**, nie potrafiła sobie z tym poradzić.*

*Już nie wiem, czy **prawdziwa ja** to kreatywna asystentka szefa, czy może mama słodkiego Piotrusia. To **rozdwojenie** doprowadza mnie do szału.*

The above-discussed metaphors, the Sacrificed Self and the Split Self, form part of the picture of femininity existing now in Polish culture. This picture, like any picture created as a socio-cultural representation, has a dynamic nature; it is constantly changing, and these changes result from the transformations occurring in our society.

The picture of femininity is a socio-cultural construct. It has a complex structure within which we can distinguish three different levels:

1. The social level, at which there exist different types of femininity, which are part of gender order.

2. The cultural level, at which there are culture-specific stereotypes (e.g., *matka Polka*, or *split femininity* in Polish culture), and metaphors of femininity, triggered by these stereotypes (e.g., the Sacrificed Self and the Split Self).

3. The linguistic level, at which there can be found:
— linguistic stereotypes of femininity (cf. BARTMIŃSKI, 1998),
— metaphorical expressions (e.g., the metaphors presented above).

REFERENCES

ABERCROMBIE N., HILL S. and TURNER B.S. (2000): *The Penguin Dictionary of Socio-logy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

ANUSIEWICZ J. and BARTMIŃSKI J. (eds.) (1998): *Stereotyp jako przedmiot lingwistyki. Teoria, metodologia, analizy empiryczne*. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polo-nistyki Wrocławskiej.

ANUSIEWICZ J. and HANDKE K. (eds.) (1994): *Płeć w języku i kulturze*. Wrocław: To-warzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej.

BARKER A.D. (ed.) (2004): *O Poder e a. Persistência dos Estereótipos. The Power and Persistence of Stereotyping*. Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro, Departamento de Línguas e Culturas.

BARTMIŃSKI J. (1998): "Podstawy lingwistycznych badań nad stereotypem — na przykładzie stereotypu matki". In: ANUSIEWICZ J. and BARTMIŃSKI J. (eds.): *Stereotyp jako przedmiot lingwistyki. Teoria, metodologia, analizy empiryczne*. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 63—83.

BOKSZAŃSKI Z. (1997): *Stereotypy a kultura*. Wrocław: Leopoldinum.

CHLEBDA W. (1998): "Stereotyp jako jedność języka, myślenia i działania". In: ANUSIEWICZ J. and BARTMIŃSKI J. (eds.): *Stereotyp jako przedmiot lingwistyki. Teoria, metodologia, analizy empiryczne*. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 31—41.

CONNELL R.W. (1987): *Gender and Power. Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity.

EAGLY A.H. (1997): *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NY: Erlbaum.

GIDDENS A. (2006): *Socjologia*. Trans. A. SZULŻYCKA. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

HABRAJSKA G. (1998): "Prototyp — stereotyp — metafora". In: ANUSIEWICZ J. and BART-MIŃSKI J. (eds.): *Stereotyp jako przedmiot lingwistyki. Teoria, metodologia, analizy empiryczne*. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 116—123.

HOFFMAN C. and HURST N. (1990): "Gender stereotypes: Perception or rationalization?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, 2: 197—208.

HOFSTEDE G. (1998): "The cultural construction of gender". In: HOFSTEDE G. et al. (eds.): *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures*. Thousand Oaks/London: SAGE Publications, 77—105.

HOFSTEDE G. et al. (eds.) (1998): *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures*. Thousand Oaks/London: SAGE Publications.

JAKUBOWSKA E. (2007): "Gender and face". In: SANTAEMILIA J., BOU P., MARUENDA S. and ZARAGOZA G. (eds.): *International Perspectives on Gender and Languages*. Va-lencia: Universitat de Valencia (CD version), 333—351.

LAKOFF G. and JOHNSON M. (1980): *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

LAKOFF G. and JOHNSON M. (1999): *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.

LIPPMANN W. (1922): *Public Opinion*. New York: Macmillan.

LUBECKA A. (2000): *Requests, Invitations, Apologies and Compliments in American English and Polish. A Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.

ŁYDA A. and GABRYŚ-BARKER D. (2004): "Translation as stereotyping". In: BARKER A.D. (ed.): *O Poder e a. Persistência dos Estereótipos. The Power and Persistence of Stereotyping*. Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro, Departamento de Línguas e Culturas, 175—184.

MILLS S. (2003): *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MONCZKA-CIECHOMSKA M. (1992): "Mit kobiety w polskiej kulturze". In: WALCZEWSKA S. (ed.): *Głos mają kobiety: teksty feministyczne*. Kraków: Convinum.

PEISERT M. (1994): "»On« i »ona« we współczesnej polszczyźnie potocznej". In: ANUSIEWICZ J. and HANDKE K. (eds.): *Płeć w języku i kulturze*. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 97—108.

PICKERING M. (2004): "The inescapably social concept of stereotyping". In: BARKER A.D. (ed.): *O Poder e a. Persistência dos Estereótipos. The Power and Persistence of Stereotyping*. Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro, Departamento de Línguas e Culturas, 21—32.

SANTAEMILIA J., BOU P., MARUENDA S. and ZARAGOZA G. (eds.) (2007): *International Perspectives on Gender and Languages*. Valencia: Universitat de Valencia (CD version).

TERMIŃSKA K. (1998): "Refleksy sporu o uniwersalia w sporze o stereotypy". In: ANUSIEWICZ J. and BARTMIŃSKI J. (eds.): *Stereotyp jako przedmiot lingwistyki. Teoria, metodologia, analizy empiryczne*. Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 42—52.

WALCZEWSKA S. (ed.) (1992): *Głos mają kobiety: teksty feministyczne*. Kraków: Convinum.