

THE LINGUISTIC DIMENSION OF GENDER EQUALITY: A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

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Summary :

The subject-matter of this essay is gender justice in language which, as I argue, may be achieved through the development of a gender-related approach to linguistic human rights. The last decades of the 20th century, globally marked by a “gender shift” in attitudes to language policy, gave impetus to the social movement for promoting linguistic gender equality. It was initiated in Western Europe and nowadays is moving eastwards, as ideas of gender democracy progress into developing countries. But, while in western societies gender discrimination through language, or linguistic sexism, was an issue of concern for over three decades, in developing countries efforts to promote gender justice in language are only in their infancy. My argument is that to promote gender justice in language internationally it is necessary to acknowledge the rights of women and men to equal representation of their gender in language and speech and, therefore, raise a question of *linguistic rights of the sexes*. My understanding is that the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in 1996 provided this opportunity to address the problem of gender justice in language as a human rights issue, specifically as a gender dimension of linguistic human rights.

Palavras-chave

Género ; Língua; Direitos; Igualdade; Ucrânia; Europa

Key Words

Gender; Language; Rights; Equality; Ukraine; Europe

Introduction

The Movement for women's liberation is one of the most influential social movements of the century, whose purpose is to eliminate gender inequalities at an international level, to increase women's participation in all aspects of societal life, and to achieve greater influence on its current development. In the last decades of the 20th century, it affected the major areas of life worldwide and encouraged great improvements in the absolute status of women: their educational level, life expectancy, and position in the labour market, as well as their income rates have increased considerably, while illiteracy, maternal mortality, and total fertility are beginning to fall (*Toward Gender Equality* 1995: vii). However, despite the convincing progress in this area, achieving comprehensive gender equality still remains one of the major problems of the international women's movement. Significant gender asymmetries in the promotion of human rights, access to resources, decision-making, health-status, and schooling persist worldwide, but especially in developing countries.

The current work is devoted to the analysis of one of the many impacts women's movement is having on society, particularly, its influence on language as a powerful means of structuring public consciousness. It addresses the problem of the negative gender effect of an *androcentric language*, claiming that it should be regarded as a violation of human rights and outlawed by means of a *gender-sensitive approach to linguistic rights*.

The influence of the women's movement for language change may be traced in recent developments concerning problematic usages in the language of international official documents, for example, the text of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. A gender-sensitive linguistic expertise of this text does not provide any grounds for criticism. However, the history of this document shows that its draft contained language patterns that were qualified by European women's organizations as a manifestation of linguistic discrimination. It was not until the press release of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), condemning the sexist language of this document, was issued on 3 August 2000, that gender-sensitive amendments were introduced into the final text. In the English version of the draft Charter, linguistic sexism occurred several times, for example in article 3 (1) which initially read: "Everyone has the right to the respect of *his* physical and mental integrity". The EWL press release focused on the use of sexist language in the Charter as a tool for women's exclusion from its provisions. It qualified linguistic sexism as a form of gender discrimination, which "although sometimes unintentional, is nonetheless damaging in excluding women and in

rendering our reality and our experience invisible” (European Women’s Lobby 2000). After the EWL protest, the language of the document underwent gender-sensitive corrections and today it can be identified as gender-fair. Therefore, the political correctness of language of the Charter resulted from the pressure of European women’s organizations, particularly, from members of the European Women’s Lobby, as the largest coordinating body of national and European non-governmental women’s organizations in the European Union (EU).

But at the same time, the attitude of the women’s movement towards unequal linguistic representation of women and men in countries outside the EU does not provide equal grounds for optimism. Particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and especially in the countries of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), the necessity to encourage gender correct language usage in political discourse is not recognized as a serious problem by women’s organizations. Research showed numerous cases where documents of national significance and even clauses on gender equality contained terminology perpetuating gender stereotyping, and reflected commonly accepted sexist practices in official languages. For example, the New Constitution of Ukraine contains the following articles:

Article 28. Everyone has the right to be respected in his dignity;

Article 32. No one may be subjected to intrusions into his private and family life;

Article 43. Everyone has the right to work, which includes the possibility of earning one’s living by the work that he is free to choose (*Nova Konstytucia Ukrainy* 1997).

The implicit message conveyed by these fragments of the Constitution of Ukraine is that the Fundamental Law of the country addresses only men, because women are grammatically excluded. Especially challenging from this point of view is the Article 24, which declares gender equality in the Ukrainian society by using formulations that are discriminatory towards women as citizens. It states: “The equality of men and women is ensured by giving women opportunities in civil, political, and cultural activity, which are equal to men’s”. According to this article, while men have their own rights, women should be given their rights. Besides, women’s rights are to be measured by those of men, the latter being the norm that defines legislative standards for other groups in society. In other words, men can share their social opportunities with women and women have to receive them from men, as if women were socially disabled individuals, incapable of obtaining their rights by themselves, and in constant need for masculine guidance. The cited articles of the Constitution of Ukraine contain examples

of gender-biased language, or linguistic gender discrimination, through which the social status of Ukrainian women is verbally undermined in the Fundamental Law of society, which eventually results in the inferiority of their social image. The goal of the current paper is to show that the wording of these articles represents a violation of women's rights for equality in linguistic self-representation, and correspondingly of their linguistic rights, as acknowledged by the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in 1996.

Gender Bias in Language as a Socio-Linguistic Phenomenon

The central concept of this paper is that gender-biased language is a manifestation of inequality between female and male-referring terms (Swann 1992: 35), which leads to gender discrimination by means of language, to women's linguistic exclusion from the public awareness, and eventually to women's social marginalization. Some radical authors identify it as a form of "linguistic genocide" of women (*die sprachliche Vernichtung der Frau*) (Hellinger 1986), as a "patriarchal imperialism in the area of language", and as a "linguistic colonization with masculine terms taking over feminine territory" (Wodak 1989: 273-4).

The opinion accepted by many researchers of language and gender is that linguistic sexism is a part, as well as an indicator, of societal sexism, i.e., of sexism as a social phenomenon *per se*. Sexist language is a manifestation of the presence of sexist tendencies in a society at large, and at the same time it is a mechanism for the establishment of gender asymmetries. Therefore, the challenging of gender-bias in language is viewed by scholars as an important feminist strategy to engender social order and to eliminate sexism in society (Wheatherall 2002: 10).

As far as language conveys attitudes, sexist attitudes stereotype a person according to her/his gender, rather than by judging that person on individual merits (Holmes 2001: 305). Decades of empirical research support the claims of feminist scholars that "language can have negative real-world consequences, especially for women and girls" (Frank 1989: 2), because it fails to reflect adequately their presence in society. The research of the linguistic portrayal of women and men in texts and discourses across languages has revealed many common discriminatory practices, conveyed by sexist language (Casey, Miller 1977: 122-38; Graddol, Swann 1985: 112-

13; Hellinger 1980; Mills 1995; Pauwels 1998: 34-5; Richardson 1997; Schulz 1975; Thomas, Wareing 1999: 70-4; Weatherall 2002: 12-31; Wodak 1989):

- It marginalizes women, excludes them from the area of language functioning, and makes them linguistically invisible;
- It reinforces stereotypical gender roles, i.e., perpetuates stereotypes about the “correct” way for a man or a woman to behave;
- It can be patronizing, deprecating, and derogatory;
- It defines women narrowly, mostly in terms of their marital status, thus reinforcing the attitude towards women only as marriage material;
- It represents masculine forms as the norm for language, and feminine forms as marked, derivative, secondary, and subordinate, thus creating linguistic asymmetries in the presentation of sexes.

The linguistic manifestations of sexism, criticized by feminist linguistic scholarship, enlist a clear over-use of masculine generic nouns and of gender-specific pronouns (Barron 1986; Hellinger, Bussman 2001: 7-8; Martyna 1980), of gender-exclusive job titles (Decamps 2001; Gervais 2001; Doyle 1995: 63-4; Powels 1987), and of honorifics and forms of address to women (Doyle 1995: 39-40; Pauwels 1987; Smith 1985: 42-5), among others.

The notion of gender-discriminatory language as a component part of a wider concept of gender discrimination was emphasized by the international women’s liberation movement in the 1970s, when the active entrance of women into the labour market made them insecure and unprotected, under socio-economic conditions counted predominantly for men. Women’s position within the economic space was not identified in national legislations, which provided employers with the possibility of both covert and overt gender discrimination. This situation defined the necessity of legitimising the new position of women in the economic structure of society. In response to this development, many countries started to work on special measures, which could regulate the rights of the sexes in the labour relations system. In turn, this process gave rise to the international discourse about women’s human rights and encouraged the necessity to develop legislation that could protect women’s rights in the labour market. In the period between 1960 and 1980, non-discrimination laws were introduced in the national legislation of the industrially developed countries of the world. These laws included

clauses concerning the language of official job vacancy announcements, a necessary means to promote employment equality in the labour market. This regulation was based on research findings, which convincingly proved that gender-biased language in employment advertising and job interviewing resulted in the restriction of women's presence in the labour force.

In academic literature, the problem of gender-unfair language is usually approached by the feminist linguistic tradition in terms of its social and ethical consequences. But nowadays it is imperative to emphasize the economic effect of gender-exclusive language on women's lives. It is particularly relevant in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where women are economically vulnerable and unprotected, partly as a result of their invisibility in the language of law and important state documents, as demonstrated in the fragments from the Constitution of Ukraine cited above. The issue of political correctness in language acquires particular significance in the context of the Eastern enlargement of the European Union, in the course of which eight CEE states joined EU in May 2004¹; two more countries were enlisted as candidates for EU entry², and a number of others are willing to join EU in the nearest possible future.

According to the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1999, one of the prerequisites for EU candidate countries is the introduction of gender mainstreaming policy, and the adoption of gender-sensitive legislation. As mentioned above, EU older member-states integrated gender equality laws into their national legal framework decades ago, with a special emphasis on the linguistic aspect of gender justice. At the same time, in CEE accessing countries, the principle of linguistic gender equality and its socio-economic consequences for the sexes is not yet viewed as a significant legislative issue. Even in the states that have already adopted gender equality laws, the issue of gender-inclusive language has still not been incorporated into equality legislation. The exception is Slovenia, where the Article 25 of the Employment Relationship Act determines that gender-specific job advertising is illegal. In 2002, the National Assembly of Slovenia adopted a special provision, which guarantees the non-sexist use of language in legislation³. Meanwhile, international advocacy organizations have found evidence of a

¹ The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

² Bulgaria and Romania.

³ See: Ob obravnavi II. in III. periodičnega poročila Slovenije o uresničevanju CEDAW 2003, and *Third Periodical Report of Slovenia on the Realization of the Convention about Forms of Discrimination Against Women* 2003: 13.

direct correlation between linguistic strategies of recruitment policies and women's employment possibilities in Central and Eastern Europe. For example, the Human Rights Watch Report on Ukraine for 2003 provides evidence of gender discrimination in the language of job advertising and interviews, resulting in women's exclusion from the work force. It informs that job advertisements in the Ukrainian media specify "man" among the requirements for working in business and government agencies, and employers often deny women employment based on age and marital or family status (Ukraine: Women Facing Job Discrimination, 2003). In this way, women's access to the labour market and career opportunities are linguistically restricted. As a result, the labour rights of women from Central and Eastern Europe are less protected in what concerns job recruitment, and their career opportunities are lower than those of their western sisters. Therefore, it is possible to speak about particular linguistic causes of higher economic vulnerability, lower competitiveness, and a less secure position of women from post-communist countries, within the European Union joint economic space.

The resolution of the European conference on gender equality and democracy, held under the auspices of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1995, emphasized that the language that society uses reflects its commitment to the equality between women and men. The recognition that sexist stereotypes and discrimination continue, through the use of a gender-biased vocabulary, is an important step towards the achievement of genuine democracy. Since language structures social thinking, it is through the development of a non-sexist vocabulary that awareness can be broadened and users empowered without prejudice (Council of Europe, 1995). This is why the awareness of society of the existence of sexist tendencies in its language practices is one of the major conditions for the success of a policy aimed at the promotion of linguistic gender equality.

A Gender-Sensitive Linguistic Reform: Feminist Perspectives

In the last decades of the 20th century, verbal harassment and abuse on the grounds of gender were increasingly recognized as a form of linguistic discrimination. Sexist language was acknowledged as a powerful tool of social deprivation, undermining women's status in society. Increased public awareness of the social effect of gender-biased language triggered campaigns for political correctness in language,

leading to a linguistic reform on feminist principles. Initiated by scholars and activists of second-wave feminist linguistics, the gender-sensitive approach to language policy and planning was implemented in United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, West and East Germany, Austria, France, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries, mainly in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Quite recently, the documentation of linguistic gender bias has spread to Oriental and African languages, such as Chinese (Tan 1990; Ettner 2001), Japanese (Shibamoto-Smith 2001), Thai (Pauwels 1998: 16-17), Hebrew (Spolsky 1998: 38; Tobin 2001), Greek (Pavlidou 2001), Yoruba (Yusuf 2002), and Ube (Chukwukere 2000). The necessity of overcoming the linguistic androcentricity of discourse is emphasized by researchers of Slavic languages, such as Polish (Koniuszaniec, Blaszkowska 2001), Czech (Cmejrkova 2001), Romanian (Maurice 2001; Miroiu 1998), Russian (Doleshal 2001), Ukrainian (Tolstokorova 2004), and Lithuanian (Kaledaite 1995).

Taking into account the universal tradition of neglecting women's linguistic personality, shaped within the linguistic context of a patriarchal society, the gender-sensitive approach to language planning highlighted as its priority the task of reforming and enriching language resources with linguistic realities, capable of reflecting a specifically female vision and perception of the world. But at the same time, the methodology and approaches to gender-sensitive language planning are viewed differently in different societies. The proponents of a feminist reform in language have divergent views regarding either the scope of the suggested innovations or their directions, methods, and strategies. The proposed options vary widely, ranging from coining special "women-specific" and epicene grammatical forms – like the personal pronouns "E" or "IR" (Eade 1970), or words and word-forms such as *femocrat* (for democrat), *herstory* (for history), *womyn* or *wimmin* (for woman) (Romaine 1989: 29; Pauwels 2003: 555) – to the construction of entirely new, specifically female languages, as the Láádan (Elgin 1988).

As S. Ehrlich and R. King rightly observe, a language reform requires primarily institutional changes, i.e., the implementation of language reforms in agencies, companies and organizations, in the form of policy statements, guidelines and the insurance of compliance with those guidelines (Ehrlich and King 1998: 186). During the last three decades, a large number of different institutions, such as educational establishments, publishing houses, and all types of public organizations have developed

gender-free or anti-sexist language policies, which advocate that care must be taken to avoid sexist usage in documents (Mills 1995: 87). The main sections of society, viewed by feminists as the target areas of the gender-sensitive language reformation, include legislation (primarily in the area of employment policies and in texts of official documents), education and academia (e.g. in educational and reference materials, naming of courses, and university equality policies), mass media (e.g. in editorial policies and style guidelines), publishing practices and advertising (e.g. in official employment announcements), clerical procedures (in the text of bibles, books of prayers and hymns, sermons, and in all denominational publications), governmental and non-governmental organizations, trade unions, professional councils, associations, and learned societies (e.g. in corporate codes of ethics and policies).

The necessity of promoting the gender-accurate language of official documents has also been a matter of concern in major international and supranational organizations. The first attempts to challenge the patriarchal social paradigm through language were undertaken within the wider perspective of anti-discrimination legislation. Regulations regarding employment equality, as exemplified by the 1976 guidelines of the *European Community* (now EU), made gender discrimination in the area of professional life illegal and provided an important background for the development and dissemination of a non-sexist language.

In the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO), gender-justice in language was first addressed by representatives of Canada and the Scandinavian countries in 1987, at the 24th session of the General Conference, which made a call to avoid gender-biased language in this organization. The UNESCO General Conference developed a special resolution dealing with this issue. It contained an appeal to the Director-General to “adopt a policy related to the drafting of all the organization’s working documents aimed at avoiding, to the possible extent, the use of language which refers explicitly or implicitly to only one sex” (UNESCO 1987, p. 4). The General Conference went on to adopt an increasingly firm stance on sexist language at its 25th (1989), 26th (1991), and 27th (1995) sessions. In later issues, three editions of UNESCO guidelines on gender-neutral language in English, French, and later German and Spanish were published.

In 1990, the *Council of Europe* (CE) adopted a special document which acknowledged that sexist linguistic usage in CE member states “is hindering the establishment of equality between women and men since it obscures the existence of

women as half of humanity, while denying the equality of women and men” (Council of Europe 1990: 1). Having admitted the connection between language and the social order in society, this document recommended the governments of member states to: 1) take all the measures they considered appropriate in order to encourage the use of non-sexist language, taking into account the presence, status and role of women in society, as the current linguistic practice does for men; 2) bring the terminology used in legal drafting, public administration, and education into line with the principles of gender equality; 3) encourage the use of non-sexist language in the media.

In July 1998, the *United Nations Organization* (UN) issued an editorial directive on gender-neutral language (*United Nations editorial directive on gender-neutral language* 1998). More recently, on 28 January 2003, the Committee on Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities of the *European Parliament* published a document emphasizing the necessity of taking measures against the sexist practices reflected in male-biased language, as an obstacle to the equality between men and women (European Parliament 2003). The international advocacy organization *Amnesty International*, which has a presence in many countries of the world, has adopted a non-sexist language policy, mandatory for all its members (Amnesty International 1998).

At the same time, as S. Mills correctly observes, the problem of gender-discriminatory language persists because whilst significant changes have happened in the type of language used to describe women or the relative merits of either sex within these institutions, it is clear that their non-sexist policies are not always being put into practice in many documents and interactions (Mills 2003).

Today, the issue of gender-fair language usage attracts the public commitment as well as the attention of the international academia and mass media, and its geography is gradually expanding east and southwards, as the movement for gender democracy develops in this direction (Cameron 1995: 3). The international legacy of the collective actions of women’s rights advocates for the promotion of linguistic gender justice provides grounds to qualify their struggle as a separate trend within the women’s movement, with its own history and geography, ideology and methodology, strategies and tactics.

The Challenges of a Gender-Sensitive Language Reformation

Anti-sexist language campaigns, like the women's movement that inspired them, have had a varying scope of success in achieving their ambitious goals in different countries. However, their results convincingly demonstrated considerable transformations in the public gender awareness and sensitivity, in the period that followed the introduction of linguistic strategies in the gender legislation of the countries where gender-sensitive language reformation was implemented. Specifically, there was a considerable decrease in the use of gender-marked forms in the media, and primarily in youth editions (Pauwels 1998). As Ch. Ettner rightly points out:

Elsewhere in the world, no movement or campaign has yet effected the total elimination of sexist language among its subject people. And yet, success in each instance exists not merely in the resulting reduced usage of sexist language forms, but also in the people's newly increased awareness and heightened sensitivity to sexist language, and especially in the irrevocable seeds of language change and reform that are planted (Ettner 2001: 51).

At the same time, despite the many advances in the elimination of gender-biased language witnessed worldwide over the past twenty years, there is still a number of problems which remain unresolved and therefore have to be addressed. It is true, that despite a considerable progress in the gender purification of language since the 1970s, it will probably take another generation for these changes to be fully incorporated into the language. As emphasised by J. Markowitz, unless the new linguistic regulations are actually reinforced, institutional compliance tends to be minimal (Markowitz 1984).

First, although the problem of gender-discriminatory language is global, each state addresses it in the framework of its own domestic policies, facing the necessity to develop national strategies for the eradication of linguistic forms of gender discrimination. There are no international legal frameworks, which could codify standards of linguistic political correctness conceptually, and provide the possibility to combat linguistic sexism worldwide on the basis of a unified, coordinated and coherent approach.

Second, while in industrially developed societies the problem of sexist language usage has been actively debated and researched for over three decades, and was eventually outlawed, in developing countries it is hardly publicly articulated, or addressed legislatively. Changes towards a gender-fair language are conditioned there, on the efforts of individual women's movement activists and organisations, often in need of a well-developed theoretical foundation or a program of public action. Feminist

linguistic scholarship faces similar problems as Women's Studies in general: the lack of concrete data, the sexist bias of the available data, the necessity of generating new perspectives "from nowhere" – mainly from women's own experience and intuition (Jones 1980).

Third, campaigns against androcentric language are largely confined to conscience-raising techniques: guidelines developed by feminist pressure groups in the form of self-regulating principles, to be adopted by sympathetic individuals, for example, editors and publishing houses (Cirillo 2002). Otherwise speaking, the current achievements of the movement for the promotion of linguistic gender justice are limited to the administrative sphere, as they consist of the dissemination and implementation of recommendations on non-sexist language use, which are only voluntary (Cameron 1985: 89; Pauwels 1987: 24).

Fourth, even in countries that have had some success in feminist linguistic reformation, one real problem is the absence of juridical regulations that could make gender-sensitive language a norm of language functioning, and guarantee its mandatory use in every spheres of life and not only in recruitment policies. This legislative lacuna allows those who do not want to acknowledge the necessity of linguistic gender equality and are opposed to gender-fair language to avoid rules of gender correctness in language, without any serious consequences for themselves.

Fifth, although many researches claim that there is a decrease of sexist usage in the public discourse of "post-reform countries", other commentators doubt the fruitfulness of a gender-sensitive language reformation, suggesting that today linguistic sexism is simply acquiring new forms, becoming more covert, implicit, indirect and therefore more difficult to identify and to counteract (Mills 2003).

Sixth, in those countries which are progressive in issues of equal opportunities policy, especially in Scandinavia, the discussion about feminist language has been marked by stagnation. The linguistic debate generally indicates an adherence to the ideology that the problem of linguistic inequality is solved and that gender-fair language usage has already been achieved, instead of bringing up for discussion the still existing asymmetries and inconsistencies in the language system, usage and perception (Hornscheidt 2001: 362; Gomard, Kunoe 2001: 82).

Seventh, many language users perceive the feminist attempt at language gender reformation as a pointless and unnecessary undertaking. Strong resistance to reformation efforts is a universal tendency, both from the general public and from

scholars, and, on top of that, from decision making bodies and gatekeepers of language, as reflected in the debates in the press “where anti-sexist language is often ridiculed and scorned” (Romaine 1999: 297).

These arguments lead to the conclusion that linguistic forms of gender inequality are a global problem, requiring a universal, coherent and coordinated solution. It can not any longer be treated as an issue of domestic language policies within a group of legislatively advanced societies, but it must be addressed at the level of international legislation and policy-making. It is necessary to address linguistic sexism not only as a breach of ethical norms and rules of political correctness in different languages, but also as a violation of human rights worldwide.

The Gender Dimension of Linguistic Rights

Bearing in mind that societal sexism *per se* is generally acknowledged as a form of discrimination and as a violation of human rights, linguistic sexism should also be regarded as a human rights issue. In the framework of this approach, the development of effective legislative measures for the eradication of gender-unfair language usage requires, first of all, the identification of the civil rights and freedoms that are violated by this form of discrimination. Until recently, the juridical solution for this problem was problematic, due to the absence of a corresponding human rights provision which could be claimed as having been violated, in a case of gender-based linguistic discrimination. A legal mechanism that provides the possibility to address gender-based linguistic discrimination as a human rights issue appeared in 1996, when the concept of Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) was legitimised by the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UDLR)⁴, approved on 6 June 1996, by the World Conference on Linguistic Rights. This World Conference was an initiative of the Committee for Translation and Linguistic Rights (International PEN) and the International Escarre Center for Ethnic Minorities and Nations (CIEMEN), with the moral and technical support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Declaration recommended and promoted the institution of the World Commission on Linguistic Rights (WCLR), a non-official, consultative body, incorporating representatives of non-

⁴ Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, prepared at the World Conference on Linguistic Rights in Barcelona, published by International PEN (Committee for Translation and Linguistic Rights) and CIEMEN (Escarre International Center for Ethnic Minorities), 1996. See also: <http://www.linguistic-declaration.org/index-gb.htm> (accessed 20.03.2004).

governmental and other organizations working in the field of linguistic legislation. The goal of the WCLR was to develop the Declaration into an International Convention of the United Nations.

The problem is that the UDLR treats the concept of linguistic rights in a very narrow way, restricted to the rights of linguistic minorities. Therefore, in their current definition, LHR cannot be used to address the problem of gender-unfair language usage. For this purpose, the content of the notion of LHR has to be reconsidered and expanded, primarily in terms of its social dimension. Such understanding of LHR will ensure a legal basis for the promotion of gender-fair language internationally, and will encourage the gender purification of language in societies that are experiencing a deficit of linguistic democracy.

It should be taken into account that linguistic human rights scholarship is not yet a fully institutionalised research field. The concept of linguistic human rights has a complicated and somewhat contradictory history. This notion was the fruit of a long process of reflection and its official recognition became possible only after a long international debate. Much remains to be done in terms of both theory and practice of LHR protection and promotion. Researchers in this field are still confronted with considerable challenges in clarifying the nature and scope of linguistic human rights.

One of the major problems is that the effort to implement linguistic human rights has been focused on the protection of the languages of ethnic minorities, but it has ignored the problems of many other linguistic groups and communities, whose rights to the use of language are also unprotected, as for example deaf communities, users of sign and man-made languages (e.g. Esperantians), etc. There is a legislative void in what concerns the linguistic rights of interpreters, the women's rights to linguistic identity (e.g. the right to maintain the maiden name) (Pauwels 1987: 131), the right to be protected against discriminatory language on grounds of race, age, sex and physical abilities, etc. There is a large amount of literature about challenging issues on Linguistics, which are theoretically connected with the concept of LHR and can be conceptually embraced by it, but which are still not covered by linguistic legislation⁵.

Another problem is that the terms "language rights", "linguistic rights" and "linguistic human rights" are interchangeably used in scholarly works, all the three

⁵ Such as: "a right to a language identity" (D. Crystal); "communicative rights and responsibilities" (F. G. De Matos); "interactional rights" in communication (D. Zimmerman and C. West); "conversational rights and obligations" (H. Sacks); "linguistic rights of talk, topic control and turn-taking" (A. Goddar); "pronunciation rights" (F. G. De Matos), etc.

being understood as a part of the ethnic minorities rights and as a derivative from them. As a result, different ways of thinking about the rights to language use have blended within the international human rights system. Historically, the notion of linguistic rights and, later, of linguistic human rights merely replaced an earlier concept of language rights, highlighting the right of speakers to resist global pressures and to use, maintain, and develop their local languages (Dor 2003: 97), without changing its semantic implications. The founders of the linguistic human rights theory identify the conceptual correlation between these notions with a formula: “language rights + human rights = linguistic human rights” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 484). At the same time, it is emphasized that the concept of language rights (not strictly identified) is obviously much broader, as far as “there are many language rights which, while important, cannot (and should not) be seen as linguistic human rights” because “if the scope is extended too much, linguistic human rights become meaningless” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 496). In practical terms, in the international debate about linguistic (human) rights⁶, these three terms are used interchangeably, all the three referring to ethnic minority groups, but ignoring other social groups and communities.

The synonymic use of the three above-mentioned terms is an unjustified restriction of the concept of LHR, resulting in the narrowing of its sphere of application and functioning. The semantic connotations of the term “language rights” suggest its interpretation as the “right to a language”, i.e., the “right to have, maintain, use and develop one’s language”, which is naturally associated with linguistic minorities, whose access to their native languages is often denied in the context of globalisation and, therefore, whose right to their languages is endangered. At the same time, the semantic connotations of the term “linguistic rights” allow for a much broader interpretation of this notion. In the first place, it allows us to embrace a significantly wider audience, because there are no reasons why human rights in the area of Linguistics should be a monopoly of linguistic minorities, and not belong to every language user. Logically speaking, linguistic rights should not focus only on ethnicity, nationality or the geographical reference of speakers, but must also encompass their major socially relevant characteristics, primarily race, gender and age. Therefore, they should be guaranteed to each and everyone, but first of all to those who are deprived of the possibility of fully enjoying the linguistic resources of their culture, i.e., to all those

⁶ See: Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, Rannut 1995; Kibbee 1996; Kontra et al. 1999; Tollefson 1991; Phillipson 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Schmid 2001.

linguistically endangered individuals and groups whose identity is defined not only by ethnical and national, but also by social parameters.

Besides, it is not only linguistic minorities who are challenged in exercising their right to language use – this may also be a problem of linguistic communities and individuals, who may formally belong to statistic majorities. For example, according to the last census in Ukraine, the speakers of Russian statistically represent the majority of the population of the country. However, they were officially assigned the status of a linguistic minority. One of such linguistically deprived groups are women, whose possibilities for linguistic self-representation are questioned by the feminist linguistic tradition and viewed as being restricted and threatened by the patriarchal system of social relations. Although women make the majority of the world's population, in a male-centred society their linguistic manifestation is either excluded from the language repertoire, or displaced to the periphery of language practices and, correspondingly, of linguistic consciousness. Women's life experiences, world visions and perceptions are invisible in the androcentric language, which leads to women's self-perception as secondary, insignificant and as having no value of their own.

Gender-Sensitive Linguistic Rights and Women's Linguistic Rights

The recognition of linguistic gender discrimination as a human rights issue leads to the necessity of raising a question about the linguistic rights of women and men, i.e., about gender-sensitive linguistic rights. These may be defined as the rights of both women and men for an equal representation of their linguistic qualities in language, speech and communication. If LHR are treated in a wider sense as the one offered above, including its social dimension, there is an opportunity to regard linguistic sexism as a form of *violation of linguistic human rights through gender parameter*. Given that women and men are regarded as equal subjects under the law, they should be guaranteed equal rights for their representation in language, as in any other sphere of life.

Many linguists agree that, although linguistic sexism affects both women and men, in practice discrimination against women is seen as being more serious, and has most concerned those who oppose gender-biased language (Graddol, Swann 1989: 96; Thomas, Wareign 1999: 66). In other words, it is the women's linguistic rights that are more often unprotected and, correspondingly, women should be acknowledged as the

major sufferers of linguistic gender discrimination. This requires the development of legislative standards for the protection of linguistic rights specifically for women, as a necessary tool for the observance of non-discriminatory language practices. Therefore, a gender-sensitive approach to LHR should promote women's linguistic rights by singling them out as a separate category of linguistic legislation. These rights are critically important for women, as a means of visualizing their presence in society, raising their social status, and promoting their socio-economic position. Women's organizations have to prioritise this problem as one of their central goals in advancing the position of women in society, and to incorporate LHR in the international agenda of women's rights.

Conclusion

Feminist linguistic scholarship convincingly proved that the introduction of legal steps in the change towards a more gender-fair usage – particularly the adoption of laws which forbid gender-biased advertising in the recruitment of personnel and prescribe the gender correctness of the language of official documents; the introduction of a gender-fair naming policy, etc. – may have a considerable impact on language usage and language change. Therefore, it is imperative to develop international mechanisms to address linguistic sexism legislatively. One of the possible approaches to this problem is to acknowledge linguistic forms of gender discrimination as a breach of linguistic human rights, and to introduce the notion of 'gender-sensitive linguistic rights' or of 'linguistic rights of the sexes' in the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. This, in turn, demands a careful theoretical elaboration of the issue, its dissemination through the mass media, its bringing to the public discussion, and lobbying at the international decision-making level. The solution for this task requires the consolidation of the efforts of society as a whole: of researchers, women's rights advocates, the mass media, NGOs, government structures, and of all those who are concerned about a worldwide democratic development.

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