



first publication

in cooperation with the Institute for Strengthening Democracy in BiH / Presentation at the Eighth International Seminar *Democracy and Human Rights in Multiethnic Societies*

1 Tolstokorova, Alissa: Feministički pristup jezičnoj politici u post-sovjetskim zemljama I lingvistička ljudska prava (pp. 111-116)/Feminist Approach to Language Policy in Post-Soviet Countries and Linguistic Human Rights (pp. 223-229)/Feministische Auseinandersetzungen in der Sprachpolitik in den post-sowjetischen Ländern und linguistische Menschenrechte (pp. 343-349). In: Mrak, Branimira/Bogdanić, Mirta/Kajinić, Sanja/Ivančić, Jadranka (Eds.) *Contemporary Women's/Feminist Movement in Post-Communist Countries – 10 Years After*. Zagreb: Zenska Infoteka 2003.

2 Ukraine: Women Facing Job Discrimination. In: Human Rights Watch report on Ukraine (New York, August 27, 2003), at: <http://www.hrw.org/press/2003/08/ukraine082703.htm> [last visit 14.10.2004].

The future of the European Union (EU) is connected with continuous enlargement, logically implying not only its geographical extension, but also the intermixture of different cultural experiences and practices. It will necessitate the development of unified forms of interrelation between member states as well as shared ethical norms and standards of political correctness and common principles of discourse and rhetoric. This in turn calls for the transformation of public mentality and changes of national ideologies to make the process of adaptation easier for both member states and new entrants.

The adherence to the principle of gender mainstreaming as a prerequisite to EU accession for candidate countries requires a high level of gender awareness of the society, without which genuine democracy is impossible. This brings onto the agenda the issue of gender equality legislation, which candidate countries are obliged to develop according to the Amsterdam treaty of 1999. Most member countries adopted such legislation in the 1970/80's. Its important component was a regulation with regard to the language of official job announcements as a necessary means to promote employment equality on the labor market. This issue, identified as linguistic gender equality or language sexism, provoked a heated debate in academic circles, the mass media and among the general public, having inspired anti-sexist language campaigns and reformation of gender legislation on linguistic principles. In fact, we can speak today about a growing social movement for linguistic gender equality, attracting more and more followers as ideas of gender democracy progress worldwide. Anti-sexist language campaigns were launched in many parts of the world and were carried out, although with different degrees of success, in the official languages of most industrial countries, such as the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, West Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, as well as in Transnational organizations such as the United Nations, the UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, etc.¹ The main objective of these campaigns was to counteract linguistic types of gender discrimination as a component of the global problem of gender inequality, specifically in the area of economic relations between the sexes.

In societies with developed systems of gender democracies, the policies for linguistic gender equality have been an issue of concern in both gender theory and in political activism for over three decades. However, in Central Easter European countries (CEE), many of which are now entering the European economic space, ideas of linguistic gender equality are not yet deeply rooted in the public consciousness. This issue and its socio-economic consequences for the sexes are not yet viewed as being a problem. Particularly, in most Central and East-European states, even in those that have their equal treatment legislation, its linguistic aspect is still disregarded. The issue of linguistic gender discrimination is hardly articulated, even within the academic community. The necessity of integrating a linguistic aspect into equality policies is not articulated either by researchers or by the civil society. In the CEE academic space, efforts to combat gender-exclusive language are still undertaken only by individual scholars and are not represented by a theoretically grounded scientific scholarly approach or, even more importantly, by a public action program.

Meanwhile, feminist scholarship convincingly demonstrated a direct correlation between the gender correctness of the official language and the economic possibilities of women in society, particularly concerning employment equality. International advocacy organizations found evidence of the interrelationship between language practices in recruitment policies and women's competitiveness in the labour market in post-communist countries. For example, the Human Rights Watch report on Ukraine (August 27, 2003) contains information on gender discrimination in the language of job advertising and interviews, which results in excluding women from the work force.² In this way, women's access to the labor market and their career opportunities are restricted linguistically. This means that the labor rights of CEE women are less protected with regard to job recruitment, and their employment possibilities are more restricted than those of their western sisters. The result is their lower competitiveness, higher vulnerability and less secure position within the EU joint economic space. In other words, in the course of the enlargement there arose a particular linguistic reason for the growing



³ Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (Barcelona, June 6-9, 1996), at: <http://www.linguistic-declaration.org/index-gb.htm> [last visit 14.10.2004].

⁴ Graddol, David/Swann, Joan: *Gender Voices*. Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell 1998, p. 96; Linda, Thomas/Shan, Wareing: *Language, Society and Power*. London: Routledge 1999, p. 66.

disparities between the economic situation of women in EU member countries and in EU entrant countries causing marginalization and pauperization of the latter.

Thus, despite all the convincing achievements in the elimination of linguistic gender discrimination reported worldwide, there are yet many problems to be solved before a successful approach to this issue can be achieved. First of all, the movement for gender equality in language has not yet acquired universal character and does not attract the unified efforts of the international community: it is disintegrated and fragmented by character. Anti-sexist language campaigns were implemented primarily in countries which are most advanced in terms of gender justice, but the best they achieved rests on the administrative level – developing, disseminating and implementing guidelines for gender-fair language use, which are voluntary in nature since non-adherence does not result in actual penalties. Besides, even in those countries which may boast success in counteracting the linguistic aspect of gender discrimination, a real problem is that so far there have been no universal, legally protected regulations which could guarantee the mandatory use of gender-correct language. This means that those who do not support ideas of gender equality and are opposed to non-sexist language can easily avoid rules of linguistic gender correctness without serious consequences for themselves.

Therefore, two major problems arise within the social movement for linguistic gender equality in the context of the EU enlargement process:

Firstly, it is imperative to challenge the governments and the civil society in CEE countries, both recent entrants, new candidates and those only seeking EU admission, with the necessity of paying special attention to the linguistic aspect of gender legislation as one of the major factors determining the success of their integration into the EU. In this context, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of developing linguistic strategies to guide economic policy for achieving gender equality in the labor market in the EU new members and candidate countries.

Secondly, eradication of the linguistic type of gender discrimination internationally requires comprehensive and global measures. One of various possible approaches to this problem is to regard gender-biased language in a human rights perspective, i.e. as a violation of linguistic rights, proclaimed by the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* in 1996.³ Recognition of the linguistic type of gender discrimination as a human rights issue allows to raise the question about violation of *linguistic rights of the sexes*, which may be defined as the rights of women and men for equal representation of their linguistic qualities in language, speech and communication. As far as the findings of numerous linguistic researches admit the interconnection between linguistic gender discrimination and the violation of socio-economic rights of individuals, it is necessary to address language sexism not only as a violation of ethical and administrative norms in separate countries, but also as a violation of basic human rights worldwide. Therefore, it is imperative to claim the official recognition of linguistic rights of the sexes as a separate aspect of fundamental human rights which must be legally guaranteed to each and every individual.

Many researchers agree that although linguistic sexism affects both women and men, in practice, discrimination against women is seen as more serious, and has most concerned those who oppose gender-biased language.⁴ In other words, it is women's linguistic rights which are more often left unprotected. Because women are the major sufferers of the linguistic form of gender inequality, the gender-sensitive approach to linguistic human rights should specifically concentrate on observance of women's linguistic rights, which must be identified as a separate category of linguistic legislation. These rights are critically important for women as a tool of visualizing their presence in society, raising their social status and correspondingly promoting their socio-economic situation. I assume that the force that has to bring this issue to the forefront of social thinking is women's human rights leadership. Women's organizations have to incorporate this problem in women's rights advocacy agendas and prioritize it as one of their central goals in advancing the position of women in society.

The resolution of the European Conference *Equality and Democracy: Utopia or Challenges?* held in Strasbourg in February 1995 emphasized that

the language that society uses reflects its commitment to equality between the sexes. The recognition that sexist stereotypes and discrimination continue, through the use of gender-biased vocabulary, is an important step towards achieving genuine



5 European Conference *Equality and Democracy: Utopia or Challenges?*, Strasbourg, February 9-11, 1995, p. 17.

6 Barron, Dennis: *Grammar and Gender*. New Haven, London: Yale UP 1986, p. 7.

7 Romaine, Suzanne: *Communicating Gender*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass. Publ. 1999, pp. 239-297.

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.⁵

Thus, the prerequisite for the elimination of the linguistic form of gender inequality in any given society is its awareness of the presence of gender-exclusive patterns in its language resources and the acknowledgement of its negative effect on the progress of gender democracy.

That is why it is imperative to alert the international civil society by bringing to the forefront the idea that linguistic sexism is not only a violation of ethical or administrative norms, but primarily a violation of human rights. Such a formulation of the problem will provide an opportunity to counteract linguistic gender discrimination internationally and to enhance this process primarily in those countries which are not yet open to the idea of linguistic gender democracy, like CEE countries, many of which are now integrating into the EU. In turn, these strategies will contribute to the promotion of the position of women on the labour market in these countries.

It is important to verbalize the idea that the elimination of sexism from any national language demands complex transformations of the state's language policy and planning in the direction of incorporating a gender approach in their development. This objective demands the careful theoretical elaboration of this issue, its dissemination through the mass media, bringing it to public discussions, and its lobbying on the decision-making level.

To define national strategies of linguistic gender reformation, it is imperative to bear in mind the cases of negative international experience as a possibility to avoid confrontations and contradictions which naturally arise in this process. One such universal tendency is a strong resistance to reformation efforts both from the general public and from scholars and, on top of that, from decision-making bodies and gatekeepers of language. As D. Barron points out, the reforms proposed by feminists generated opposition as well as support, and the reformers discovered that just as it is difficult to effect changes in the social structure, it is difficult to control the language which seems to have a life and a will of its own.⁶ Besides, to advocate deliberate changes always means to threaten the political *status quo*, and, therefore, if the reform challenges the prevailing moral order, it is certain to be resisted. Furthermore, some commentators contend that for many language users, feminist attempts at language gender reformation was a pointless and unnecessary undertaking, and the resistance to this process was reflected in the debates in the press which ridiculed and scorned anti-sexist language models.⁷

This is why the introduction of gender-based linguistic reforms requires gradual, step-by-step transformations of the linguistic gender consciousness of the society. Rapid and forced changes may lead not only to the resistance of language speakers to the proposed linguistic corrections, but to their total alienation, and may have quite the opposite consequences to those anticipated by the reformers.

Taking this experience into account, the eradication of sexist practices from language resources of post-Soviet cultures would require the implementation of the following objectives:

- to admit officially the existence of sexist tendencies in the different national languages;
- to bring to the general public the idea that language sexism should be treated as linguistic gender discrimination and, therefore, as the violation of fundamental human rights;
- to initiate nationwide programs on the elimination of linguistic sexism.

I suggest the following steps to put these goals into practice:

1. On the legislative level:
 - a. pursue the integration of a positive policy on the use of non-sexist language into national gender equality legislation with an accent on the necessity of gender-neutral language in employment classifications;
 - b. advocate the development and adoption of regulations which would oblige editors to publish only the materials which follow the principles of linguistic gender democracy;
 - c. introduce sanctions for gender-abusive speech at least in the official sphere of communication;

8 Pauwels, Anne: Feminist Language Planning: Has it Been Worthwhile? In: *Linguistik online* 1/1 (1998), at: <http://viadrina.euv-frankfurt.de/~wjournal/> [last visit 17.01.2004].

d. lobby for gender expertise in the language of state documents and national constitutions.

2. On the institutional level:
 - a. Advocate the adoption of codes of ethics with regard to non-sexist language use in these different types of institutions:
 - governmental bodies,
 - educational establishments,
 - non-governmental organisations,
 - professional associations,
 - private and business companies.
 - b. Initiate gender expertise in lists of occupational classifications, i.e. professional titles, specialties, functional positions, research degrees, awards, etc., in order to register their female forms.
3. On the level of civil society through affirmative action strategies:
 - a. Launch information campaigns on gender-correct use of language through the mass media to attract public attention to the issue of language sexism and to the gender approach to linguistic human rights.
 - b. Develop recommendations for the gender-correct use of our national languages and reflect them in special guidelines, vocabularies, handbooks, and style manuals for those who are professionally involved in the public use of speech such as government employees, journalists, advertisers, teachers, editors, library professionals, communication specialists, cultural workers, etc.
 - c. Organise projects that aim at gender consciousness-raising in the groups of the professionals indicated above and implement such projects in seminars and training workshops on the gender-correct use of language, tailored to their professional requirements.

The expedience and the importance of a linguistic gender reformation in the new independent states are being proved by the positive outcomes of this process in Western societies. Findings of researches of different language cultures demonstrate an increase of public gender awareness and sensitivity as a result of feminist language planning.⁹

At the same time, it is important to be aware that linguistic reformation on gender principles in post-communist countries may run the risk of copying methods of linguistic gender democratisation implemented in developed industrial countries. Such an approach may destroy the whole idea of national gender reformation of language resources in CEE. Every language culture has its own unique, historically structured gender identity, and its correction in the direction of democratisation asks for a refined and authentic methodology. This task requires the consolidation of the efforts of the society as a whole – researchers, women's rights advocates, the mass media, NGOs, government structures, and all those who are concerned about the democratic developments in transitional countries.

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