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## **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**'Changing Gender! Research, Theory and Policy  
for Gendered Realities of the 21st century'**

**June 2-3, 2005  
Panteion University  
Athens, Greece**

### **PAPER PRESENTED BY**

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### **TITLE**

**Gender Justice In Linguistic Perspective: Global Challenges and Perspectives for Development**

One of the most influential social movements of the current epoch is women's movement, which strives for the elimination of gender inequalities and for the emancipation of women, their increasing participation in all the aspects of societal life and greater influence on its current developments. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it affected the major areas of life worldwide, having encouraged a great improvement in the absolute status of women globally: their educational level, life expectancy and position on the labour market as well as income rates have considerably increased, while illiteracy, maternal mortality and total fertility are beginning to fall. However, despite the convincing progress in this area, achieving comprehensive gender equality still remains one of the major problems of the international women's development. 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 paper is devoted to the analysis of one of the many impacts women's movement is having on society, particularly, its influence on language as the most powerful means of structuring public consciousness. The major problem addressed in it is the socio-economic consequences of *androcentric language*, or linguistic sexism, which as I argue, should be counteracted by means of developing a *gender-related approach to linguistic human rights*.

Therefore, the subject-matter of the paper is linguistic sexism as a social phenomenon and a type of gender discrimination by means of language, resulting in women's linguistic exclusion from language resources of their cultures and eventually in

their social marginalization. Some authors identify it as a form of "linguistic gynocid" (die sprachliche Vernichtung der Frau) (Hellinger 1986). In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century verbal harassment and abuse on the ground of sex 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.

The concept of linguistic sexism was verbalized by international women's movement in 1970-s, when it became obvious that massive entrance of women into the labour market made them insecure and unprotected under the socio-economic conditions counted predominantly for men as their position within the economic space was not identified in national legislations, providing employers with the a possibility of both covert and overt gender discrimination. This historically unprecedented 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 working on special measures which could regulate the rights of the sexes in the system of labour relations. It turn, this process gave rise to the international discourse of women' human rights and brought into the agenda the necessity of developing legislation which could protect the rights of the sexes on the labour market. In the period between late 1960s and early 1980-s non-discrimination clauses were introduced in national legislation of industrially developed countries of the world. Their important component was a regulation with regard to the language of official job announcement as a necessary means to promote gender equality on the labour market, because specialized research convincingly proved that gender-biased language of the employment advertising and job interviewing results in the restriction of women's presence in the labour force.

In the academic literature this issue is usually addressed by critical or feminist linguistic tradition and is approached in terms of its philological and ethical consequences. But I find it necessary to emphasize the social and economic effect of gender-exclusive language on women's lives, particularly in CEE countries, where women are especially economically vulnerable and unprotected, partly as a result of their invisibility in the language of law and important state documents. The issue acquires particular current significance in the context of the enlargement process of the European Union, as several CEE states joined the EU in May 2004 and a number of countries from this part of the world are already enlisted as prospective candidates for entry. The point is that according to the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1999 one of the prerequisites to EU accession is the adherence of candidate countries to the principle of gender mainstreaming, which demands adoption of gender-sensitive legislation. In EU member states this legislation is integrated into the national legal framework, and in many of them sex equality laws make a special emphasis on the linguistic aspect of gender justice. But in the Central and Eastern European countries, a number of which are now entering the European joint economic space, the principle of linguistic gender equality and its socio-economic consequences for the sexes is not yet viewed as a significant issue. Even in the CEE states that have already adopted their gender equality laws, the problem of gender-inclusive language is still disregarded. The necessity of incorporating this issue into equality opportunities legislation and 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 by individual scholars, often in need of a well-developed theoretical framework and a program of public actions. Meanwhile, international advocacy organizations, working in CEE, find evidence of direct correlation between linguistic strategies of recruitment policies and women's employment possibilities in this part of Europe. For example, the Human Rights Watch Report on Ukraine (2003) provides evidence on gender discrimination in the language of job advertising and interviews, resulting in women's exclusion from the work force. It contains information that job advertisement in the Ukrainian media specify "man" among the requirements for work in business and government agencies, and employers often deny women employment based on age and marital or family status. In this way women's access to the labour market and

their career opportunities are restricted linguistically. As a result, the labor rights of women in Central 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 the less secure position of women from CEE countries within the EU joint economic space.

The resolution of the European Conference "Equality and Democracy: Utopia or Challenges?" held in Strasbourg (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-based vocabulary, is an important step towards achieving 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.

Therefore, the precondition for the elimination of linguistic gender inequality is first of all the awareness of society of sexist tendencies in its language resources and understanding of its negative effect on progress of gender democracy. In this context it is necessary emphasize the importance of developing linguistic strategies of economic policy for achieving gender equality on the labour market in EU new members and candidate countries. My approach to the issue implies that linguistic sexism should be regarded as a kind of linguistic gender discrimination and gender linguicide. It is an integral part of global problem of gender inequality and fighting it may not be confined solely to administrative reforms implemented by means of repatriate normative acts, official prescriptions and recommendations in language use. Neither should it be a matter of concern of only several separate countries. This socio-linguistic phenomenon has a cross-cultural character and should seek its global solution, which must be reflected in the international legislation.

I see a logical connection between the notions of androcentric language and linguistic human rights because to my mind as soon as linguistic gender discrimination is acknowledged, it requires identification of civil rights and freedoms which are being violated by it. Until recently the legal approach to this issue was problematic in view of the absence of a corresponding human right which could be claimed as violated in case of gender-based linguistic discrimination. It became possible after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in 1996, which legalized the concept of LHR, proving a possibility to address linguistic sexism as a human rights issue. But for this purpose the notion of LHR has to be reconsidered in terms of its conceptual scope, i.e. the social aspect has to be incorporated into its definition. This will provide an opportunity to approach a number of problems, currently unaddressed by the scholarship in this field, but primarily will supply legal grounds to outlaw linguistic sexism internationally and to enhance this process primarily in those countries which are not yet open to ideas of linguistic gender democracy, like most CEE countries.

The problem is that the area of linguistic human rights is not yet a well-developed domain and the history of the concept of linguistic human rights (LHR) is complicated and somewhat contradictory. This notion was a fruit of a long process of reflection and its official recognition became possible only after the lasting discussion of its content and implications internationally. As it is a new development, much still remains to be done in terms of both the theory and practice of LHR protection and promotion. Up till now scholarship in this field is confronted with a considerable challenge in clarifying the nature and scope of linguistic human rights.

One of the major problems is that the effort to create a linguistic human right has focused on protecting the languages of ethnic minorities, but has ignored the problems of many other linguistic groups and communities whose rights to language use are also unprotected, as for example deaf communities, users of sign and man-made languages (e.g. Esperantians). There is a need to raise a question of the linguistic rights of interpreters, women's right to linguistic identity (a right to maintain maiden name)

(Pauwels 1987, 131), and the human right to be protected against discriminatory language on the ground of race, sex and physical abilities etc. Linguistic literature abounds in linguistically challenging issues which are theoretically connected with the concept of LHR and conceptually can be embraced by it, but are not covered by linguistic legislation [1].

Another problem is that the terms "language rights", "linguistic rights" and "linguistic human rights" are used in scholarly works interchangeably, all the three being understood as a part of ethnic minority rights and as derivative from them. As a result, different ways of thinking about rights to language use have blended within the international human rights system. Historically, the notion of linguistic rights and later linguistic human rights merely replaced the earlier existing concept of language rights without changing its semantic implications. The founders of the linguistic human rights theory identify the conceptual correlation between these notions by means of a formula: "language rights + human rights = linguistic human rights" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, 484). At the same time they emphasize that the concept of language rights (not strictly identified in their works) is obviously much broader because "there are many language rights which, while important, cannot (and should not) be seen as linguistic human rights, i.e. if the scope is extended too much, linguistic human rights become meaningless" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, 496).

I would argue that the synonymic use of these three terms is an unjustified restriction of the concept of LHR, which results in the narrowing of its sphere of application and functioning. The semantic connotations of the term "language right" suggest its interpretation as a "right to a language" i.e. "right to have, use and develop one's language", which is primarily associated with linguistic minorities, whose access to their native languages is often denied in the context of globalization, and therefore, whose right to their language – their language right – is endangered. At the same time semantic connotations of the term "linguistic right" allow for a much broader interpretation of this notion. In the first place, its referent suggests a significantly wider audience, as there are no reasons why human rights to a language should be a monopoly of linguistic minorities, and not belong to every language user. Logically, linguistic rights should focus not only on ethnicity, nationality or geographical reference of speakers, but should encompass all their linguistically relevant social characteristics: race, gender, age, social status, profession etc. Therefore they should belong to everyone who is deprived of the possibility to fully enjoy the linguistic resources of her/his culture, i.e. to all the linguistically endangered individuals and groups whose identity is defined not solely by ethnical and national parameters, but by a whole range of social factors.

Besides, it is not only linguistic minorities who are challenged in exercising their right to language use -- this is in many respects a problem of linguistic communities and language individuals who may be formally referred to linguistic majorities. One of such linguistically deprived groups are women, whose possibilities for linguistic self-representation are questioned by the feminist linguistic tradition and viewed as restricted and threatened by the patriarchal system of social relations. In the andocentric language of a male-centred culture the linguistic manifestation of womanhood is obscured, if present at all, women's linguistic paradigm is displaced to the periphery of language functioning and, correspondingly, linguistic consciousness, women's experience, world vision and perceptions are excluded from the linguistic repertoire of the society and are made invisible, which leads to the perception of a woman's personality as secondary, insignificant and having no value of her own. Feminist linguists argue that gender bias in language has a powerful negative impact primarily on women because it fails to reflect their presence in society adequately (Franks 1989, p. 2). Linguistic manifestations of sexism, attacked by feminist linguistic scholarship, enlist over-use of generic "man" and gender-specific pronouns like "he" and its semantic equivalents, gender-exclusive job titles, asymmetrical treatment of the sexes (e.g. describing women by their relationship to

men), linguistic gender stereotyping (e.g. *fair sex vs stern sex*) etc. As highlighted by different scholars the sexist language may have the following effect:

- \* it marginalizes women, makes them invisible and creates the impression of a male-dominated society;
- \* it can be patronizing, for example treating women only as marriage material;
- \* it reinforces stereotypical gender roles, i.e. perpetuates stereotypes about the "correct" way for a man or woman to behave;
- \* it limits women's opportunities and even their aspirations;
- \* it may alienate female interlocutors and cause them to feel that they are not being addressed;
- \* it may be one of the factors which may cause women to view themselves in a negative or stereotyped way. It may thus have an effect on the expectations women and men have of what women can do;
- \* it may confuse listeners, both male and female (for example, as to whether a true generic noun or pronoun is being used or a gender-specific one) (Mills 1995, 95)

Public awareness of the social effect of gender-biased language triggered anti-sexist language campaigns in many countries of the world and led to "gender shift" in attitudes to language policy and planning. In fact today there are all the grounds to speak about a growing social movement for linguistic gender equality, which is attracting more and more followers as ideas of gender democracy progress worldwide. Being initiated in North America and Western Europe it encompassed the USA, Canada (both in English and French), the UK, West and East Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Nordic countries as well as intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, European Parliament, etc. Nowadays this movement is developing eastwards, as ideas of gender democracy progress into the non-western world. Quite recently documentation of gender bias has spread to African and Oriental languages such as Chinese, Japanese, or Thai as well as some East-European language as Polish, Czech and Romanian. Like the women's movements that inspired them, these campaigns have had varying levels of success in achieving their ambitious goals in different countries. However, their results convincingly demonstrated considerable transformations in public gender awareness and sensitivity in the post-reform period. Specifically, there was registered a considerable drop-out of gender-marked forms in media, and primarily in youth editions (Cameron 1985, c. 73; Pauwels 1998).

At the same time, while results are already remarkable, some problems remain and have to be addressed in order to develop an efficient approach to combating gender discrimination through language.

**First**, the current movement for the promotion of linguistic gender justice is disintegrated and fragmentary. Campaigns against andocentric language are implemented mainly in countries that already have an advanced level of gender democracy. And yet, even there, achievements are limited to the administrative sphere, as they consist of the dissemination and implementation of guidelines on non-sexist language use, which are only voluntary; non-adherence does not result in any sanction (Cameron 1985, p.89; Pauwels 1987, p.24).

**Second**, even in countries that have had some success in gender linguistic reformation, one real problem is the absence of judicial regulations that could guarantee mandatory use of gender-sensitive language and introduce it at the same time a norm of language functioning. This means that those who do not want to acknowledge the significance of linguistic gender equality and are opposed to gender-fair language as its manifestation can avoid rules of gender correctness in language without any serious consequences for themselves. In other words, although much change has occurred since the 1970s, it will probably take another generation for the changes to be fully incorporated into the language. Unless the new language regulations actually are reinforced, institutional compliance tends to be minimal (Markowitz 1984).

**Third**, while the issue of linguistic gender discrimination is included in the agenda of Western countries, it is not yet regarded as a significant issue in developing countries where changes are conditioned on the efforts of individual scholars often in need of a well-developed theoretical framework or of a program of public action. This area of research faces same problems as Women's Studies in general: the lack of concrete data, the sexist bias of the data available, the necessity of generating new perspectives "from nowhere" – mainly from women's own experience and intuition (Jones 1980, p. 193).

**Fourth**, although many researches claim decrease of sexist usage in public discourse in the "post-reform countries", other commentators are pessimistic about the issue, suggesting that today linguistic sexism is simply acquiring new forms, becoming more covert, implicit and indirect and therefore more difficult to identify and correspondingly to counteract (Mills 2003).

Taking all these elements into account, I claim that the issue of linguistic sexism should not any longer be treated as a problem of local relevance. Initiatives should go beyond domestic language policies in those countries that already undertook a feminist reformation of language. Gender inequality in language is a global problem that calls for a global and coherent approach. It should not be regulated by isolated national administrative acts, but through international legislation. I would argue that the acknowledgment of linguistic sexism as a type of gender discrimination should lead to the recognition of a right of women and men for equal representation of their gender in language, speech, and communication. It is necessary to address linguistic sexism not only as a violation of ethical norms and rules of political correctness in separate societies, but as a violation of linguistic human rights worldwide.

In other words, 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, to raise a question of *linguistic rights of the sexes or gender-related linguistic rights* which may be defined as the *rights of women and men for equal representation of their gender in language, speech and communication*. Provided LHR are treated in a wider sense as offered above, it will allow for an opportunity to regard language sexism as a form of *violation of linguistic human rights through gender parameter*. Given that men and men are treated as equal subjects of 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 more serious, and has most concerned those who oppose gender-biased language (Graddol, Swann 1989, p. 96; Thomas, Wareign 1999, p. 66). In other words it is women's linguistic rights which are more often unprotected and correspondingly women should be acknowledged as major sufferers of linguistic gender inequality. This creates a necessity to develop standards for the protection of linguistic rights particularly for women and regard them as a necessary tool for monitoring the observance of non-discriminatory language practices. Therefore, gender-based approach to LHR should specifically concentrate on the promotion of women's linguistic rights by singling them out 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 of promoting their socio-economic situation. 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 prioritize this problem as one of their central goals in advancing the position of women in society and incorporate it in women's rights advocacy agendas.

It is imperative today to challenge the global civil society by verbalizing the idea that linguistic sexism is not only an ethical problem, but primarily a violation of human rights. Such a way of wording this issues will allow to counteract linguistic gender discrimination internationally and to enhance this process primarily in those counties which are not yet open to ideas of linguistic gender democracy. This in turn demands careful theoretical elaboration of this issue, its dissemination through the mass media, bringing it

to public discussion and lobbying on the international decision-making level. Solution of 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 all those who are concerned about the democratic developments worldwide.

### Notes:

1. 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 right" (F.G. De Matos) etc.

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