

Interpreting Sexist Discourse in the European Parliament: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The paper employs critical discourse analysis for a pragmatically-oriented exploration of sexist statements by a Polish Eurosceptic Member of the European Parliament, Janusz Korwin-Mikke. Extracts from plenary speeches (delivered by the controversial politician between 2014 and 2018, originally in Polish or English) are compared with their interpretations into German and, respectively, either English or Polish. The qualitative analysis reveals a pronounced trend towards mitigation of sexist discourse by interpreters, particularly strong if the original sexism relied exclusively on the linguistic forms selected by the speaker. Impersonalization seems to be the most typical shift mitigating sexist remarks, other frequent shifts include addition of hedges and omission of evidentiality markers. Mitigation is understood here as a discursive shift in the interpreted text which does not necessarily result from the interpreter's conscious decision. It may often occur as a side-effect of interpreting strategies used to overcome comprehension problems or to keep pace with the swift delivery of the original speaker. It is sometimes also attributable to systemic differences between the source and target languages. Sexism present in the source text appears to frequently contribute to serious problems with interpreting accuracy, diminishing the quality of the original argumentation in the interpretations.

Keywords: simultaneous interpreting; parliamentary discourse; sexism; discourse analysis; mitigation

INTRODUCTION

The European Parliament (EP) is the most consistent EU institution as regards the usage of multiple official languages (see Bartłomiejczyk et al., 2022 for organizational details). During EP plenary debates, each contribution sounds in 24 language versions: the original one (in the speaker's native language or another official EU language of their choice) and in 23 interpretations. The voice of each speaker, therefore, inevitably becomes 'filtered' by 23 other individuals. Over recent years, numerous empirical studies have generated valuable insights into the multilingual functioning of the EP. Some authors (e.g., Beaton-Thome, 2013; Kučič & Majhenič, 2018; Bartłomiejczyk, 2019) have demonstrated that interpreters may introduce substantial shifts modifying the speaker's communicative intent.

This study employs critical discourse analysis for a qualitative, pragmatically-oriented exploration of sexist statements by a Polish Eurosceptic Member of the European Parliament (MEP), Janusz Korwin-Mikke (JKM). It constitutes a part of a more comprehensive endeavor to investigate the limits of translatability during EP plenary debates on the basis of this highly challenging speaker, and a follow-up to case studies devoted to JKM's racist discourse

(Bartłomiejczyk, 2020), Euroscepticism (Bartłomiejczyk, 2022) and humour (Bartłomiejczyk, 2023).

SEXIST DISCOURSE

Sexism may be defined as “any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice, or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex [...]” (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 10). Sexism is primarily directed against women.

Historically, a strong link between right-wing discourse and sexism is observable, as right-wing politicians have tended to highlight the ‘natural difference’ between the sexes and restrict women’s roles to mothers and homemakers (e.g., Seidel, 1988). Sociologists distinguish between hostile and benevolent sexism. The former is blatant and openly resentful toward women, while the latter is subtler and “expressed in a seemingly positive way” (Mastari et al., 2019, p. 2) through chivalry and protection offered to women in return for their compliance with the traditional gender roles. While it has become predominantly socially unacceptable to openly devalue women, modern sexism “focuses on the denial of gender discrimination, antagonism toward women who make demands for political and economic equality, and resentment about policies favouring women in hiring and promotion” (Valentino et al., 2018, p. 218).

SEXISM IN LANGUAGE

The realisation that linguistic expressions may act as vehicles of sexism dates back about 50 years, at least to Bodine (1975). Shortly thereafter, Miller and Swift (1976) published their seminal book advocating for the usage of non-sexist language forms in American English. A comprehensive overview of sexism as manifest in language (with a focus on English) is undertaken by Mills (2008). She proposes a very dynamic view of sexist language: “sexism is an evaluation of an intent to be sexist rather than an inherent quality of the utterance or text alone” (2008, p. 136). Mills distinguishes between overt, more straightforward, and indirect sexism, although this distinction is not always clear-cut (2008, p. 71). Overt sexism does not have to rely on any linguistic devices, however, it tends to be associated with certain forms such as generic *he* and *man*, feminine nouns ending in *-ette* or *-ess*, or gender-specific terms of abuse implying, inter alia, promiscuity (2008, pp. 10-11). As overt sexism has become increasingly stigmatized, at least in public discourse, indirect sexism has emerged. This sexism is “masked by humour and irony” (2008, p. 34), and may rely on certain presuppositions, such as male being the norm and female being a divergence from that norm.

Manifestations of sexism in parliamentary debates are discussed by Ilie (2018) and Stopfner (2018) -- the former analysing British, and the latter -- Canadian, French and Austrian material. Both the authors expose sexist treatment of female members of parliament. Ilie (2018) identifies three recurrent discriminatory strategies: a focus on women’s appearance, patronizing forms of address (such as *dear* or *honey*) and abusive nick-names. Stopfner (2018), in turn, discusses certain argumentative topoi used to deter female MPs from contributing to the debate.

JKM’S SEXISM

JKM has been expressing highly radical sexist beliefs (e.g., opposition to women’s suffrage) since the 1990s (Kuros, 2011). Nevertheless, he also projects benevolent sexism by arguing that the traditional gender roles make women privileged. In his sexist utterances, he often resorts to humour

and irony, characteristic of indirect sexism. He also provokes controversies with sexist linguistic forms, for instance, the outdated feminine surnames with the possessive ending *-owa*.

When elected to the EP in 2014, JKM clearly positioned himself among those Eurosceptics who “choose a strategy of noisy opposition, focusing on speeches in the plenary and seeking to attract a lot of publicity through radical and anti-conformist attitudes and behaviour” (Brack, 2015, p. 13). Although Euroscepticism gained a very strong foothold in the term 2014-2019 (Brack estimates that about 30% of MEPs were Eurosceptic), JKM definitely stood unique with his anachronistic views on other matters, including racial issues (Bartłomiejczyk, 2020) and gender equality.

SEXISM ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

When investigating cross-linguistic transfer of sexist statements, possible systemic and intercultural differences between different language communities need to be considered. The English language system offers relatively little potential for sexism, consequently, the non-sexist language reforms have focused mainly on the avoidance of generic *he* and the introduction of gender-neutral names of professions and positions, such as *firefighter*, *flight attendant* or *chairperson* (see, e.g., Miller & Swift, 1976). Freed argues that in spite of the success of the “lexical level reform”, sexist discursive practices such as “language use that contains anti-female comments and sexist beliefs” or “offensive communicative styles” (2020, p. 5) continue to be prevalent in the American public discourse.

Mills points out that, in comparison with English, “sexism is much more embedded” in languages that possess a grammatical gender (2008, p. 30), which is the case of both Polish and German. Considering their syntax and morphology, it is probably similarly difficult to construct gender-neutral generic statements in both these languages, and feminine names of professions and positions should sound equally ‘awkward’. However, the concern with sexism inherent in the language has been much more pronounced in German-speaking countries than in Poland.

It has led, inter alia, to enhancing the visibility of women in German by avoiding the masculine generic. Instead of *Studenten* ‘students’, for instance, gender-inclusive variants such as *Studenten und Studentinnen*, *Studierende*, *StudentInnen* or *Student*innen* are now predominantly used (see, e.g., Johnson & Suhr, 2003). Moreover, the use of feminine names of professions and positions for female referents (e.g., *Kanzlerin* ‘chancellor’, *Professorin* ‘professor’, *Soldatin* ‘soldier’) is standard nowadays.

By contrast, calls for an analogous reform of the Polish language (e.g., Koniuszaniec & Błaszowska, 2003) have largely been ignored or even opposed. For instance, ‘splitting’ to include both the genders is still relatively rare and stylistically marked, and Polish women tend to prefer masculine job titles (see, e.g., Małocha-Krupa, 2021). This is coupled with relatively low status of women: in 2022, Poland scored 21st among 27 EU countries in EIGE’s Gender Equality Index (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). Consequently, various manifestations of sexism in the Polish language are probably more ubiquitous and less disputed than either in English or German.

INTERPRETING SEXIST STATEMENTS

Besides problems of equivalence such as different markedness levels of generic masculine or gender-inclusive forms, sexism may constitute a challenging ethical issue for interpreters. As is the case with racism (see Hinterplattner, 2017; Bartłomiejczyk, 2020), the interpreter may feel

compelled to resist sexism on moral grounds. Possible strategies of resistance, however, are radically divergent: the interpreter might censor sexism to avoid spreading the unacceptable ideology or they might highlight the speaker's sexist views in order to compromise them even more. Another option is distancing that may become manifest by switching into the third person (Dufrou, 2012) or using ironic intonation (Bartłomiejczyk, 2023). According to this author's best knowledge, research specifically tackling sexism is absent from Interpreting Studies literature.

METHODOLOGY

MATERIAL

The material under analysis comprises the complete EP contributions by JKM, i.e., 191 plenary speeches delivered between 2 July 2014 and 1 March 2018 (when he officially resigned) in three language versions: Polish, English, and German¹. Among these, 135 were originally delivered in Polish, and 56 in English. The original contributions comprise over 21,000 words; with the longest ones exceeding 200 words and the shortest ones consisting of one or two sentences. They were retrieved from the EP website in the form of verbatim reports and MP4 recordings. The former were checked against delivery and corrected whenever needed. Afterwards, the corresponding interpretations were transcribed by the author to facilitate analysis. As the interpreter's sex may be relevant here, each interpretation discussed below is coded as F or M on the basis of the interpreter's voice. In addition, longer pauses are marked as ---, and voiced hesitations -- as @.

METHOD

The study relies on research tools characteristic for critical discourse analysis (CDA) performed from a feminist viewpoint. Feminist CDA aims to “show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which [...] gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated and challenged” (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). Within the specific context of interpreted parliamentary discourse, the producer is the original speaker, while interpreters may sustain, negotiate and/or challenge the sexism present in the source text. When comparing the source and target texts within the paradigm of discourse analysis, the researcher may consider “translation difficulties and interpreters' strategies to overcome them, issues of accuracy, equivalence, semantic and pragmatic meaning, illocutionary point and effect, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences” (Hale & Napier, 2013, pp. 130–131). The pragmatic aspects are of particular interest for this analysis, which identifies possible interpreter-introduced shifts or establishes lack thereof.

The original contributions were searched manually for sexist statements that meet the criteria established by discourse analysts with a feminist perspective (e.g., Mills, 2008 and 2012; Ilie, 2018; Stopfner, 2018). The examples to be analysed here were selected by the author exclusively on the basis of the source texts, with no reference to the interpretations at this stage. The main aim governing the selection process was to showcase a possibly wide variety of rhetorical moves typical for JKM, including humour and irony (see also Bartłomiejczyk, 2023). The subsequent comparative analysis is divided into three parts according to the role sexism plays

¹ Some of the Polish-German interpretations might be the product of relay interpreting, i.e., they might be based on the English interpretation rather than the original Polish text. Identifying them as such, however, is impossible without access to information whether an interpreter with Polish as a passive language was present in the German booth during a given session.

in a particular contribution, starting with entire speeches primarily aimed at voicing JKM's sexist views, through speeches interspersed with sexist remarks functioning as asides, to sexist linguistic forms.

DISCUSSION

SEXISM IN DEBATES ON WOMEN ISSUES: CHALLENGING THE MAINSTREAM DISCOURSE ON GENDER EQUALITY

JKM routinely participates in plenary debates devoted to women issues, and has a long history of contributing to them with provocative statements that vividly contrast with the larger context, i.e., speeches by other MEPs promoting women's rights. Consequently, it might be a challenge for the interpreter to abandon the more usual, mainstream EP discourse on women and immediately switch into this speaker's radically different mode of thinking.

First, a very glaring example of sexism² will be presented: a blue card question to MEP Iratxe García Pérez, who has just complained about a 16% gender wage gap in the EU. With this statement, JKM triggered a massive on-line petition urging the EP to punish him, and caused a tremendous uproar in the media. A suspension for ten days and a fine of over 9000 EUR were ruled, but the punishment was subsequently revoked by the General Court of the European Union.

- (1) Do you know which was the place in the Polish theoretical physics Olympiad, the first place of women, of a girls? I can tell you: eight hundred. Do you know how many women are in the first hundred of chess players? I tell you: no one. And of course of course women must earn less than men because they are weaker, they are smaller, they are less intelligent, and they must earn less. That's all. (01-03-2017)

The sexism in Example 1 does not rely on linguistic features, but purely on the content. The introduction consists of two rhetorical questions followed by short answers, generating a vivid contrast between the 'ignorant' female addressee, referenced as *you*, and the 'knowledgeable' male speaker, referenced with similar directness as *I* (see Okoniewska, 2019, p. 144). Importantly, specific numbers are provided, probably to create an appearance of a 'scientific' approach (Okoniewska perceives this as a "number game", in accordance with the classification of discourse strategies by van Dijk, 2006). The most offending fragment centres on the main claim made at the beginning and reiterated towards the end (*women/they must earn less*) and three simple arguments having a parallel syntactic structure (*they are* + a comparative adjective).

(1a) M: *Czy wie pani, jakie było miejsce w w @ teoretycznej @ olimpiadzie pierwsze miejsce zajmowały kobiety w olimpiadzie z fizyki teoretycznej? Osiemset. Ile kobiet są w pierwszej setce graczy szachowych? Żadnej. I oczywiście kobiety muszą zarabiać mniej niż mężczyźni, bo są słabsze, mniejsze, mniej inteligentne. No, muszą zarabiać mniej. No, takie jest życie.*

Gloss: Do you know which was the place in the theoretical Olympiad the first place taken by women in the theoretical physics Olympiad? Eight hundred. How many women are in the first one hundred of chess players? None. And obviously women must earn less than men because they are weaker, smaller, less intelligent. Well, they have to earn less. Well, this is life.

² Example 1 is also discussed in Bartłomiejczyk (2019) and in Okoniewska (2019), both taking into consideration only the original and the Polish interpretation. In addition, Okoniewska (2019) explores the wider context (preceding and following interventions in the same debate).

(1b) F: Ja. Wissen Sie, welches @ der Ort ist wo am ersten Mal die Frauen an der Olimpiade teilgenommen haben? Kann ich Ihnen sagen. @ es waren acht hundert. Die @ Schachspieler, wieviel Frauen gibt es da an erster Stelle? Nein? Und die Mä- Frauen müssen weniger verdienen, weil sie schwächer sind, weil sie kleiner sind, weil sie weniger intelligent sind, und deswegen müssen sie auch weniger verdienen, so ganz klar.

Gloss: Yes. Do you know which is the place where for the first time women took part in the Olympiad? I can tell you, these were eight hundred. The chess players, how many women are there in the first position? No? And the m- women must e- earn less because they are weaker, because they are smaller, because they are less intelligent, and that's why they also must earn less, so, perfectly clear.

The introduction proves difficult for both the interpreters. The Polish interpreter makes an extensive correction in the first sentence and produces two grammatical errors, which, however, should not hinder comprehension. Finally, he manages to transfer the rhetorical questions and the answers accurately, including numbers. However, as pointed out by Okoniewska (2019, p. 144), he suppresses the first-person agency prominently present in the original, and also removes the direct forms of address from the answers. The German interpreter seems to experience more fundamental problems in understanding the line of argument as it develops, which results in incoherent content interspersed with numerous hesitation markers and false starts. The first sentence is completely incomprehensible and seems to refer to female athletes. The second rhetorical question is approximated (without the number) but not followed by any answer. Consequently, the appearance of rationality is preserved in the Polish but not in the German version.

As regards the offensive fragment itself, the interpretations appear relatively fluent and closely follow the original. The interpreters render all three criticisms of women accurately and in the same order. The Polish interpreter uses ellipsis to compress the text, which does not seem to significantly impact its pragmatic value. Both the interpreters transfer the original repetition of the assertion that women must earn less, preserving the speaker's emphasis.

Interestingly, the final words *That's all*, serving as a conversational marker but potentially also highlighting the speaker's categorical tone, undergo a major shift in the Polish interpretation. They are rendered as *No, takie jest życie* 'well, this is life.' The phrase is typically used to comment on a status quo that is considered undesirable but, at the same time, impossible to change. The interpreter's personal view regarding the pay gap may be shining through here. This mitigating move constitutes an exception to the Polish interpreter's general strategy of nearly literal translation. By contrast, in the German interpretation, the ending *so, ganz klar* 'so, perfectly clear' emphasises the message stronger than *that's all*, but it might also be regarded as a pragmatic counterpart of the marker *of course* that was omitted earlier.

Overall, the German interpretation preserves the discriminatory gist of the original. The perception of the chaotic introduction might depend on whether the lack of logic is attributed to the speaker or to the interpreter. If the former is the case, the speaker's sexism might perhaps appear even more radical as his statement is deprived of a seemingly rational justification present both in the original and in the Polish version. If the latter is the case, the audience might lose the trust in the interpreter and, consequently, be reluctant to believe that the speaker proceeds to make such outrageous claims. The Polish interpretation, in turn, blunts the edge of JKM's chauvinism to some extent through the final mitigating shift.

A more elaborate outline of JKM's views as regards the gender pay gap was provided during a debate devoted to the socio-economic situation of women in Europe one year earlier:

- (2) *Naukowcy zbadali @ koszykarzy amerykańskich i okazało się, że wysocy mężczyźni zarabiają więcej niż niscy, co dowodzi, że mężczyźni wysocy lepiej nadają się do koszykówki. @ Tak samo, jeżeli kobiety mniej zarabiają niż mężczyźni na tych stanowiskach, to znaczy, że mniej nadają się do tego stanowiska niż mężczyźni. @ Kiedyś w Europie rządziły kobiety, bo ten rządzi światem, kto wychowuje dzieci. Kobietom odebrano to prawo, odebrano im dzieci, dzieci posłano do żłobków, przedszkoli, gdzie wychowuje ich państwo, natomiast kobiety skierowano do gorzej płatnych prac, do których się znacznie mniej nadają i dlatego zarabiają oczywiście znacznie mniej. Proszę zauważyć, że na przykład na Extreme Sports, czy na przykład w szachach czy w brydżu, kobiety stanowią tylko jeden procent, jeden procent startujących tam zawodników. I jeżeli w jakiejś dziedzinie kobiety stanowią więcej niż jeden procent, to znaczy, że jest to jakaś sztuczna sztuczny nacisk Unii Europejskiej, który powoduje oczywiście obniżenie poziomu obniżenie poziomu danej dyscypliny. (08-03-2016)*

Gloss: Scientists examined American basketball players and it turned out that tall men earned more than short ones, which proves that tall men are better suited to basketball. Likewise, if women earn less than men in these positions, it means that they are less suited for this position than men. Once women ruled in Europe, because the one who rules the world is the one who raises children. Women were deprived of this right, they were deprived of children, children were sent to nurseries, kindergartens, where the state raises them, and women were sent to lower income jobs to which they are much less suited, and that's why they obviously earn much less. Please note that for instance in Extreme Sports Channel, or for instance in chess or bridge, women make up only one percent, one percent of players who compete there. And if in some realm women make up more than one percent, this means that this is an artificial artificial pressure of the European Union, which results in an obvious decline of the level decline of the level in a given discipline.

(2a) F: *Scientists --- looked at American basketball players and it turned out that tall ones earned more money than short ones, which means that tall sportsmen are better fit to play basketball. So, equally, if women earn less at a given post than a man, this would mean that they are less likely to be good at this position than men. @ In Europe, at some t- some time ago women ruled Europe, because that person rules the world who is taking care of the children. This right has been taken away from women, children were sent to kindergarten and school schools, and @ women were sent to do work for which they are much less fit. And this is why they earn less. We need to look at other areas, such as extreme sports or bridge or chess. Women consist constitute only one per cent of people playing those games, and this would mean that perhaps there is an artificial pressure on part on the part of the European Union which works towards downgrading the level at which those games are played.*

(2b) F: *Wissenschaftler --- haben einiges untersucht in Amerika und es hat sich gezeigt, dass größere Männer mehr Geld verdienen als kleine. @ Größere Männer sind ja auch besser im Basketball. Aber die großen Männer verdienen, wie gesagt, mehr als die kleinen --- auf den gleichen Posten. Wenn in Europa die Frauen an der Macht wären oder in der Welt, dann sind sie Kinder großziehen. Den Frauen wird das Recht genommen. Es wird ihnen das Recht genommen Kinder großzuziehen, denn die werden vom Staat erzogen in Krippen und so weiter, und die Frauen müssen arbeiten gehen. Was sie aber besser, @ Pardon, weniger können und daher verdienen sie auch weniger. Wir haben ja auch Extremsportarten, und die Frauen machen aber nur ein Prozent aus in diesen Bereichen. Wenn die Frauen irgendwo mehr als ein Prozent ausmachen, dann @ wird da natürlich dann auch eine Verringerung des Niveaus in der Disziplin erreicht.*

Gloss: Scientists examined something in America and it turned out that taller men earned more money than short ones. Taller men are also better in basketball. But the tall men earn, as I said, more than the short ones – in the same positions. When in Europe women would be in power or in the world, then they are raise children. The women are deprived of this right. They are deprived of the right to raise children, because they are raised by the state in nurseries and so on, and the women must go to work. Which they can do better, sorry, worse and that's why they earn less. We also have extreme sports, and the women make up only one percent in these realms. When the women make up more than one percent anywhere, then there will naturally also result a lowering of the level in the discipline.

In Example 2, the supposed biological difference between male and female employees justifying the existing pay gap is compared to varying heights among male basketball players. The topic of basketball initially strikes one as surprising in the context of the debate. JKM proceeds to develop the argument that the traditional gender roles were in fact highly beneficial for women. The most characteristic feature of this passage is a long series of impersonal verbs: *odebrano* 'deprived' (twice), *posłano* 'sent', *skierowano* 'sent', manifesting a total lack of agency on the part of working women. However, it remains unclear who the presupposed agent is: perhaps men or the state as such, intending to take control over children? The professional potential of women is devalued repeatedly, with additional intensifying particles and a marker of evidentiality: *się znacznie mniej nadają* 'they are considerably less suitable', *zarabiają oczywiście znacznie mniej* 'they obviously earn much less'. At this point, JKM again refers to the domain of sports, enumerating some disciplines in which women's participation is very limited, without explaining why women's general lack of interest or even talent for particular sports should have a bearing on their professional activities. The unexpected conclusion is that a higher participation of women is always enforced by the EU and causes a deterioration of the discipline, but it remains unclear whether this applies only to sports, or more generally.

The English version seems to follow the original relatively closely, but it still contains subtle shifts. One of them is the conditional form *this would mean* that twice replaces *to znaczy* 'this means', weakening the original epistemic stance. The broad generalization that women are less suitable for certain positions is paraphrased with *they are less likely to be good*, which is a milder argument implying that some women match men's competence level. When the speaker reuses the same expression, boosted with an intensifier, the interpreter opts for a closer version: *they are much less fit*. The interpreter also deletes two markers of evidentiality (*oczywiście* 'obviously', *oczywiste* 'obvious'), and adds the hedge *perhaps*, which presents the speaker as less arrogant. These shifts might alternatively be construed as an intercultural pragmatic adjustment in line with the tendency to use relatively strong and blunt expressions of opinion in Polish as compared with English, pointed out by Wierzbicka (2003). All the above shifts conspire to slightly mitigate the sexism present in the original. Moreover, the logic of the last sentence is problematic due to merging two original sentences while omitting a part of the second one. The original ambiguity as to whether the claim only refers to sports disappears, which also subtly reduces JKM's sexism.

The German interpretation features more radical shifts. Initially, the interpreter apparently misses the discipline, and changes JKM's very specific claim about the pay gap in basketball to a more general and less credible one. The advantage of taller players is mentioned, but the relation to their remunerations remains unclear. The analogy between shorter versus taller basketball players on the one hand and female versus male employees on the other hand is lost, therefore, the beginning is completely incoherent and the listener will not be able to appreciate its relevance for the topic. By analogy to the English interpreter, the German one also inserts a conditional into the sentence that originally was a factual statement; moreover, the incorrect syntax of the remainder of this sentence seriously hinders comprehension. From this point onwards, the shifts are less radical and the interpretation becomes comprehensible. Omission affects the intensifier and the marker of evidentiality, as well as two out of three disciplines provided as examples of women's incompetence (bridge and chess) -- these shifts slightly mitigate JKM's sexism. There is a highly conspicuous self-correction (signalled with an apology) that might reveal the interpreter's personal beliefs, incompatible with the ones voiced by the speaker. The final argument is coherent although modified by omitting the supposed reason why women manage to reach a higher representation.

Both the interpretations display several subtle shifts reducing the original sexism. However, the audience may be more likely to notice the problems with logic, occurring at a number of points and considerably more serious in the German interpretation. The speaker's argumentation is complex and evidently difficult to follow for the interpreters. The impression is that the English interpreter (whose accent strongly suggests that she is a native speaker of Polish) understands the message correctly, but finally loses track of JKM's argumentation, possibly due to fast delivery. The German interpreter, by contrast, seems to experience very serious comprehension problems and produces a version that will not inspire any trust in the audience. She appears to grasp the sexist appeal of the contribution only mid-way. This issue of failing logic resembles the problems demonstrated in Example 1b.

Example 3 is JKM's contribution to a debate on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age. Unlike the previous two examples, it relies primarily on humour -- but it is a very specific type of humour.

- (3) *Nie potrafię sobie wyobrazić, jak można serio mówić o dyskryminacji kobiet w dziedzinie cyfrowej. No chyba tylko tak, że w tenisie mężczyźni grają pięć setów, kobiety tylko trzy, kulę pchają mężczyźni siedmiokilową, a kobiety pięciokilową. Więc w takim razie jedynym rozwiązaniem jakie widzę, to wprowadzić zasadę, że dla kobiet wprowadza się @ liczenie tylko przy siedmiu cyfrach, a nie dziesięciu. To bardzo by kobietom ułatwiło @ wejście w technologię cyfrową. (2016-04-27)*

Gloss: I cannot imagine how it is possible to talk seriously about discrimination of women in the digital sphere. Well, maybe only in this way that in tennis men play five sets, women only three, men push a seven-kilogram shot, and women -- a five-kilogram one. Consequently, in this case the only solution I see is to introduce the rule that for women counting with only seven digits and not ten is introduced. This would greatly facilitate for women entering the digital technology.

(3a) M: *I can't imagine how you can seriously talk about discriminating women in the digital sphere. Maybe only @ then in tennis @ wo- women @ play only three sets @ etcetera, etcetera. That @ I think the only solution is that @ women should only count to seven and not to ten. This would @ make it more easy for women.*

(3b) F: *Man kann sich das ja kaum vorstellen, wenn man da spricht von Diskriminierung von Frauen im digitalen Bereich. Also, beim Tennis zum Beispiel, da spielen die Männer ja mehr Sätze als die Frauen, fünf und drei. Auch beim Laufen, laufen die Frauen auch nicht so viel Kilometer wie die Männer. Das heißt ja im Grunde, dass @ dass da Unterschiede gibt. Und daher müsste man vielleicht den Frauen doch bestimmte Möglichkeiten öffnen.*

Gloss: It is hardly imaginable when one speaks about discrimination of women in the digital sphere. So, in tennis, for instance, the men play more sets than the women, five and three. Also in running, women also do not run as many kilometres as the men. This means, in general, that there are differences. And that's why one would perhaps have to open certain possibilities to the women.

JKM's joke is based on two different meanings of the adjective *cyfrowy*: 'related to digits' and 'related to IT'. While the debate clearly refers to the latter meaning, JKM refers to the former. His favourite domain of sports is used to create an analogy with mathematics here, and JKM implies that women's mental capacity is inferior. He proceeds to propose a solution that would be beneficial for women, and its absurdity contributes to the overall humorous effect. JKM's strategy here is to deny the existence of any discrimination by ridiculing the topic of the debate as such. Choosing to foreground another meaning of *cyfrowy*, he flouts the maxim of relevance.

Linguistic jokes are notoriously difficult to transfer in translation, however, this is not the case here. The same extension of meaning took place in all three languages under consideration: *digital* in either English or German also has the two meanings exploited for the joke.

The English interpreter (again, presumably a native speaker of Polish) seems to comprehend the original joke, however, his omission of three out of four numbers referring to sports and the broad generalization *etcetera, etcetera* will probably hinder the activation of the other meaning of *digital* by the audience. The reference to sports appears out of context. However, the ironic suggestion that the rules of mathematics should be simplified for women is transferred accurately. Consequently, the interpreter probably did not intend to reduce JKM's sexism, but the joke is certainly less clear in the English version. With the insertion of the pronoun *you* in the first sentence, the interpreter targets at the other participants in the debate JKM's originally impersonal accusation that the topic under discussion is nonsense. With numerous hesitation markers, the interpretation does not do justice to the speaker's self-confidence.

The German interpreter, in turn, appears to experience fundamental problems in understanding the original message, which may result from her mistaken expectation that the maxim of relevance would be respected. The first sentence is transferred in a non-committal way, so that the listener is unable to determine what is unimaginable: the discrimination as such or speaking about it. Substituting shot put with running (presumably long-distance: the interpreter mentions kilometres) as an example of a discipline where the rules for men and for women vary undermines JKM's original argumentation (as the distances are in fact different only for hurdling nowadays). The interpreter finishes with two very general propositions possibly resulting from the strategy of parallel reformulation, i.e., ad-libbing on the topic of the discussion to replace a fragment that has been missed (Gile, 2009, p. 211). While the vague argument to the effect that gender differences do exist is in line with JKM's discourse (highlighting the 'natural difference'), the final general suggestion for the benefit of women completely loses its ironic character. The interpreted version seems to genuinely argue in favour of empowering women, in line with the mainstream EP discourse on gender equality (which does not preclude some forms of 'positive discrimination'). In essence, the German version is neither sexist nor humorous; while very vague, it seems to remain within the boundaries of the mainstream discourse. Moreover, it sounds highly emotional and therefore 'unmanly' with numerous added emphatic particles (*ja, da, doch*), which contradicts JKM's appearance of rationality and aloofness.

SEXISM OUT OF CONTEXT: SEXIST REMARKS WITH A STRONG SURPRISE EFFECT

Examples 1-3 account for entire contributions focusing on women and delivered during debates on women issues. However, JKM also routinely incorporates his sexist views into debates and speeches devoted to other topics, which may necessitate an even more rapid switch in the interpreter's line of thinking. Such sexist asides occur frequently across the corpus; for reasons of space, only three examples will be discussed here.

- (4) *Piszecie, że ma być przestrzegane prawa człowieka, że chcecie zbadać końcowych odbiorców waszej broni. Rozumiem, że będziecie sprawdzali, czy połowę waszej broni używają kobiety, a połowę mężczyźni mężczyźni, zgodnie z zasadą równouprawnienia.* (2015-12-16)

Gloss: You write that human rights is to be respected, that you want to investigate the end users of your weapons. I understand that you will be checking if a half of your weapons is used by women and a half by mans men, in accordance with the rule of gender equality.

(4a) M: *You've been talking about the human rights, control of the end user, and obviously you want the checks to ensure that maybe there's a fifty-fifty gender split in all of this.*

(4b) M: *Sie sprechen hier von @ Menschenrechten, @ von der Kontrolle über Endabnehmer, @ und natürlich @ wird dann auch gecheckt, ob auch die Geschlechtsverteilung dann f- fünfzig-fünfzig von Frauen und Männern ist bei den Empfängern.*

Gloss: You are talking here about human rights, about checks of the end user, and, naturally, it will then be checked if the gender split is fifty-fifty of men and women, among the receivers.

In Example 4, gender equality is ridiculed in a statement whose main topic is arms exports from the EU. The report criticized by JKM has been presented by the female MEP Bodil Valero, consequently, the sudden attack against the concept of gender quota might imply that the topic under discussion exceeds the competence of women and should rather be handled by men, in a less ‘wimpy’ style. The original fragment is targeted very clearly at the authors of the report, addressing them directly with a series of verbs: *piszecie* ‘you write’, *chcecie zbadać* ‘you want to investigate’, *będziecie sprawdzali* ‘you will be checking’ (very direct, the least polite among three possible variants of Polish second person plural forms). Two of the verb phrases refer to activities that are obviously unfeasible for the addressees. Additionally, the possessive pronoun *waszej* ‘your’ modifies the noun *broni* ‘weapons’ twice, although the weapons clearly do not belong to the addressees. Once again, JKM makes extensive use of irony.

Both the interpreters reduce the prevalence of personal forms, and, therefore, the speaker’s directness. All the possessive pronouns are deleted. In the English interpretation, *you* appears twice, but, in contrast to JKM, the interpreter does not imply that the authors are planning to personally perform tasks that are clearly beyond their capabilities. The trend towards impersonalization is even stronger in the German interpretation, where the interpreter replaces one personal verb form with a noun phrase that obscures the agent, and another one -- with a passive construction, having a similar effect. While in this case English allows no choice between more and less polite forms of address, the German interpreter has to select either *ihr spricht* or *Sie sprechen*, and opts for the more polite solution, appropriate for a parliamentary speech. All of the abovementioned shifts contribute towards reducing the aggressiveness of JKM’s attack.

There are some similarities between the two interpretations. The irony signalled in Polish with *rozumiam, że* ‘I understand that’ is transferred by means of impersonal evidentiality markers *obviously* and *natürlich* ‘naturally’. The reference to quota is made with appropriate vocabulary in the target languages, and the final mention of gender equality is omitted by each interpreter. The English version, however, contains additional shifts that weaken the message: adding the hedge *maybe* (possibly a ‘filler’ allowing the interpreter extra time for planning production) and employing a broad generalization *in all of this* are shifts that obscure the absurd suggestion that 50% of exported weapons should end up in the hands of women.

Overall, the sudden reference to women issues is retained in both the interpretations, and so is most of the original irony. However, the speaker is presented as less impolite towards the addressees than he really is.

(5) *Nie ma najmniejszego powodu, żebyśmy uważali, że człowiek ma prawo socjalne do energii, bo jeżeli dalej pójdziemy tą drogą, to niedługo dojdziemy do wniosku, że mężczyzna powinien mieć zagwarantowany socjalny dostęp do kobiet, zwłaszcza do ładnych [...]. (2016-05-25)*

Gloss: There is not even the smallest reason why we should believe that a human has a social right to energy, because, if we continue down this path, we will soon reach the conclusion that a man should be guaranteed social access to women, especially to pretty ones.

(5a) M: *We have to say that people have social rights to energy. But this is wrong, because if we continue down this path, then perhaps we shall @ end up with the @ people saying that men should have @ social rights to access women, especially the prettier ones.*

(5b) F: *Jetzt haben wir also Sozialrechte in der EU als im Bezug auf Energie. Wenn wir den Weg beschreiten, dann kommen wir bald auch zu dem Schluss, dass wir @ sozialen Zugang zu Frauen haben sollten [...].*

Gloss: So now we have social rights in the EU as in relation to energy. If we continue down this path, we will soon also reach the conclusion that we should have social access to women.

Example 5 originates from a debate on energy poverty. JKM is strongly opposed to any social benefits, and his argumentation aims to ridicule the idea that access to energy should be a social right. However, the employed analogy is sexist in several aspects, even though the ‘reform’ is not presented as a desirable step. Firstly, it accommodates exclusively for heterosexual men’s needs. Secondly, women are clearly presented not as humans but as a commodity. Thirdly, the relative value of women is measured on the basis of their appearance.

The English interpreter seems to have gone down a wrong path in his first sentence, but he corrects this afterwards by means of an added negation. The sexist joke is transferred fairly accurately, with the addition of the hedge *perhaps* that marginally weakens the conclusion. All three aspects of sexism as enumerated above are undoubtedly present.

The German interpretation, in turn, features significant shifts. The first sentence is non-committal, it does not convey the speaker’s negative attitude to social rights. The reference to men as beneficiaries of the proposed solution is replaced with the solidarity-building pronoun *wir* ‘we’, whose referent is unclear in the context. The idea of social access to women, however, is transferred closely, and it may lead the listener to construe the preceding pronoun as referring exclusively to men. The reference to women’s appearance is omitted. Overall, the sexist appeal of this passage is reduced.

(6) *W dodatku wasze żądania są sprzeczne z uczuciami większości Polaków. Żądacie praw dla homoseksualistów – poparcie dla PiS-u rośnie. Żądacie jakichś głupich praw kobiet, gadacie o jakichś gender – poparcie dla PiS-u rośnie. (2017-11-15)*

Gloss: In addition, your demands are incompatible with the feelings of the majority of Poles. You demand rights for homosexuals -- support for PiS rises. You demand some stupid women’s rights, you jaw about some gender -- support for PiS rises.

(6a) M: *Take gay rights, for instance @ -- popularity of PiS is rising. What you are doing on gender equality means -- PiS’s popularity rises.*

(6b) F: *Die Polen müssen entscheiden, wer sie regiert. Es geht dort nicht darum, dass dass Homosexuelle auf einmal an die Macht kommen und diese komischen Frauenrechte – das ist auch nichts was @ passt.*

Gloss: The Poles must decide who governs them. It is not about about homosexuals suddenly coming to power, and these funny women’s rights -- this is also not something that sits well.

Example 6 originates from a debate on the rule of law and democracy in Poland. JKM is an opponent of the government of the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS). At the same time, he is convinced that EU’s interference is counterproductive, as Poles unite in their rejection of certain unreasonable demands, which serves the interests of PiS. Women’s rights are mentioned as one of those unreasonable demands, which is reinforced with a strongly evaluative adjective *głupich* ‘stupid’, and an indefinite pronoun that signals the speaker’s repulsion (employed as a distancing device). The loanword *gender* functions as a typical scapegoat in the discourse of the Polish right wing and must be assessed as negatively loaded in this context, moreover, it is accompanied with a derisive verb *gadacie* ‘you jaw’, which implies triviality of the subject, and another indefinite

pronoun. The second person plural forms are of the same type and make a similar impression of a politeness deficit as those employed in Example 4.

The first sentence that, in connection with the following ones, implies that the majority of Poles are opposed to gay rights and women's rights, is omitted by the English interpreter. The lacking introduction significantly hinders the understanding of this fragment. The agency of the addressees is considerably reduced, as the prevalence of personal forms is much lower (one instead of four). The negatively loaded lexemes disappear, and the addressees' role in inadvertently promoting PiS remains unclear.

The shifts in the German version are very substantial, so that the initial part is hardly identifiable as an equivalent of the Polish text. It seems that both the first and the second sentence of the original were reconstructed, unsuccessfully, on the basis of one word in each case: *Polaków* 'Poles' and *homoseksualistów* 'homosexuals'. The addressees' agency is suppressed, causing this extract to lose its accusatory tone. However, as regards sexism, the adjective *komischen* 'funny' ensures an accurate reflection of the speaker's sexist attitude. The fact that women's rights are not perceived favourably by the speaker is conveyed, but the vague ending fails to convey that he ascribes similar views to the majority of his compatriots.

Example 6 demonstrates that transferring sexism does not necessarily depend on an accurate rendition of other content in the immediate context. The German interpretation retains considerably more of the original sexism than the English one, although its overall accuracy is very low.

SEXIST LANGUAGE

Sexist linguistic forms are limited to speeches delivered in Polish. If the speaker did not voice his clearly sexist views elsewhere, they might alternatively be perceived as an element of JKM's general tendency to use archaic language, and therefore be justified. As their presentation does not require a wide context, they are placed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Sexist linguistic forms

Example no.	Polish	English (a)	German (b)	Date
7	[...] <i>pewna blondynka z Berlina obiecała im wysokie zasiłki</i> . 'a blonde from Berlin promised them high benefits'	M: [...] <i>this blond women from Berlin @ promised them high allow- benefits.</i>	M: [...] <i>eine Dame in Berlin hat ihnen eine gute Sozialleistung versprochen.</i> 'a lady from Berlin promised them good social care'	2016-02-02
8	<i>Pani Mogherini! Kilka słów prawdy, męskich słów prawdy</i> . 'Ms Mogherini! A few words of truth, manly words of truth'	M: <i>Madam Mogherini! A few words of truth. @ Very stern words.</i>	F: <i>Danke schön. Einige Worte der Wahrheit möchte ich sprechen.</i> 'Thank you very much. I would like to speak a few words of truth'	2016-03-08
9	[...] <i>ja się pytam panny Le Pen</i> [...] 'I ask Miss Le Pen'	F: [...] <i>my question to Madame Le Pen</i> [...]	F: [...] <i>das möchte ich Sie fragen, Frau Le Pen</i> [...] 'I would like to ask you this, Ms Le Pen'	2016-05-10
10	[...] <i>ten procent jest znacznie większy niż procent chcących głosować na panią Clintonową w Ameryce</i> [...] 'this percentage is much	F: - [omitted subordinate clause]	F: - [omitted subordinate clause]	2016-10-03

	higher than the percentage of those who want to vote for Mrs Bill Clinton in America’			
11	[...] <i>nie zdołałem się od pani komisarki Marii Gabriel dowiedzieć</i> [...] ‘I did not manage to find out from Madam Commissioner Maria Gabriel’	F: [...] <i>I did not manage to find out from Commissioner Mary Gabriel</i> [...]	F: [...] <i>es mir nicht gelungen ist, dann von Frau Maria Gabriel, der neuen Kommissarin, zu erfahren</i> [...] ‘I did not manage then to find out from Ms Maria Gabriel, the new Commissioner’	2017-07-04

Example 7 is a clear reference to Chancellor Angela Merkel, called *blondynka* ‘blonde’, which draws attention to her appearance, but also, more importantly, evokes the stereotype of a dumb blonde that remains salient in the Polish culture due to numerous jokes. The English interpreter stays close to the original, but his lexical choice is less loaded, and the stereotype itself does not seem to be so widespread in the English-speaking world nowadays. The German interpreter, in turn, selects the reverential form *eine Dame* ‘a lady’. Consequently, the sexist appeal is moderately reduced in English, while it completely disappears in German. Interestingly, Example 7a is the only interpretation in Table 1 that transfers any of the original sexism.

In Example 8, JKM offers to tell Commissioner Mogherini some words of truth, which he describes as *męskich* ‘manly’, meaning serious, perhaps even blunt. The sexist character of this adjective is highlighted in this context, as the addressee is female and supposedly behaves in a ‘feminine’ manner (in another contribution, JKM ridicules Mogherini because she cried publicly after a terrorist attack -- see Bartłomiejczyk, 2023). The English interpreter transfers the primary meaning of the adjective, but not its sexist undertone. The German interpreter, in turn, deletes the adjective and, moreover, impersonalizes the statement by depriving it of a specific addressee.

Example 9 features the outdated honorific that used to be employed in Polish for unmarried women but became obsolete after the Second World War. Although close equivalents exist both in English and in German (*Miss* and *Fräulein*), both the interpreters select more modern forms, and the English interpreter additionally boosts politeness using the reverential *Madame*. Interestingly, when speaking in English, JKM does not call MEP Marine Le Pen *Miss*, he uses *Mrs* instead.

The sexist element in Example 10 is the outdated possessive form *Clintonowa* referring to Hillary Clinton. It is embedded in a subordinate clause, and both the interpreters omit the entire clause, presumably due to high speed of delivery.

Finally, Example 11 contains the feminine name of the official position *komisarka* ‘Commissioner’, which sounds marked as feminine nouns of this type are uncommon in Polish, at least for high and prestigious offices. When used by a feminist, the word would aim to highlight women’s role in politics, however, when uttered by JKM it must be construed as mockery. These subtleties are practically impossible to transfer in translation due to systemic differences. In English, names of positions are typically unmarked for gender. Modern German, in turn, makes such a widespread use of feminine names of professions and positions that the feminine noun is fully expected here, while its masculine counterpart would strike the listener as marked.

CONCLUSION

The analysis has demonstrated that the original sexism is rarely preserved with the same force -- among the analysed examples, probably only 1b accounts for such a case. Moreover, JKM's sexism is not strengthened by the interpreter in any of the examples. Typically, sexism is reduced to varying degrees: from marginal (e.g., 2a, 4b, 5a) to significant (e.g., 5b, 6a). In some cases, sexism completely disappears in the interpretation (e.g., 3b, 7b, 8a, 8b). In particular, if the original sexism is manifest exclusively in linguistic forms, it is highly unlikely to be transferred from Polish into English or German, which is sometimes attributable to systemic differences between the source and target languages rather than the interpreter's decision.

Among the various mitigating shifts introduced by the interpreters, impersonalization seems the most prominent one. In line with previous findings reported in the literature (Ilie, 2018; Stopfner, 2018), JKM's sexist remarks very often target (and, in most cases, are also addressed to) particular women, fellow MEPs or EU officials. This trend tends to be significantly underplayed by the interpreters through avoidance of personal verb forms, pronouns and terms of address. JKM's own agency is sometimes also reduced.

Other frequent mitigating shifts include addition of hedges and omission of evidentiality markers. These shifts, however, may also be construed as products of interpreting strategies at play, not necessarily aimed at mitigation. Added elements may alternatively function as 'padding' intended to give the interpreter extra time. Omission is common and expectable in case of fast speeches, and, when applied correctly, affects elements of relatively low importance.

Problems with accuracy are often in evidence (e.g., 1b, 2b, 3b, 6b), leading to a loss of message coherence and/or logic and seriously diminishing the quality of the original argumentation. This occurs primarily in the German interpretations, but the small number of analysed examples precludes generalizations of this nature. Lack of accuracy may mitigate sexism or deprive it of its seemingly rational base. This appears to be a frequent side-effect of two interpreting strategies, inference and parallel reformulation (Gile, 2009), which are difficult to distinguish when the analyst only relies on product data. The interpreter may try to solve comprehension problems by reconstructing original content on the basis of the elements that have been understood (inference), or by improvising on the topic (parallel reformulation). Such comprehension problems may partly result from source text content that is unthinkable in the interpreter's culture or incongruent with the rest of the debate, but this would only be possible to establish using process methods such as retrospective process tracing (see, e.g., Gumul & Herring 2022).

In comparison with the results of the previous analyses focusing on JKM's racism (Bartłomiejczyk, 2020) and Euroscepticism (Bartłomiejczyk, 2022), sexism appears to be more prone to mitigation by interpreters and more likely to co-occur with sense errors. This might be attributed to the status of sexism as the least mainstream ideological stance in the EP among the three. The arrays of interpreting shifts producing mitigation largely overlap, but impersonalization did not feature so prominently in the previous analyses.

The main limitations of this study are its modest scope (analysing a relatively small corpus of plenary contributions by one MEP) and the subjective selection of specific examples by the author. These might hopefully be counteracted in the future by research on a larger scale, both in terms of bigger datasets and teams of researchers. Triangulation with quantitative methods and/or process methods would also be welcome. This exploratory study is primarily intended to raise

awareness of the issue and inspire some reflection by both theoreticians and practitioners on how to effectively resist sexism expressed by the original speaker.

While it has been shown here that mitigation may also occur beyond the interpreter's control, importantly, there remains the question of the interpreter's general attitude to sexism whose transfer is feasible. From a more prescriptive than descriptive perspective, one might ask whether the interpreter should aim at reproduction, negotiation or challenging of the speaker's views? Although the analysis provides food for thought, this study is not sufficient to reach a clear answer. Each of the three options may be justifiable and ethical, depending on the interpreter's priorities. Reproduction unmasks the speaker's sexism and enables other participants in the debate to challenge it accordingly. Negotiation in the form of mitigation downplays the ideological tensions and facilitates better rapport among the participants in the debate. Challenging might consist in stepping out of the speaker's role (e.g., through switching into the third person) or a downright refusal to interpret, strategies that would produce a very noticeable distancing effect for the audience and make the interpreter highly visible. These are not in evidence in the material under analysis, which means that the interpreters studied here only meandered between reproduction and negotiation of sexist utterances.

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