

## **Interpreting Sexist Discourse in the European Parliament: A Case Study**

### **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. Fragments of this controversial politician's plenary speeches (delivered between 2014 and 2018, originally in Polish or in 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 only on the linguistic forms chosen by the speaker. Impersonalization seems to be the most popular means to tone down sexist remarks, other frequent means include addition of hedges and omission of evidentiality markers. Mitigation is understood here as a discursive shift in the interpreted text which does not have to stem 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 up with the brisk rate of delivery of the original speaker. Sometimes it is attributable to systemic differences between the languages in question. 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 among EU institutions in using 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 his/her 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; Author, YearA) have shown that interpreters occasionally 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 is a part of a more comprehensive endeavor to test the limits of translatability during EP plenary debates on the basis of this very challenging speaker, and a follow-up to case studies devoted to JKM's racist discourse (Author, YearB), Euroscepticism (Author, YearC) and humour (Author, YearD).

### **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: 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 make a

distinction 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) through chivalry and protection offered to women in return for their compliance with the traditional gender roles. While it has become largely 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: 218).

### SEXISM IN LANGUAGE

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: 136). Mills distinguishes between overt and indirect sexism, although this distinction is not always clear-cut (2008: 71). Overt sexism is more straightforward in expressing the view that women are inferior to men. Although it does not have to rely on any linguistic forms, 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: 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: 34), and may also 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) distinguishes 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 overtly sexist beliefs (e.g., that women should not be entitled to vote) since long before he entered the EP in 2014. Kuros (2011) discusses examples of his sexist statements going back to 1990s. However, JKM creates an appearance of 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 plays with controversial linguistic forms, for instance by attaching the outdated possessive ending *-owa* to female surnames, e.g., *Clintonowa*.

Once elected to the EP, 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: 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 (Author, YearB) and gender equality.

### SEXISM ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

When considering cross-linguistic transfer of sexist statements, we need to account for possible systemic and intercultural differences between different language communities. Mills points out that, in comparison with English, “sexism is much more embedded” in languages that possess a grammatical gender (2008: 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 greater 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). In addition, the use of feminine names of professions and positions (e.g., *Kanzlerin* ‘chancellor’, *Profesörin* ‘professor’, *Soldatin* ‘soldier’) is now very common.

By contrast, calls for a similar linguistic reform in Polish (e.g., Koniuszaniec & Błaszowska, 2003) have largely been falling on deaf ears. 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., Latos, 2020). This is coupled with relatively low status of women: in 2021, Poland scored 23<sup>rd</sup> among 27 EU countries in EIGE’s Gender Equality Index (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Consequently, various manifestations of sexism in language are probably more ubiquitous and less disputed in Polish than either in English or German.

## INTERPRETING SEXIST STATEMENTS

Apart from problems of equivalence such as different markedness levels of generic masculine or gender-inclusive forms, sexism may constitute a difficult ethical issue for interpreters. As is the case with racism (see Hinterplattner, 2017; Author, YearB), 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 s/he 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 (Duflou, 2012) or using ironic intonation (Author, YearD). According to my best knowledge, research specifically tackling linguistic sexism is absent from Interpreting Studies literature.

## EMPIRICAL STUDY

### MATERIAL

The material under analysis comprizes all 191 parliamentary contributions by JKM delivered from 2 July 2014 until 1 March 2018 (i.e., from the beginning of the term for which he was elected until his resignation) in three language versions: Polish, English, and German<sup>1</sup>. Among these, 135 were originally delivered in Polish, and 56 in English, the longest slightly exceeding 200 words and the shortest consisting of one or two sentences. The original contributions comprize over 21,000 words. They were retrieved from the EP website in the form of verbatim

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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 this may be relevant here, each interpretation discussed below is marked according to the interpreter's sex (F/M). In addition, longer pauses are marked as ---, and voiced hesitations – as @.

## METHOD

I rely 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: 142). In the context of interpreted parliamentary discourse, the producer is the original speaker, while interpreters may sustain, negotiate and/or challenge his sexism – which I would like to explore from the perspective of an analyst who is not an EU interpreter and who only occasionally undertakes interpreting assignments. 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: 130–131). The pragmatic aspects are the ones on which I will focus in particular, looking for possible shifts or establishing lack thereof.

The original contributions were searched manually for sexist statements that meet the criteria established by discourse analysts taking a feminist perspective (e.g., Mills, 2008 and 2012; Ilie, 2018; Stopfner, 2018). The examples selected for detailed qualitative analysis here represent a variety of rhetorical moves typical for JKM, including humour and irony. The analysis is divided into three parts according to the role sexism plays in a particular contribution, starting with whole speeches whose main goal is to present JKM's sexist views, through speeches where sexist remarks are inserted as asides, to sexist linguistic forms.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### 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 stand in stark contrast to the larger context, i.e., speeches by other MEPs primarily meant to promote women's rights. Therefore, it might be a problem 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, I would like to focus on a very glaring example of sexism<sup>2</sup>: a blue card question to MEP Iratxe García Pérez, who has just complained about a 16% gender wage gap in the EU. JKM's statement triggered an on-line petition, signed by nearly one million people, asking the EP to punish him, and caused tremendous uproar in the media. JKM received a suspension for 10 days and a fine of over 9000 EUR, but the punishment was subsequently revoked by the General Court of the European Union.

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<sup>2</sup> Example 1 is also discussed in Author (YearA) and in Okoniewska (2019), but only the original and the Polish interpretation are taken into consideration there. In addition, Okoniewska (2019) explores the wider context (preceding and following interventions in the same debate).

- (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 here relies not on linguistic features but purely on the content. The introduction consists of two rhetorical questions followed by short answers, generating a strong opposition between the 'ignorant' female addressee and the 'knowledgeable' male speaker (see Okoniewska, 2019: 144). Importantly, it contains specific numbers, probably supposed to create an appearance of a 'scientific' approach (Okoniewska identifies this as "number game", in accordance with the classification of discourse strategies by van Dijk, 2006). The most offending fragment centres on the main claim stated at the beginning and repeated towards the end (*women/they must earn less*) and three simple arguments with the 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 player? 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.

(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 women took part in the Olympiad for the first time? I can tell you. There were eight hundred. Chess players, how many women are there in the first position? No? And m- women must earn less because they are weaker, because they are smaller, because they are less intelligent, and that's why they also must earn less, perfectly clear.

The introduction proves difficult for both the interpreters. The Polish interpreter makes an extensive correction in the first sentence and commits 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: 144), he suppresses the first-person agency prominently present in the original. The German interpreter seems to experience more fundamental problems in understanding the line of argument as it develops, which results in an incoherent version. The first example is completely incomprehensible and seems to refer to female athletes. The rhetorical question in the second example is approximated (without the number) but not followed by any clear answer. Consequently, the appearance of rationality is preserved in the Polish but not in the German version.

When we analyse the offensive fragment itself, the interpretations seem fluent and very close to the original. The interpreters render all three criticisms of women faithfully and in the same order. The Polish interpreter uses ellipsis to compress the text, which does not seem to exert a noticeable influence on its pragmatic value. Both the interpreters follow the original in repeating twice the assertion that women must earn less, which preserves the speaker's emphasis.

Interestingly, the final *That's all*, which serves as a conversational marker but may also additionally highlight the speaker's categorical tone, undergoes a shift in the Polish interpretation. It is rendered as *No, takie jest życie* 'well, this is life.' The phrase is typically used in Polish to comment on the status quo that the speaker considers undesirable but, at the same time, impossible to change. Possibly, the interpreter's own view on the pay gap seeped through at this moment. This mitigating move constitutes an exception to the Polish interpreter's general strategy of almost literal translation. On the other hand, in the German interpretation, the phrase *ganz klar* 'perfectly clear' strengthens the message more than *that's all*, but it could be regarded as a pragmatic counterpart of *of course* that was omitted earlier.

Overall, the German interpretation preserves the discriminatory appeal of the original. The chaotic introduction might work differently depending 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 acute by depriving the statement of a seemingly rational justification it possesses 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, fail to believe later on that the speaker is actually making such outrageous claims. The Polish interpretation, in turn, blunts the edge of JKM's chauvinism at least slightly through the final mitigating move.

A more elaborate explanation of JKM's views on the gender pay gap was provided by him 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 oczywiste obniżenie poziomu danej dyscypliny. (08-03-2016)*

Gloss: Scientists examined American basketball players and it turned out that tall men earned more than short men, which proves that tall men are better suited to basketball. In the same way, 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 this person rules the world 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 worse paid 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 of players who compete there. And if in some realm women make up more than one percent, this means that this is an artificial pressure of the European Union, which results in an obvious lowering 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 raised 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, pardon, worse and that's why they earn less. We also have extreme sports, and the women only make up only one percent in these realms. When the women make up more than one percent anywhere, then there will naturally also be a lowering of the level in the discipline.

The gist of this statement is also the conviction that female employees are less competent and paying them less is therefore fully justifiable. The supposed biological difference in this aspect between men and women is compared to the difference in height in male basketball players, but the theme 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 striking feature of this passage is a series of impersonal verbs: *odebrano* 'deprived' (twice), *posłano* 'sent', *skierowano* 'sent' manifesting 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, wishing to take control over the children? The professional potential of women is devalued once again, with additional intensifying particles and a marker of evidentiality: *znacznie mniej nadają* 'they are considerably less suitable', *zarabiają oczywiście znacznie mniej* 'they obviously earn much less'. At this point, JKM once again turns to the topic of sport, enumerating some disciplines in which women's participation is very limited: extreme sports (as shown by a particular TV channel), chess and bridge. It is not clear why women's general lack of interest or even lack of talent for particular sports should have a bearing on their professional activities. The rather surprising conclusion is that higher participation of women is always enforced by the EU and causes a deterioration of the discipline – the listener does not know whether this applies to sports only, or more generally.

The English version seems to follow the original quite closely, but still, there are some subtle shifts. One of them is the conditional form *this would mean* that occurs twice in place of *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 because it implies that there are some women who match men's competence level. The second time the speaker uses 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 makes the speech less arrogant. These moves might also be construed as an intercultural pragmatic adjustment in line with the tendency towards relatively strong and blunt expressions of opinion in Polish as compared with English, pointed out by Wierzbicka (2003). All the above shifts conspire towards slight weakening of sexism present in the original

statement. Additionally, there is a problem with the logic of the last sentence, which results from merging two original sentences while omitting a part of the second one. The original ambiguity as to whether the claim only refers to sports is lost, which also slightly reduces JKM's sexism.

The German interpretation features more radical shifts. At the beginning, the interpreter apparently misses the sport discipline, and changes JKM's very specific claim about the pay gap in basketball to a more general one that seems harder to accept as true. The advantage that taller men possess in basketball is mentioned, but it is by no means clear how this relates to their remunerations. The analogy between smaller/taller basketball players and female/male employees is lost, therefore, the beginning is completely incoherent and the listener is not able to appreciate its relevance for the topic under discussion. Similarly to the English interpreter, the German one also inserts conditional into a sentence that was a factual statement in the original, and the incorrect syntax of the rest of this sentence seriously hinders its understanding. 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 moves slightly weaken JKM's sexism. There is a very noticeable self-correction (signalled with the interpreter's apology) that might reveal her own beliefs, incompatible with these of the speaker. The final argument is coherent although somewhat changed by omitting the reason why women manage to reach a higher representation in unspecified realms.

Both the interpretations display some subtle shifts that reduce the original sexism. What is likely much more prominent for the audience are the problems with logic, occurring at different 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 (who, judging by her accent, is a native speaker of Polish working into her foreign language) comprehends the message well, but loses track of JKM's argumentation at the end, possibly due to high speed. The German interpreter, by contrast, seems to experience very serious comprehension problems at the beginning, which translates into 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 is analogical to what has been described earlier for 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 mainly 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, kulą pchają mężczyźni siedmiokilową, a kobiety pięciokilową. Więc w takim razie jedynym rozwiązaniem jakiego 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 7-kilogram shot, and women -- a 5-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 entering the digital technology for women.

(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 as a whole clearly refers to the latter meaning, JKM refers to the former, which is reinforced with his enumeration of numbers. The disadvantage of women as manifest in some sports is transferred to the mental sphere with the suggestion that the rules of mathematics should be different for women, which implies that their mental capacity is also inferior. JKM pretends to propose a solution that would be beneficial for women, while the absurdity of this suggestion 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, luckily for translators, the same extension of meaning took place in all three languages under consideration: *digital* in either English or German also has the two meanings mentioned above.

The English interpreter (again, presumably a Pole working into his B language) 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 make it difficult for the audience to activate the other meaning of *digital*. The reference to sports seems out of context. However, the ironic suggestion that the rules of mathematics should be made easier for women is transferred quite closely. Therefore, we cannot assume that the interpreter has meant to reduce JKM's sexism, but the joke is certainly not so easy to understand in the English version. With the insertion of the pronoun *you* in the first sentence, the interpreter strengthens (makes more direct, targeted at the other participants in the debate) JKM's originally impersonal accusation that the topic under discussion is nonsense. With numerous filled pauses, 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 well result from her mistaken expectation that the speaker would respect the maxim of relevance. The first sentence is transferred in a non-comital way, so that it is impossible for the listener 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 sport discipline where the rules are different for men and for women undermines JKM's original argumentation (as the distances are in fact different only for hurdling nowadays). The interpreter finishes with two very general propositions that seem to result from the strategy of parallel reformulation, i.e., ad-libbing on the topic of the discussion to replace a fragment that the interpreter has missed (Gile, 1995: 211). While the vague argument that there are some differences between men and women is in line with JKM's discourse (highlighting the natural difference), the final very general suggestion for the benefit of women completely loses its ironic character. Rather, it is an utterance that could have easily been authored by any MEP 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 short, the German version is neither sexist nor funny for the audience. While very vague, it seems to stay within the boundaries of the mainstream discourse. Moreover, it sounds very 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 whole contributions that focus on women, delivered during debates on women issues. However, JKM also very often incorporates his sexist views into debates and speeches devoted to other topics, which may require an even more rapid switch in the interpreter's line of thinking than in case of previously discussed contributions. Such sexist asides are frequent in the corpus, for reasons of space, I will limit the discussion to three examples.

- (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 are 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 men, in accordance with the rule of equal rights.

(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 that primarily refers to arms exports from the EU. The report criticized by JKM has been presented by a woman, Swedish MEP Bodil Valero, so the sudden attack on the idea of gender quota might imply that the topic under discussion goes beyond the competence of women and should rather be handled by men, in a less 'wimpy' style. The original fragment is addressed very clearly to the authors of the report, which is evident due to 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural verb forms: *piszecie* 'you write', *chcecie zbadać* 'you want to investigate', *będziecie sprawdzali* 'you will be checking' (very direct, selected out of three possible variants where the other two are more polite). The verbs refer to an activity that is 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 interpretations reduce the speaker's use of personal forms, and therefore his directness. The possessive pronouns disappear completely. 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 hides the agent, and another one -- with a passive construction, with a similar effect. While in this case there is practically no choice between more and less polite forms of address in English, the German interpreter has to choose between *ihr spricht* and *Sie sprechen*, and opts for the more polite solution, appropriate for a parliamentary speech. All of the abovementioned shifts work towards reducing the aggressiveness of JKM's attack.

There are some similarities between the two interpretations. The irony that is signalled in Polish with *rozumiem, że* 'I understand that' (which typically introduces a conclusion that

may legitimately be made on the basis of one's interlocutor's contribution) is transferred by both the interpreters by means of evidentiality markers *obviously* and *natürlich* 'naturally' that are impersonal. 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 some additional shifts that work towards weakening the message: adding the hedge *maybe* (which appears to be a 'filler' uttered while the interpreter is planning how to complete this sentence) and employing a broad generalization *in all of this* does not clearly present to the listener 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 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 in relation to energy. If we continue down this path, we will soon reach the conclusion that we should have social access to women.

Example 5 comes from a debate on tackling energy poverty. JKM is strongly opposed to any social benefits, and here his argumentation aims to ridicule the idea that access to energy should be a social right. However, the analogy that he makes is sexist in several aspects, even though the 'reform' is not presented as a desirable step. Firstly, it accommodates exclusively for male needs. Secondly, women are clearly treated not as humans but as a commodity. Thirdly, the relative value of women is measured on the basis of their looks.

The English interpreter seems to have gone down a wrong path with his first sentence, but he cleverly corrects this in the next one. The sexist joke is transferred fairly closely, with the addition of the hedge *perhaps* that weakens the conclusion very slightly. All three aspects of sexism as enumerated above are undoubtedly present.

The German interpretation, in turn, features significant shifts. The first sentence is non-comittal, so that the listener does not learn about 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 shocking 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 males. The reference to women's looks is omitted. Overall, the sexist appeal of the whole fragment 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.

This excerpt originates from a debate on the rule of law and democracy in Poland. JKM is against 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 by the EU, which suits PiS. Women’s rights are mentioned as one of those unreasonable demands, which is reinforced with a strongly evaluative adjective *glupich* ‘stupid’, and an indefinite pronoun that signals the speaker’s repulsion (as a means of distancing). As for the loanword *gender*, it functions as a popular scapegoat in the discourse of the Polish right wing and must be assessed as a negatively loaded word 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 against gay rights and women’s rights, is omitted by the English interpreter. The lacking introduction means that the fragment is much more difficult to understand. The agency of the addressees is considerably reduced, as the interpreter employs only one personal form instead of four. The negatively loaded words disappear, and the addressees’ role in inadvertently promoting PiS remains unclear.

The shifts in the German version are very significant, to the point that its beginning is hardly identifiable as an equivalent of the Polish text. It seems that both the first and the second sentence in the original version were reconstructed, unsuccessfully, on the basis of one word each: *Polaków* ‘Poles’ and *homoseksualistów* ‘homosexuals’. The addressees’ agency is omitted altogether, causing this extract to lose its accusatory tone. However, as regards sexism, the adjective *komischen* ‘funny’ ensures the correct image of the speaker’s sexist attitude. The listeners learn that women’s rights are not perceived favorably by the speaker, but the vague ending does not tell them that he ascribes similar views to most of his compatriots.

Example 6 shows that transferring sexism does not necessarily depend on 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 in fact 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, many of them might also be perceived as an element of a general tendency by JKM to use archaic language, and therefore 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	[...] pewna blondynka z Berlina obiecała im wysokie zasilki. ‘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 Wahrheite 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 higher than the percentage of those who want to vote for Mrs Bill Clinton in America’	F: - [omitted subordinate clause]	F: - [omitted subordinate clause]	2016-10-03
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 looks, but also, more importantly, evokes the stereotype of a dumb blonde that is still very much alive in the Polish culture due to numerous jokes. The English interpreter stays close to the original, but the lexical choice he makes 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, chooses a reverential form *eine Dame* ‘a lady’. Consequently, in English the sexist appeal is somewhat reduced, while it is completely omitted in German. Interestingly, 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 somewhat blunt. The sexist character of this adjective is highlighted in this context, as the addressee is female and supposedly behaving in “feminine” ways (in another contribution, JKM ridicules Mogherini because she cried publicly after a terrorist attack). 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 went out of use after the Second World War. Although there are close equivalents both in English and in German (*Miss* and *Fräulein*), both the interpreters settle on more modern forms, with the English interpreter choosing 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* to refer to Hillary Clinton. It appears in a subordinate clause, and both the interpreters omit the whole clause, presumably due to high speed of delivery.

Finally, Example 11 contains the feminine name of the official position *komisarka* ‘Commissioner’, which sounds marked because feminine nouns of this type are not common in Polish, at least not for high and prestigious offices. When used by a feminist, the word would aim to highlight women’s role in politics, however, coming from JKM it must be construed as mockery. These subtleties are practically impossible to transfer in translation due to some systemic differences. In English, names of positions are typically not marked 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.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The original sexism is rarely preserved with the same force -- among the analysed examples, probably only 1b accounts for such a case. There are no examples where JKM’s sexism would be strengthened by the interpreter. Typically, sexism is reduced to varying degrees: from very slight (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). Particularly, if the original sexism is manifest only in linguistic forms, it is very unlikely to be transferred from Polish into English or German, which sometimes must be attributed to systemic differences among the languages in question rather than the interpreter’s decision.

Among the various mitigating strategies employed by the interpreters, impersonalization seems the most prominent one. In line with what has been described 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 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 strategies include addition of hedges and omission of evidentiality markers. Both of these may also be construed as products of interpreting strategies at play, not necessarily aimed at mitigation. Added elements may well act as ‘padding’ intended to give the interpreter some more time to think. 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), which seriously diminishes the quality of the original argumentation. This issue is detected primarily in German interpretations, but the small number of 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 side-effect two interpreting strategies: inference and parallel reformulation (Gile, 2009), while the dividing line between them may be fuzzy. The interpreter experiences some comprehension problems, which s/he tries to solve by reconstructing original content on the basis of what little has been understood (inference), or by improvising on the topic (parallel reformulation). We might hypothesize that such comprehension problems partly result from the speaker saying something unthinkable in the interpreter’s culture or incongruent with the rest of the debate, but this would be very difficult to establish.

In comparison with earlier analyses focusing on JKM’s racism and Euroscepticism (Author, YearB; Author, YearC), 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 array of interpreting strategies used for mitigation largely overlaps, but in neither of the previous analyses impersonalization played such a crucial role.

Hopefully, this paper will 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 I have shown 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. In short, should the interpreter aim at reproduction, negotiation or challenging the speaker's views? Although the analysis provides much food for thought, I will not pretend to have arrived at a clear answer. Each of the three options may be justifiable, depending on the interpreter's priorities. Reproduction unmask the speaker's sexism and enables other participants in the debate to challenge it accordingly. Negotiation, on the other hand, manifests itself as mitigation that downplays the ideological tensions and facilitates better rapport among the participants in the debate. Challenging might take the form of 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 the interpreters studied here only meandered between reproduction and negotiation of sexist utterances.

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