

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN POLISH

Polish, a language with deep cultural roots and linguistic intricacies shares many similarities with the Russian language, and so faces similar challenges regarding inclusive language. This comprehensive guide delves into these complexities, offering insights and solutions to foster a more inclusive linguistic environment in Polish.¹

There is a neuter singular pronoun "ono/jego", but that can be considered dehumanising, similarly to "it/its" in English. Interestingly, it is used to refer to animals and objects but also to children – *To dziecko, ono jest bardzo grzeczne (This child, it is very well behaved)*. This might suggest there is a chance to introduce it in language on a wider scale without the dehumanising undertones.

Proposals of applying neutrum to people - which, albeit rare in the mainstream - are considered grammatically correct by the Polish Language Council and are suggested by linguistic experts like prof. Bralczyk for use by non-binary people. These proposals appear in grammar books from the 18th and 19th centuries and have been used by authors like Mickiewicz or Lem so they shouldn't be controversial – yet they still encounter queerphobic resistance from decision-makers and many Polish-speakers.

Nouns, verbs, numerals, and adjectives are also gendered in Polish. Some Polish nonbinary people create solutions such as gender-neutral word endings, for example implementing new conjugations of the verb 'chcieć', including "chciałxm"/"chciałom"/"chciałx" instead of "chciałem" (masculine) or "chciałam" (feminine) when expressing desires or intentions. However, the use of the letter 'x' in this context may seem unusual to native Polish speakers, as it is not found in the Polish alphabet. To promote inclusivity effectively, it is crucial to develop neologisms that feel more natural in the language. For instance, the form "chciałom" could offer a more culturally harmonious alternative, increasing the likelihood of its acceptance and use. Additionally, encouraging the use of inclusive forms further eliminates the need for gendered language in Polish. This involves using gender-encompassing terms like "pracujący" (workers) instead of the masculine "pracownicy" and feminine "pracowniczk".

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Furthermore, Polish names and titles are rarely ungendered. This means that upon reading or hearing a name, one's gender is intuitively assumed and can therefore lead to bias or discrimination in contexts like places of employment. A wide-scale implementation of a neutral marker in the language like 'o' (as previously mentioned) could solve such issues. In places where gender should be rendered irrelevant, gender-neutral terms can aid in the prevention of gender discrimination, for example when grading papers, recruiting personnel, or communicating in a professional setting. Due to the Polish language's common use of the addressive forms "Pan" for men and "Pani" for women when paired with third person singular verbs for politeness, a gender-neutral neologism like "Pano" would foster equality and diminish the need to highlight one's gender when addressing them – similarly to the function of 'usted' in Spanish.

Moreover, it is important to note the obstacles that Polish faces when employing inclusive language. Not only is it a complex sociolinguistic issue, but it is also highly complex grammatically. The Polish language is known for its intricate grammar, which makes introducing gender-neutral forms and pronouns a complex task. Developing linguistic structures that feel natural and are widely accepted by native speakers is a considerable challenge. In addition to linguistic challenges, there is social resistance to inclusive language in some quarters of Polish society. Traditional and conservative attitudes and prejudices can impede progress towards more inclusive language usage, making it difficult for non-binary individuals to feel accepted and respected.

In conclusion, the journey towards inclusivity in the Polish language is a complex and multifaceted process, but with persistence, education, and acceptance, it is possible to create a more inclusive linguistic environment that respects and acknowledges the diverse identities of Polish speakers.

Further resources:

https://nonbinary.wiki/wiki/Gender_neutral_language_in_Polish

<https://isjp.pl/en/>