Uninflectedness as a rule in Polish, an inflected language

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Inflection in Polish

- Polish has robust inflection of verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc.
- nouns inflect for 7 cases and 2 numbers
- nouns fall into several declension classes
- declension of adjectives, determiners and pronouns involves also gender and often has separate endings
- declension pattern of a noun depends on: grammatical gender, phonetic shape (last sound, last consonant of stem), animacy, morphological structure

 phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm butelka malibu 'a bottle of malibu' cf. butelka wódki 'a bottle of vodka' (NOM wódka) Czy nie przestaje (...) Pani być rozsądną bizneswoman? (NKJP) 'Don't you stop being a sensible businesswoman?' orange – uninflected/uninflectable forms green – normally inflected/inflectable forms blue – nominative forms (inflected and uninflected identical by definition)

- phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm
- foreign feel to the noun

malibu, do Peru 'to Peru'

do Vancouver 'to Vancouver' unifl n

rządy Sukarno w Indonezji

'the rule of Sukarno in Indonesia'

- phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm
- foreign feel to the noun
- metalinguistic quoting

Rym do "kwiat" (NKJP) contextually uninfl

'a word rhyming with kwiat'

- phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm
- foreign feel to the noun
- metalinguistic quoting
- apposition: infl N + (contextually) uninfl N

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rząd Ewy Kopacz
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'the cabinet of Ewa Kopacz'

nad rzeką San 'on the river San'

cf. nad rzeką Wisłą 'on the river Vistula' (NOM Wisła)

- phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm
- foreign feel to the noun
- metalinguistic quoting
- apposition
- a minor class: Latin neuters in -um uninfl in sing

idziemy do muzeum

'we're going to a/the museum'

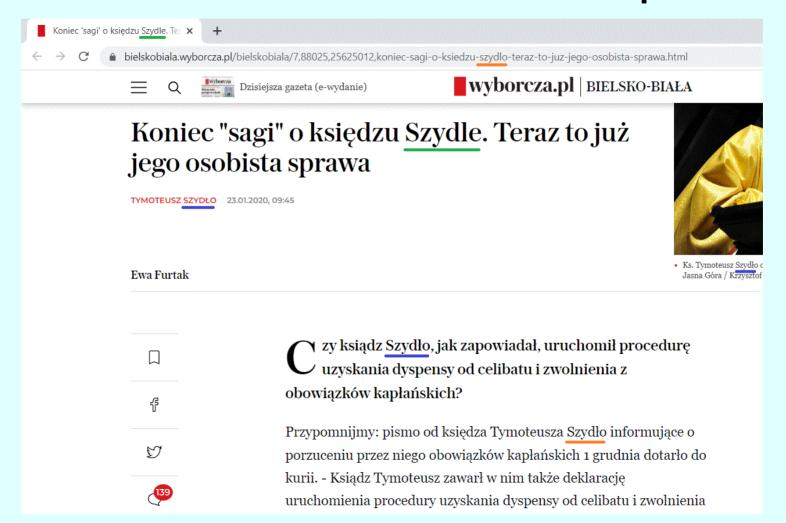
- phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm
- foreign feel to the noun
- metalinguistic quoting
- apposition
- a minor class: Latin neuters in -um
- grammatically masculine nouns used for women

za czasów premier Kopacz

'in the times of prime minister Kopacz'

- phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm
- foreign feel to the noun
- metalinguistic quoting
- apposition
- a minor class: Latin neuters in -um
- most grammatically masculine nouns used for women
- usage varies: do Vancouveru (non-standard infl m, attested in NKJP)

Variation with less common patterns



- phonetic shape incompatible with declension paradigm
- foreign feel to the noun
- metalinguistic quoting
- apposition
- a minor class: Latin neuters in -um
- most grammatically masculine nouns used for women
- usage varies
- less common paradigms: traditionally inflected, now often uninflected

The uninflected feminine words

- the main issue is **phonetic incompatibility**: consonant-final words do not fit paradigms for animate feminine nouns
- in such cases one lexeme (cf. Łaziński 2005) is masculine inflected or feminine uninflected – a productive rule
- uninflectedness is a signal of feminine gender here (Obrębska-Jabłońska 1949)
- titles: doktor, profesor, minister, premier 'prime minister', prezydent, etc.
- professions: lekarz 'medical doctor', psycholog, architekt, etc.
- most types of surnames, esp. most of those that are nouns

Limits to the uninflected pattern

- the alternative is to derive separate feminine forms, these are feminine inflected words
- a number of productive (cf. Szpyra-Kozłowska 2019) suffixes available

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kuzyn ~ kuzynka 'cousin'
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sąsiad ~ sąsiadka 'neighbour'

kucharz ~ kucharka 'cook'

mistrz ~ mistrzyni 'champion'

szef ~ szefowa 'boss'

topielec ~ topielica 'drowned person'

Nowak ~ (trad.) Nowakowa, Nowakówna 'Mr/Mrs/Miss Nowak'

• feminine words for nationalities, family relations, non-professional roles are inflected derivates rather than identical with masculine but uninflected

Usage of uninflected feminine words

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z panią dziekan lit. 'with Mrs. dean' wywiad z Edytą Górniak (NKJP) 'an interview with Edyta Górniak' to i tak dużo dla Nowak (NKJP) 'this is a lot for [Ms] Nowak'
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Kordyś i Stepek prowadziły 2-1 z Nowak i Graczek (NKJP)

'Kordyś and Stepek were leading 2-1 with Nowak and Graczek'

Usage of uninflected feminine words

Polityczna burza po twitterowym wpisie kurator Nowak.

'a political storm after a Twitter post of superintendent Nowak'

Nie lubisz tej doktor? (NKJP)

'don't you like this doctor?'

z psycholog nie chciała gadać (NKJP)

'with the psychologist she wouldn't talk'

Overview of the constructions

- do dyrektor 'to the principal'
- do dyrektorki (most likely casual variant)
- do pani dyrektor (with inflected honorific pani; most likely formal/polite variant)
- do pani dyrektorki (clash of register/politeness signals)
- do dyrektor Nowak/Kowalskiej
- *do dyrektora Nowak/Kowalskiej (infl m + f clash of gender signals; attested in mid 20th cent., considered acceptable in Klemesiewicz 1957)
- conceptual availability matters premierka 'prime minister' much less acceptable than dyrektorka 'school principal'

19th century & early 20th century

- women start to work in professions that were not available for them before
- existing masculine nouns are used to refer to them, usually uninflected
- corresponding derived feminine nouns also appear
- competition between the uninflected and inflected structures arises doktor ~ doktorka '(medical) doctor'
- uninflected forms generally preferred by the successful professional women
- conservative purists insist on the necessity of inflected derivations (cf. Klemensiewicz 1957, Woźniak 2014 on the debate)
- earlier derived feminine nouns are used too, e.g. sąsiadka 'neighbour'

19th century & early 20th century

 women's surnames in documents very often have the masculine form and are uninflected

Nowak ~ Nowak

- this is mandatory in the Russian and Prussian partitions, also common in the Austrian partition (Kowalska 2013)
- everyday usage makes use of traditional derived forms which obligatorily distinguish married names and maiden names

Nowak ~ Nowakowa, Nowakówna

use of uninflected vs. inflected thus becomes associated with level of formality

Interwar Poland

- in 1919 newly independent Poland mandates the use of traditional inflected surnames for women (Dacewicz 2021): Nowakowa, Nowakówna not Nowak
- usage in documents varies, however

Variation of surname form in a document



Interwar Poland

- in 1919 newly independent Poland mandates the use of traditional inflected surnames for women (Dacewicz 2021)
- usage in documents varies, however
- uninflected forms for titles and professions gain ground
- purists continue to criticize the uninflected forms, but over time the comments acknowledge the reality of language use more and more (Klemesiewicz 1957)
- variation in labels of women from a 1929 census of teachers (Klemesiewicz 1957),
 the incidence of uninflected and inflected forms are comparable:

sekretarz 'secretary', naczelnik wydziału 'head of department' nauczycielka 'teacher', wizytatorka 'supervisor'

Communist Poland

- uninflected pattern dominant with words for titles and professions, appears to be a victorious innovation (Klemensiewicz 1957)
- much greater numbers of women work more occasions to refer to them
- usage varies in less formal contexts
- surnames of women are once again are officially identical with those of men: Nowak not Nowakowa, Nowakówna

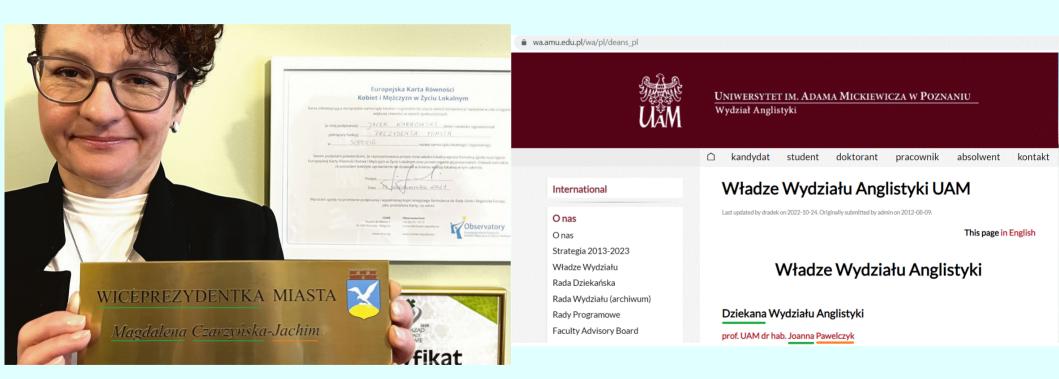
Present day

- inflected derived feminine forms start to reappear
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- some highly publicized events:
- 2012 Joanna Mucha wants to be referred to as *ministra* rather than *minister*
- 2019 MP Magdalena Biejat refers to herself as *gościni*, not *gość* 'guest' on a TV show
- self-labelling of women MPs: (pani) poseł or posłanka follows political divisions
- inflected derivates gain ground and make it into formal language

Inflectable forms in official use



Present day

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- self-labelling of women MPs: (pani) poseł or posłanka follows political divisions
- inflected derivates gain ground and make it into formal language
- no noticeable changes regarding the forms of surnames

Future scenarios

- inflected forms are on the rise and may replace many (or most) uninflected forms
- if the uninflected forms fall out of use, it is not just because they are uninflected
- it is evident that surnames have developed and will develop independently from words for titles and professions even though the grammatical basis for uninflectedness is the same for both groups

Conclusions

- Polish has developed a productive uninflected pattern for some groups of words referring to women
- usage shows symptoms of difficulty posed by uninflected forms (exceptionality in the system, speakers' need to make gender of human referents explicit) and repair mechanisms (apposition)
- '*Premiera*, *premierka* czy *pani premier*?' (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2019) a telling inclusion of the inflectable word *pani* 'Ms' with the uninflected variant
- metalinguistic debate and awareness affect usage and the tide seems to be turning against uninflected forms
- both the rise and fall (so far retreat) of the uninflected pattern are related to the sociolinguistic context (cf. Andrejewicz 2019)
- the debate focuses on one subgroup of the nouns (titles and professions), not the other (surnames); the change in progress duly affects only the former subgroup

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