

# 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

# Uninflectedness in Polish

- 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)

# Uninflectedness in Polish

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

malibu, do Peru 'to Peru'

do Vancouver 'to Vancouver' uninflected

rządy Sukarno w Indonezji

'the rule of Sukarno in Indonesia'

# Uninflectedness in Polish

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

Rym do "kwiat" (NKJP) contextually uninfl

‘a word rhyming with *kwiat*’

# Uninflectedness in Polish

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

rząd Ewy Kopacz

‘the cabinet of Ewa Kopacz’

nad rzeką San ‘on the river San’

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

# Uninflectedness in Polish

- 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’

# Uninflectedness in Polish

- 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’



# Uninflectedness in Polish

- 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





Koniec 'sagi' o księdzu Szydło. Teraz to już jego osobista sprawa

TYMOTEUSZ SZYDŁO 23.01.2020, 09:45

Ewa Furtak



• Ks. Tymoteusz Szydło c  
Jasna Góra / Krzysztof


**C**zy ksiądz Szydło, jak zapowiadał, uruchomił procedurę uzyskania dyspensy od celibatu i zwolnienia z obowiązków kapłańskich?

Przypomnijmy: pismo od księdza Tymoteusza Szydło informujące o porzuceniu przez niego obowiązków kapłańskich 1 grudnia dotarło do kurii. - Ksiądz Tymoteusz zawarł w nim także deklarację uruchomienia procedury uzyskania dyspensy od celibatu i zwolnienia

# Uninflectedness in Polish

- 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

kuzyn ~ **kuzynka** 'cousin'

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 derivatives rather than identical with masculine but uninflected

# Usage of uninflected feminine words

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'

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 20<sup>th</sup> cent., considered acceptable in Klemesiewicz 1957)
  
- conceptual availability matters – **premierka** ‘prime minister’ much less acceptable than **dyrektorka** ‘school principal’



# 19<sup>th</sup> century & early 20<sup>th</sup> 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'

# 19<sup>th</sup> century & early 20<sup>th</sup> 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

Kuratorjum Okręgu Szkolnego Lubelskiego.

PAŃSTWOWE  
GIMNAZJUM ŻEŃSKI  
Im. UNJI LUBELSKIEJ  
w LUBLINIE.

Nr. 9 Rok szkolny 194

LEGITYMACJA UCZNIOWSKA


ważna do 1 października 1934 r.

Julja Hartwig

jest uczennicą klasy pierwszej

Julja Hartwisińska  
Własnoręczny podpis uczennicy;

J. Krenowska  
Dyrektorka.



# 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
- endorsed by feminists, criticized by conservatives

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- endorsed by feminists, criticized by conservatives
- 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 derivatives gain ground and make it into formal language



# Inflectable forms in official use



wa.amu.edu.pl/wa/pl/deans\_pl



UNIwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu  
Wydział Anglistyki

🏠 kandydat student doktorant pracownik absolwent kontakt

## Władze Wydziału Anglistyki UAM

Last updated by dradek on 2022-10-24. Originally submitted by admin on 2012-08-09.

This page in [English](#)

## Władze Wydziału Anglistyki

Dziekana Wydziału Anglistyki  
prof. UAM dr hab. [Joanna Pawelczyk](#)

**International**

- O nas
- O nas
- Strategia 2013-2023
- Władze Wydziału
- Rada Dziekańska
- Rada Wydziału (archiwum)
- Rady Programowe
- Faculty Advisory Board

# Present day

- inflected derived feminine forms start to reappear
- endorsed by feminists, criticized by conservatives
- some highly publicized events:

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- self-labelling of women MPs: (*pani*) *poseł* or *posłanka* follows political divisions
- inflected derivatives 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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