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Jokes about Women in Poland

Кључне речи:

Polish jokes, women, wives, mothers, mothers-in-law, family, socio-cultural context, culture, society, Poland.

Овај рад износи резултате анализе 300 пољских шала о женама (углавном о супругама, љубавницама, мајкама и таштама). Он има за циљ да укаже на везу између шала и њиховог социјалног контекста, тј. ситуације у просечној пољској савременој породици.

The aim of the paper is to check the relation between the world of jokes and their socio-cultural context. An analysis of 300 turn-of-the-century Polish jokes about women has been carried out. The jokes come from varied sources: newspapers, books, brochures, the Internet and every-day conversations. A *joke* is 'a short narrative-dialogical text, which ends with a punch line and is meant to cause laughter'. On the semantic level it consists of at least two opposite scripts. A *script* is 'a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions are satisfied: 1) the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts; 2) the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite' (Raskin 1985: 81). *Kawał*, one

of Polish equivalents for *joke*, is said to be "firmly rooted in Polish history" and "plays a colossal role in Polish culture" (Wierzbicka 1991: 189). Therefore, if jokes are important in culture, the picture of the world enclosed in their scripts is connected with the surrounding situation. Jokes about women were chosen for their unusually great number and for the prevailing strength of the stereotype of a woman. "The existence of a female and male stereotype is conspicuous and plays a meaningful role amongst social beliefs of the human being (...). Stereotypically women are seen as warm and expressive whereas men as rational and effective in their deeds" (Nęcki 1996: 255).

The linguistic picture of women's lives in jokes demonstrates that their roles may be divided into family activities and outside



family ones. Women are hardly ever pictured in their working places; if so, they work at hospitals, offices or schools doing the lowest paid jobs. There are few jokes presenting women doing their free time activities, which stereotypically are none other than gossiping, shopping and watching TV. The majority of jokes shows women in the context of their family, and for that reason, jokes about women seen as wives, lovers, mothers and mothers-in-law have been analysed in the paper. Although popular, the jokes about blondes are not included in the paper as they origin from American texts that became a universal property and as such they are not good examples of the traditional Polish jokes about women.

The most numerous group shows *women as wives*. Their *husbands* are usually not very happy to be married:

❶ (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

- Cześć stary, słyszałem, że się ożeniłeś.
 — Ożeniłem się...
 — Musisz być szczęśliwy?
 — Muszę.

- Hi, old buddy, I have heard you had got married.
 — Yes, I had...
 — You have to be happy?
 — Yes, I have to.

The cause and the reason of the unhappiness is very often *adultery* – the most popular script present in jokes about women.

❷ (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

- Słyszałem, że twoja żona zaliczyła całe miasto?
 — Też mi miasto, pięć tysięcy mieszkańców...

— I have heard that your wife has slept with the whole city?

— Five thousand people and you call it a city?

❸ (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

Żona z kochankiem leży w łóżku. Przychodzi mąż:

— Co wy tu robicie?

Żona do kochanka:

— Mówiłam Ci, że to głupek.

A wife is in bed with a lover. A husband comes in and asks:

— What are you doing here?

A wife then turns to her lover:

— You see, I've told you he is stupid.

❹ (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

— Jesteś głupia, podstępna, fałszywa, kłamiesz, zdradzasz mnie...

— Mój drogi, przecież każdy człowiek ma jakieś drobne wady...

— You are stupid, sly, deceitful, you lie to me and you cheat on me...

— My dear, everyone has some minor shortcomings...

The *lovers* quite often happen to be *husband's friends*:

❺ (Nowa Trybuna Opolska, 03.03.2003)

Rozmawiają dwie koleżanki:

— Czy mąż nakrył cię kiedyś z obcym mężczyzną w łóżku?

— Nigdy. To byli zawsze jego koledzy...

Two female friends talk about their husbands:

— Has your husband ever caught you in bed with a stranger?

— No, never. They were always his friends.

6 (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

— Czy wiesz jaka jest różnica pomiędzy moją żoną a twoją?
 — Nie, nie wiem.
 — A ja wiem.

— Do you know the difference between my wife and yours?
 — No, I don't.
 — And I do.

Even if the wife is unattractive the husband is never sure about her or his friend fidelity:

7 (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

— Jak mogłeś całować moją żonę?!
 — Wiesz, jak wytrzeźwiałem też się dziwiłem...

— How could you kiss my wife?
 — You know, when I got sober I was surprised myself as well.

Though, in some cases, he does not have to care about it:

8 (Nowa Trybuna Opolska, 04.03.2003)

Rozmawiają dwaj koledzy.
 — Bardzo lubię spotykać twoją żonę.
 — A dlaczego?
 — Bo za każdym razem nie mogę się nacieszyć, że to nie moja żona.

Two friends talk about their wives.
 — I love meeting your wife.
 — Why?
 — Every time I meet her I realize how lucky I am that she is not my wife.

Not only Polish women are presented as unfaithful wives but also their husbands have extramarital affairs:

9 (Świeże dowcipy; O kelnerach 7/97)

— Tato — żali się córka Kowalskiemu — mąż mnie zdradza. Co mam robić?
 — Poczekaj na mamę, ona ma większe doświadczenie w tej sprawie.

— Daddy — complains Kowalski's daughter — my husband cheats on me, what shall I do?
 — Ask your mother, she's got more experience in this matter.

It makes wives feel suspicious and jealous:

10 (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

Maż długo nie wraca do domu. Żona się bardzo niepokoi:
 — Gdzież on może być? Może sobie jakąś babę znalazł? — mówi do sąsiadki.
 — Ty zaraz myślisz o najgorszym — uspokaja ją sąsiadka — może po prostu wpadł pod samochód.

It is late. A husband is not at home yet. A wife is very worried.
 — Where can he be? Perhaps he's got a mistress? — she says to a female neighbour.
 — You always think about the worst — the neighbour consoles her — perhaps he simply got under a car.

Even if it is better to be widowed than betrayed both spouses are equally ready to be unfaithful. Sometimes a woman cheats herself and is cheated on at the same time:

11 (Dowcip za dychę, 12/97)

Ulicą idzie dwóch mężczyzn, nagle jeden z nich się zatrzymuje i mówi:
 — O Boże, moja żona rozmawia z moją kochanką!
 — Niemożliwe — dziwi się drugi — właśnie chciałem powiedzieć to samo!

Two men walk down the street. Suddenly one of them stops and says:
 — O God, my wife is talking to my mistress!
 — That's impossible — says another one with surprise — I just wanted to say the same!

Not only many of the examined jokes have mistresses as their butts, but there is also a significant number of jokes about *divorce*. Those two subjects are closely related because in real life most couples consider infidelity as the main reason for their divorce. Another reason for the divorce in Poland is alcoholism – usually the husband's, after this financial and housing problems such as living with parents-in-law, and finally ill-matched sexuality and the partner's jealousy (Kukołowicz 1984: 126):

12 (www.pol.pl/humor)

Spotyka się dwóch kumpli i jeden mówi do drugiego:
 — Wiesz, po pierwsze twoja żona się puszcza, po drugie ze mną, po trzecie co ty na to?
 — Cóż, po pierwsze już się z nią rozwiodłem, po drugie ona jest chora na AIDS, po trzecie co ty na to?

Two friends meet and one says:
 — What would you say if I told you three things: first – your wife cheats on you, second – she does it with me, third – what do you think about it?
 — Well, I will give you three answers: first – I divorced her, second – she is an HIV positive, third – what do you think about it?

Nowadays women have more opportunities to resign from an unsatisfactory marriage than several decades ago. Statistically, women are the ones who are more often

unhappy in their marriages. 72 per cent of divorces are sued for by women. The divorce rate has been growing rapidly since 1946, after the state civil marriage law was introduced. Since then, for many years the couple that wanted to be married in church had to get a state marriage at the registry office first. Only in the nineties did the Concordat – agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the State made a church marriage valid without the civil ceremony. Currently about 70 per cent of all marriages take place in church (TVP1 “Wiadomości” 20.03.2000) but though there are no divorces in the Roman Catholic Church the number of falling apart marriages is still growing.

13 (Coś z dowcipami; O facetach 11/97)

— Czy jest pan rozwiedziony?
 — Jeszcze nie.
 — Are you divorced, sir?
 — Not yet.

In Poland, university graduates get divorced more often than those who received only primary education. They are more frequently city than village dwellers. About two-thirds of people from broken marriages decide to re-marry. The second marriages fall apart twice as often as the first ones.

14 (Ale jaja; O kobietach 12/97)

Ginekolog pyta pacjentkę:
 — Czy jest pani mężatką?
 — Nie, doktorze, już czwarty raz.

A gynaecologist asks his patient:
 — Are you married?
 — No, not for the fourth time.

15 (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

— Pani mąż wygląda w tym nowym ubraniu wyśmienicie!
 — To nie jest nowe ubranie, to jest nowy mąż.

— Your husband looks excellent in his new suit!
 — It is not a new suit, but it is the husband that is new.

The increase of divorces is accompanied by a specific social atmosphere. Couples in conflict are not encouraged to overcome their problems so striving for the rescue of their marriage is more difficult than deciding to separate (Kukołowicz 1984: 127). The higher social acceptance of divorces comes with a change of opinion concerning the negative influence of divorces exerted on children. Growing up with parents, who are in a state of permanent conflict is thought to be harmful to the children as well. The problem may be illustrated by jokes about children from the previous marriages or illegitimate ones:

16 (www.pol.pl/humor)

W szpitalu rozmowa salowej ze szczęśliwą matką nowonarodzonego dziecka:

— Na korytarzu już czeka tatuś pani dziecka z pięknymi kwiatami, czy go wpuścić? — pyta się salowa.

— Broń Boże, zaraz przyjdzie mój mąż!

A ward attendant talks to a happy mother of the newborn child in the hospital:

— There is your baby's father waiting at the corridor with a bunch of flowers, shall I let him in?

— Definitely not! My husband will be here in a minute!

In the twentieth century, the tendency of having a small number of children prevails. An average Polish family has one or two children only. More than every fifth marriage is childless and every fourth child is born outside wedlock. For many adolescent partners, a pregnancy is the main reason for getting married.

Sometimes a marriage lasts much longer than the spouses would wish. Another script in Polish jokes is one concerning dead wives who are a "pain in the neck" for their still living husbands:

17 (Dowcip za dychę; 6-7/94)

— Nie płacz, czyżbyś nie wierzył, że spotkasz się ze swoją żoną w niebie?! — pociesza przyjaciel wdowca.

— Wierzę i dlatego płaczę!

— Don't cry, don't you believe you will meet your wife in Heaven?! — a friend consoles the widower.

— I believe, and that's why I am crying!

According to statistics, a man who becomes a widower cannot take proper care of himself and quite often dies shortly after his wife's death or he wants to find another wife as soon as possible. And those facts are shown in jokes, too:

18 (Coś z dowcipami; O facetach 11/97)

Po pogrzebie do wdowca podchodzi jego najlepszy przyjaciel i mówi:

— Nie załamuj się, stary. Za rok, dwa znajdziesz sobie jakąś miłą babkę, która cię pocieszy.

— Za rok? A co ja będę robił dziś wieczorem?

After the funeral a best friend approaches the widower and says:

— Don't be so broken hearted. In a year or two you will find a nice bit of skirt and you will find a consolation in her.

— In a year? But what am I going to do to-night?

An important group of Polish jokes are the ones about mother. This fact seems to be quite interesting as a mother has an exceptional place in our culture. It is even said that mother belongs to the sacrum sphere, has only positive connotation so she is neither present in proverbs nor in anecdotes (Jędrzejko 1994: 169). As far as jokes are concerned, this point of view cannot be accepted. To desecrate what is sacred is one of a joke's attributes. So joke tellers do not hesitate to make mothers the butts of their jokes.

Most mother jokes don't belong to one, strictly defined structural series though in some jokes the same initial formula is used. Some jokes begin with an expression: *mamo* (mother) or *mamusiu* (mummy), repeated in some cases to underline its expressive character. This happens in jokes belonging to the black humor series about corpses of family members:

19 (www.pol.pl.humor)

— Mamusiu, a Jasio obgryza babci paznokcie!
 — Jasiu, nie obgryzaj babci paznokci!
 — Mamusiu, on dalej obgryza!
 — Jasiu, bo zamknę trumnę!

— Mummy, Johnny is biting grandma's nails!
 — Johnny, don't bite your grandma's nails!
 — Mummy, he is still biting her nails!
 — Johnny, stop it! Otherwise I will shut the coffin!

In Polish jokes, it is mostly the mother who helps her child – usually a son, as boys

appear six times more often in Polish jokes than girls – to do his homework and asks how it was at school.

20 (Księga Humoru 1999: 51)

— Mamo, dziś na lekcji pan od matematyki pochwalił mnie! — mówi Jasio.
 — To bardzo ładnie, a co powiedział?
 — Że wszyscy jesteśmy idiotami, a ja — największym!

— Mum, the mathematics teacher praised me today! — little Johnny says.
 — Oh, that's very nice. What did he say?
 — That we all are a bunch of idiots but I am the perfect one.

The mother is not only a butt of jokes but sometimes she is even victimised by her own child:

21 (Angora; 11. 02. 96)

Największemu chuliganowi dyrektor kazał przyjść do szkoły z matką. Tak się jednak nie stało.
 — Gdzie matka?
 — Nie żyje.
 — A co się stało?
 — Walec ją wczoraj przejechał.
 — Biedny chłopcze, współczuję ci. Proszę, niech ojciec przyjdzie do szkoły, zastanowimy się nad twoim dalszym losem.
 — Ojca też przejechał walec.
 — Oj biedaku, co ty teraz będziesz robił?
 — Jak to co? Będę dalej jeździł walcem!

The worst hooligan was asked by the headmaster to come to school with his mother, but he came alone.

— Where is your mother?
 — She is dead.
 — What happened?

- Yesterday she was run over by a roller.
- Poor boy, please accept my deepest expression of sympathy. Tell your father to come to school, we will talk about your future.
- My father was also run over by a roller.
- Poor you, what will you do now?
- What do you mean “what”? I will still drive the roller!

Polish jokes confirm the results of the research on the linguistic picture of the world (Bartmiński 1998). They indicate that the most important aspect of the stereotype of a mother is her educative function, which is of a great value especially when the father’s role becomes less and less important. Sociologists claim that the average Polish family has ceased to be patriarchal. “Children are brought up almost exclusively by mothers. Father’s share in upbringing children is minimal if there is any” (Worach – Kardas 1988: 161).

22 (Coś z dowcipami; *O facetach* 11/97)

- Żona zarzuca mi, że nie troszczę się o dzieci. To jest nie do zniesienia!
- A ile ma pan dzieci?
- Dwoje. A może troje?

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- My wife claims I don’t take care of my children. I can’t stand it any more!
 - How many children have you got?
 - Two... or maybe three?

The diachronical study of stereotypes from the years 1980–1990 underlines the differences between mother connotations and father ones (Panasiuk 1998). The results show that we associate *kindness* and *love* with mother whereas *money*, *strictness* and *work* with father.

Jokes confirm the opinion that the stereotype of a *mother* is opposed to the one of a

stepmother and a *mother-in-law*. These stereotypes are highly negative. *Strangeness* and *hostility* are the dominant features in their picture (Bartmiński 1998). The qualifications of the term *mother-in-law* are: *witch*, *wicked*. The picture of a father-in-law is much more positive and it is connoted with such words as: *good*, *hen-pecked husband*, *father* and *serenity* (Panasiuk 1998).

According to S. Freud “there is something strange in the psychological situation of a mother-in-law and her son-in-law, something that makes hostility easier and makes their lives one next to the other more difficult” (1905/1993: 18). He stresses the coexistence of tenderness and hostility in their relations and concludes that in some cultures they have to keep away in order to reduce the possibility of a conflict and to prevent incest.

Jokes about mothers-in-law are varied on their structural level. Their common feature is connected with their semantically characteristic aggressiveness. They are usually the manifestation of male solidarity. If a man happens to think good about his mother-in-law, he becomes very quickly convinced by his fellows that he is absolutely wrong:

23 (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

- Na posterunku policji dzwoni telefon:
- Ratunku, moja teściowa chce wyskoczyć przez okno! — krzyczy głos w słuchawce.
 - A co, okno się zacięło i nie może go pan otworzyć? — domyśla się życzliwie policjant.

- ~
- A telephone is ringing at a police station:
- Help, my mother-in-law wants to jump out of the window! — the phoning man shouts.
 - So what? Has the window jammed and can’t you open it? — presumes the policeman kindly.

Another typical script for mother-in-law jokes i.e. *being arfaid of* is closely related to the Polish housing problem.

24 (Humor o teściowej; 8/93: 23)

— Dobrze się czujesz w swoim małżeństwie?
— Jak w raju. Nie mamy co na siebie włożyć i boimy się, że teściowa wyrzuci nas z mieszkania.

290

— Do you feel well in your marriage?
— Just like in Paradise. We have nothing to put on and we are afraid that my mother-in-law may kick us out from her flat.

About 60 per cent of newly married couples live in one – usually rather small – flat with their parents (Kukołowicz 1984: 120). Sometimes they also share the room with some other family members. After a few years the situation usually changes and the couple moves to another apartment, provided they still want to be together. The difficult situation of the extended families is described in following jokes:

25 (www.strony.wp.pl)

— Spędzimy dziś wspólnie wieczór — mówi mąż do żony — kupiłem trzy bilety do teatru.
— Ale po co nam aż trzy bilety? — dziwi się żona.
— Dla mamy, ojca i twojej siostry...

— We will have a wonderful night tonight — says a husband to his wife — I've bought three tickets to the cinema.
— But why do we need the three of them? — his surprised wife asks.
— For your mother, father and sister.

A good collection of Polish mother-in-law jokes may be found on the Internet. They are the best examples of cruel jokes as they have not been censored. Nevertheless, contemporary website jokes are not much different from oral or published ones as censorship was abolished in Poland in 1989.

26 (www.pol.pl.humor)

Idzie Masztalski z obitą, siną buźką i taszczy duże walizki. Spotyka przyjaciela:
— Co Ci się stało Masztalski?
— A, teściowa mnie pobiła.
— Jak by mnie tak teściowa pobiła, to bym ją chyba poćwiartował!
— A ty myślisz, że co ja tu dzwigam w tych walizkach?

Mr Masztalski looks beaten, blue in the face, carrying heavy suitcases. He meets his friend.
— What's happened?
— My mother-in-law has beaten me up.
— If mine had I would have cut her into pieces!
— And what do you think I'm carrying in these suitcases?

The analysis of the scripts present in this group of jokes leads to the conclusion that a mother-in-law is perceived as the major enemy of the family and the person who is a serious threat to the family's happiness and an object of intense *aggression*.

In our culture the feminine role has been traditionally strictly connected with being at home as a housewife responsible for all kinds of housework. One of women's many duties is the preparation of food, seen for ages as a good way of showing care and good feelings towards other family members. This

belief is accompanied by numerous jokes in which women prepare the meals:

27 (Coś z dowcipami; *O facetach* 11/97)

— Co ci zrobiła żona, że ją tak strasznie zwymyślałeś?

— Jak to co?! Obiad!

~

— What did your wife do when you thundered at her in such a way?

— What could she do? Dinner.

The prepared food is usually said to be of bad quality:

28 (www.dowcipy.com.pl)

— Kochanie, jak ci smakował obiad, który dziś ugotowałam?

— Dlaczego ty stale dążysz do kłótni?!

~

— How did you like the dinner I've prepared for you today?

— Why are you always looking for a quarrel?!

A significant part of society still claims that women should be responsible also for all the housework. Although women who have full-time jobs work fewer hours at home than typical housewives, they spend much more time doing the chores than their husbands:

29 (Angora; 11.02.96)

Pani Maria ogląda w sklepie nowy odkurzac.

— To urządzenie oszczędzi pani połowę domowej roboty! — zachwala sprzedawca.

— Tak? To poproszę dwa!

~

Mary looks at a new vacuum cleaner in the shop.

— It will save you half of your work — says the clerk.

— Will it? So I'll take two!

The requirements imposed on women as mothers responsible for their children's successful lives have grown rapidly as well, because a happy childhood is seen as an important condition of being happy in adult life. Earlier, those, who could afford it, didn't hesitate to leave their kids with nannies. Poor hard-working mothers also couldn't spend too much time playing with their children. In Poland many children are sent to kindergartens and preschools. The growing number of those institutions was to make women come back to work faster. The calculations, done by the Economic Department of Warsaw University, show that treasury revenue from a working woman – the mother of two children – is at least twice as lower than the expense of the State on the upkeep for a care institution for her children, the payment of sickness and child benefits, the cost of being absent from work, etc. The calculations didn't take into consideration – for obvious reasons – social losses such as: not proper upbringing, worse social adaptability, slower learning progress (Kukołowicz 1984: 122). At the same time the number of the pensioners' houses, known as "houses of the golden fall" is growing. The relation between those institutions is shown in the following joke:

30 (Dowcip za dychę; 2/97)

— Co to jest dom starców?!

— Zemsta dzieci za oddawanie ich do żłobka!

~

— How would you call a home for the aged?

— Children's revenge for sending them to the kindergarten!

Nowadays the life of many families differs from the traditional model of a husband who earns a living and a wife who spends her day on housework and taking care of their two children. But the changes in society haven't changed the stereotypes so far. Men are seen in the context of their public lives and professional jobs, while women in the private spheres of family lives. Many adult Poles still claim that a woman can be happy only at home.

❸① (www.pol.pl/humor)

— Dlaczego sołtys kupił żonie samochód bez silnika?

— Bo uważa, że miejsce kobiety jest w domu!

~

— Why did the village administrator buy his wife a car without an engine?

— Because he thinks the woman's place is at home!

On the other hand, the researchers show that the women who stay at home to take care of the young children, suffer from depression and are eager to find even not a well-paid job, which they consider better from the hard and monotonous housework.

In the majority of jokes, women are pictured in their family as wives, lovers, mothers and mothers-in-law. The most common scripts of the jokes are wives' and lovers' *infidelity*. Generally speaking *sex/no sex* opposition dominates in these types of jokes. Mother jokes reveal women's *care* while mother-in-law jokes presuppose *hatred* and *fear*. The latter one seems to be strictly connected with the Polish housing problem. Women in jokes do most household chores (especially cooking and cleaning) and take the most of the responsibility for children. Comparison of the results of the script analysis with the sociological description of the family life of an average Polish woman confirms the thesis of the great influence of the social situation on the linguistic picture of the world shown in jokes.

резюме

Σ Польские анекдоты о женщинах

Цель настоящей статьи – акцентировать связь анекдотов и социокультурного контекста. Анализ проводился на материале 300 польских анекдотов о женщинах. Тексты почерпнуты из разных источников (газеты, бюллетени, интернет, просторечно-разговорная речь). Во многих анекдотах представлен образ женщины в кругу семьи; потому особо подчеркивается роль женщины как жены, любовницы, матери, свекрови/тещи. В анекдотах о женщинах и любовницах чаще всего имеют место *неверность* и господствующая оппозиция *секс/отсутствие секса*. В анекдотах о матерях наиболее типичной характеристикой является *забота*, тогда как в текстах о свекрови/теще – *ненависть* и *страх*. Женщины в анекдотах привлекаются к выполнению почти всех домашних дел, в частности – *варки* и *уборки*. В их обязанность входит выращивание детей, проявление заботы о них. Сопоставительным анализом отдельных характеристик и социологического описания семейной жизни обыкновенной польской женщины подтверждается тезис о том, что социальная ситуация оказывает значительное влияние на мировоззрение, представленное в анекдотах.

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