

This project is based on the Polish counterpart of performances known in the United States as stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy has already rooted itself in the Polish comedy culture by being in contrast to the traditional comedy shows, *kabarety* not only because of its form but also because of its content and reception. Despite its relatively short history, Polish stand-up comedy has already gotten a group of loyal fans and an ever-growing group of comedians willing to make them laugh.

Identity is a central point of stand-up comedy. It is largely connected to the mechanisms governing it: the comedians make use of their personal experiences and observations while questioning – under the guise of humor – the traditional social norms and behavior. Because the subject of their narratives often relates to the interpersonal relations based on gender, a skillfully led narrative is not only able to humor the audience but also introduce another way of perceiving oneself and others.

A person's identity can be categorized on three complementary levels: individual, relational, and collective. Individual identity can be understood in terms of our perception of ourselves as well as the sum of our values, beliefs, and goals. Relational identity is who we are in the context of other people and our attributed roles as a result of existing social norms. The widest level – collective – can be used to describe oneself as a member of a group sharing a common characteristic which can include gender, ethnicity, or even favorite music. Therefore, identity, including gender identity as its integral part, plays a fundamental role in perceiving reality.

There are many ways to express and negotiate one's identity with respect to the surrounding world, and language – with its communicative and cognitive functions – is one of them. Thanks to the conceptual metaphors and their realization in the language, we can project certain elements of a concept onto another. Thus, we can use it to explain what is hard to comprehend as well as change our already existing perceptions about the world. Taking into consideration the formative effect of figurative language on reality, it begs the question of what kind of conception of identity is created by stand-up comedians, who – due to the ever-growing popularity of this entertainment in Poland – can reach and influence a wide audience.

This project aims to answer the following research questions: 1) What kind of image of gender do Polish comedians and comediennes create? 2) What kind of conceptual metaphors are used when referring to their own gender identity and those of other people? 3) What kind of attitude do the identified metaphors show? And 4) What is the role of the identified metaphors in the context of the performances?

This project combines elements and perspectives from cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and corpus linguistics. The source material collected for the study will consist of the thirty most popular comedy specials performed by Polish stand-up comedians which were published on the video platform YouTube from 2018 to 2022. Utterances which refer to gender directly or contextually will be extracted and subjected to a two-stage analysis: corpus linguistic and metaphorical. The corpus linguistic analysis will involve corpus management tools such as SketchEngine and WMatrix5, while metaphors will be recognized using dictionary-based methods of identification widely used in the research area. The identified metaphorical expressions will then be classified according to their domains to achieve a better insight into how the analyzed figurative language is created. The analyses will be supplemented with quantitative evaluation using statistical software SPSS. The final stage of the project, which includes qualitative analysis, will be based on the sociolinguistic perspective on language as a tool for identity expression.

The purpose of the project is to contribute to the discussion and attempt to fill the gaps in three research areas. The first one is connected to gender as a subject of sociolinguistic studies that are largely based on everyday language. This project puts gender in the perspective of stand-up comedy, whose nature is superficially spontaneous; in fact, each performance is a result of long-term crafting. Therefore, it can be assumed that the language used by the comedians is far from improvisational, which in turn suggests that the choice of metaphors is not accidental as well.

The second research area is related to cognitive linguistics where more and more thought is being given to gendered metaphors in terms of politics or workplaces, but still not enough studies focus on the figurative language in the humorous contexts. This project aims to contribute to filling the gap and beginning the discussion on a larger scale, including other realms of comedy.

The last area is directly connected to the research subject. Stand-up comedy is a fruitful source of discourse that can be successfully applied to interdisciplinary exploration ranging from linguistics to psychology. However, due to its relatively short history, Polish stand-up comedy is not subjected to many studies, in contrast to other local counterparts. Therefore, choosing Polish stand-up comedy as a research topic for this project will be an attempt to put Polish comedians on the international map of research devoted to this kind of humor. With that being said, this study will examine not only gender identity negotiation by Polish comedians but also the identity of Polish stand-up comedy altogether.