Discursive acts of resistance: a multimodal critical discourse analysis of *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet's* (All-Poland Women's Strike) social media

Affiliations
Małgorzata Chałupnik
she/her
University of Nottingham
Email: malgorzata.chalupnik@nottingham.ac.uk

Gavin Brookes
he/him
Lancaster University
Email: g.brookes@lancaster.ac.uk

Keywords
communicative acts; multimodal critical discourse studies; protest; abortion, reproductive rights

Abstract
Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (All-Poland Women's Strike) is a grassroots campaign established in Poland in 2016 in response to proposed tightening of abortion laws, but which also engages with broader social, feminist and women's rights issues. Using a critical approach to multimodal discourse analysis, we analyse the postings of the campaign on their main social media platform, Facebook, investigating closely the types of multimodal speech acts, referred to here as 'communicative acts', employed therein. We examine the forms that such communicative acts take and the broader functions they fulfil within the (online and offline) context of the campaign. The observed communicative acts contribute towards – and, indeed, enact quite directly – the protest, forming an important part of the campaign's discourse of feminist dissent.

Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet powstał we wrześniu 2016, na fali protestów wywołanych propozycją prac nad zaostrzeniem polskiego prawa aborcyjnego. Ruch zajmuje się również szerzej pojętymi zagadnieniami społecznymi i feministycznymi oraz prawami kobiet. Przedmiotem naszej analizy są posty *Ogólnopolskiego Strajku Kobiet* na platformie społecznościowej Facebook. W odniesieniu do postów tego ruchu zastosujemy krytyczną analizę dyskursu, skupiając się na multimodalnych aktach mowy, do których będziemy się w tym artykule odnosić jako do 'aktów komunikacyjnych'. W kontekście dyskursu *Ogólnopolskiego Strajku Kobiet* będziemy obserwować formy i funkcje niniejszych aktów komunikacyjnych. W naszym artykule postulować będziemy, że posty *Ogólnopolskiego Strajku Kobiet* są często bezpośrednią formą protestu, tworząc ważną część dyskursu masowego zrywu i buntu feministycznego.

About the authors

Małgorzata Chałupnik is Assistant Professor in Linguistics and Professional Communication working in the School of English at the University of Nottingham. Her expertise is the area of discourse analysis, focusing in particular on business and health(care) communication and language, gender and sexuality.

Gavin Brookes is UKRI Future Leader Fellow in the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University. His research interests include corpus linguistics, critical discourse

studies, multimodality and language and identity. He is Associate Editor of the International Journal of Corpus Linguistics (John Benjamins) and Co-Editor of the Corpus and Discourse book series (Bloomsbury).

1. Introduction

In October 2020, the Polish constitutional court (Constitutional Tribunal) ruled that the abortion of severely and permanently malformed foetuses was unconstitutional (Plucinska and Wlodarczak-Semczuk 2021). The ruling represented a severe tightening of abortion law in Poland; it sought to outlaw one of the most common legal grounds for abortion in the country, thereby making almost all cases of abortion in Poland illegal. The following January, the ruling was published in the *Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland*, putting the legislation into legal force. The ruling can be viewed as a symptom of what has been described as a 'war on gender' (Szwed and Zielińska 2017) currently engaged by a new wave of right-wing ultra-conservatism in Poland.

The ruling was met with mass protests, with protesters opposed not only the ruling itself, but also the general interference of the Roman Catholic Church in public life. Particular ire was directed against the ruling political party, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (*PiS;* English: Law and Justice), which had appointed fourteen of the fifteen judges who delivered the controversial ruling. The protests were spearheaded by the feminist social movement *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* (All-Poland Women's Strike). This campaign was originally established in 2016 in response to earlier proposed tightening of abortion laws, but has since engaged with broader social and feminist issues. The protests of 2020 can thus be viewed as a culmination of four years of campaign activity in response to the ongoing struggle around reproductive rights in Poland. Both sides of the debate must also be viewed in the context of a broader historical fluctuation of discourses surrounding gender and reproductive rights in Poland: from communist-era liberalised abortion laws to the systematic pressure following the transformation in 1989 for tighter regulation on abortion by the new Catholic and conservative elite (Szczuka 2004).

This study examines the multimodal speech acts – which, following van Leeuwen (2004), we refer to as 'communicative acts' – through which the protest was constructed and indeed enacted (Gamson 1995). Using a critical approach to multimodal discourse analysis, we examine the use of communicative acts in Facebook posts by *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*, setting out to answer two sets of questions:

1. What communicative acts are present in the discourse *of Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* and how are they realised multimodally?
2. What overarching role do the communicative acts play in the discursive construction of the protest, and how do these draw upon and contribute towards discourses of feminist dissent?

By answering these questions, we elucidate the interrelations of communicative choices in online space and the discursive construction of dissent. This is especially important as digital protest movements have been increasingly theorised as polyphonic discourses with the potential to reclaim women's voices and '(re)appropriate patriarchal signifiers' (Baer 2016:29). While some see the *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* discourse as a 'communication phenomenon' pertaining only to Poland (Paradowski 2021), these interrelations have broader relevance in the context of rising authoritarian, nationalist and populist political movements across Europe, which seek to roll back the reproductive and civil rights won by women in earlier decades (Cameron 2020).

2. Communicative acts and the construction of protest

The starting point for this study is the performative view that language is a form of action, and practices such as protests are not only represented by discourse, but are actually performed through it (Austin 1962; Searle 1969, 1976). As Austin (1962:5) argued, 'the uttering of sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as "just", saying something'. This idea that language can not only describe the world around us but also 'do things' and evoke changes in it is central to our examination of how protests are constructed.

When conceptualising speech acts, Austin (1962) argued that three forms of action can be observed in relation to an utterance: (i) a locutionary act – the act of uttering specific words that have specific meaning and reference (i.e., what is said); (ii) an illocutionary act – the act of the speaker, for example, making a statement or expressing disagreement (i.e., what the utterance is produced to do); and (iii) a perlocutionary act – the action evoked as a result of the production of the utterance (i.e., what effects the utterance has on its audience). In order for the illocutionary force of a speech act to be successfully inferred, certain conditions need to be met. Austin (1962:110) demonstrates this with an example relevant to protest: 'If you hurl a tomato at a political meeting (or bawl "I protest" when someone else does-if that is performing an action) the consequence will probably be to make others aware that you object, and to make them think that you hold certain political beliefs'. However, this act of throwing a tomato during a political meeting will only be inferred as an act of protest if others attending the meeting are familiar with that cultural convention. Such conditions are described by Austin (1962) as 'felicity conditions', with speech acts only being 'felicitous' – that is, successful – if these are met.

Performative theories of language, and speech act theory specifically, have informed previous studies of protest discourse. For example, Chrisman and Hubbs (2021:n.p.) argue that protest 'can be viewed as a complex speech act, where a person takes some communicative means in an effort to (i) convey opposition to some object and (ii) prescribe redress related to that opposition'. Meanwhile, Kasanga (2014:19) describes protesting as a 'social and political act' in which the signs carried by protesters constitute 'mediational means to clarify demands and express feelings and, thus, add to physical action such as demonstration, sit-ins, chanting and barricades'. The most developed interpretation of protest as a form of speech act is offered by Gasaway Hill (2018:5), who describes protest as a 'verbal act of dissent' and notes the potential for language used in protests to 'stir… imaginations' and 'urg[e] people to call for change and others to respond to that call'.

Another set of important functions that protests perform are those which contribute to the construction of protest-related meanings and identities (Gasaway Hill, 2018), which in turn influences how the protest itself and its legitimacy are perceived (van Leeuwen 2008). Gasaway Hill (2018:9) argues:

> For legitimization to be real in the sense of being effective or persuasive, speakers, listeners, and onlookers need to recognize, even if grudgingly, the reasonableness and the appropriateness of protester behaviors and identity, developed in and through such behaviors, and usually represented and mediated through video, audio, or print media.

While focusing initially just on language, in more recent years the study of speech acts has become increasingly multimodal in focus. This move has likewise marked an important development in the study of multimodal discourse from being concerned primarily with its representative functions to thinking about how it achieves (inter)action. As van Leeuwen (2004:120) observes, '[i]mages have for the most part been studied as representations rather than as interactions […] [b]ut clearly images are also used to do things to or for or with people'. To reflect this potential for speech acts to be reified multimodally in discourse, van Leeuwen offers the more flexible term 'communicative acts', which we adopt in this study. Regarding protest discourse specifically, research through a speech act lens has still tended to adopt a monomodal perspective, with notable exceptions being Chrisman and

Hubbs's (2021) study of the protests by the group Pussy Riot and Elnakkouzi's (2019) analysis of strategic manoeuvring in Arab Spring Political Cartoons.

The present study builds on the limited literature exploring multimodal speech and communication acts, as well as the even slimmer body of research addressing these in the context of protest, by examining the types and functions of communicative acts through which *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* both constructed and coordinated protest action. Importantly, we also consider the role played by the context in which such discourse is produced, both online and offline by considering the extent to which social media platforms such as Facebook and the broader sociocultural context of Poland influenced the forms, functions and meanings of the communicative acts that we observe in this campaign. Our findings on multimodal communicative acts also provide a window into the potential of such multimodal online mobilisations for the construction and contestation of power and the ideology in the context of feminist dissent.

3. Methodology

The data analysed in this study comprises posts on the official Facebook profile of the *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* campaign (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet n.d.). This public webpage represents the primary online means through which the campaign conducted and promoted its activities during the protests, accumulating over half a million followers at the time of writing. Digital communication channels such as this took on an even greater importance at the time of the protests, since COVID-19 restrictions in Poland prevented many from meeting – and indeed, protesting – in person (see also Jones et al. 2022). We collected posts dated between the tribunal ruling on 22 October 2020 and 3 November 2020, when the Polish Government announced its decision to delay the implementation of the legislation. We collected all posts uploaded by the campaign organisers, excluding live-feeds, duplicate posts and posts from other users that were subsequently shared by the account. This gave us 137 posts for analysis.

We subjected these posts to a multimodal critical discourse analysis aimed at identifying the multisemiotic forms and functions of the communicative acts which constituted the posts. Both researchers analysed all of the posts comprising the data and coded these for the presence and functions of communicative acts. We adopted Searle's (1969, 1976) taxonomy, according to which speech acts can be grouped into five functional categories:

I. Assertives – expressing the speaker's belief in something being true (e.g., asserting, concluding);
II. Directives – attempting to get the hearer to do something (e.g., requesting, suggesting);
III. Commissives – committing oneself to some future action (e.g., promising, threatening);
IV. Expressives – expressing an attitude towards something (e.g., thanking, praising);
V. Declarations – evoking immediate effects in the world (e.g. declaring war, marrying).

As noted, our analysis focused not only on communicative acts accomplished through linguistic choices, but also visual ones (see van Leeuwen 2004, 2008). On a practical note, some posts could be coded as containing more than one communicative act and some communicative acts were interpreted as performing multiple functions.

In line with our critical agenda, we also interpreted the communicative acts in terms of their potential to construct and legitimise the protest, related identities and society more broadly. Here, we relied on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an interdisciplinary perspective on discourse studies (Fairclough 2015[1989]) which examines how discourse is used to create, sustain and counter

'relationships of power based in dominance, inequality, and/or injustice within social and political contexts' (Gasaway Hill 2018:49–50). CDA is thus both '[i]nterpretive and explanatory', as it seeks to address 'social problems by investigating how power functions discursively and how discourses, as forms of social action, constitute society and culture' (Gasaway Hill 2018:49). We adopt a view of power as relational: 'power is not a thing possessed, but instead a relationship in process. For protest, the circulation of power relates protesters […] to the agents of the social, political, and cultural hegemonies at play' (Gasaway Hill 2018:16). Multimodal CDA then critiques how society and power relations are constituted through discourses which manifest not only through language but a combination of modal affordances (Machin and Mayr 2012; Brookes et al. 2021).

4. Analysis

4.1. Assertives

Assertives used on the *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* Facebook profile function mainly as means of providing information concerning both the ruling and the protests. Yet such communicative acts importantly allow the campaign to assert its ideological stance on the ruling, thereby imbuing the act with its own subjectivity.

[FIGURE 1 GOES HERE]

Figure 1. #OstraJazda, dzień 4. Czekając na "wyrok" ('#AWildRide, day 4. Waiting for the "ruling".').

This post offers coverage of events leading up to the announcement of the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal. Semiotic choices in this assertive convey a critical and a feminist stance. The word *wyrok* 'ruling' can also denote a sentence passed to a criminal in a judicial context, thus implying that the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling will function like a punishment to the women being stripped of their reproductive rights. The verb *czekając* 'waiting' also passivises its recipients, framing them as helpless in this event. The quotation marks around the word 'ruling' work as a distancing device (Johnson 2017), expressing negative stance towards the ruling and casting doubt on its legitimacy. Finally, the featuring of umbrellas in the initial frame of the livestream references the alleged use of umbrellas by Polish suffragettes (see RMF24 2020), allowing for the indexing of a feminist stance.

Through assertives, the campaign group also makes identity claims and constructs in-group and out-group identities in relation to the protests.

[FIGURE 2 GOES HERE]

Figure 2. Jest nas dużo i jesteśmy bardzo złe. ('There are many of us and we are very angry.')

This post, dated not long after the announcement of the ruling, constructs the in-group of protesters. We learn that this group is large ('there are many of us') – a message that is visually reinforced through the accompanying image of a crowd of protesters, where the consciously partial depiction (as the full extent of the crowd extends beyond the scope of the image) creates an impression of the group as even more numerous. In this way, the image functions as a visual metonymy – a partial representation in which a few represented participants function as a stand-in for a larger whole. This is further enforced linguistically through repeated use of the collective 'we' (*nas* ['of us'] and *jesteśmy* [1st person plural form of the verb 'to be']) whose un(der)specificity can connote that the referents are limitless (Wales 1996). The use of the feminine form *złe* ('angry'), the selection of female represented participants in the image and the sole use of shades of pink – a chrome that is culturally synonymous with women and femininity (Koller 2008) – combine to present the issue at-

hand as a women's issue. Thus, the angry 'we' depicted in the post could potentially extend in its reference to all women in Poland. Such constructions, occurring towards the beginning of this set of protests, help to establish the in-group protester identity – that is, the potentially broad set of referents to whom 'we' applies in subsequent posts throughout the campaign.

Assertives also establish out-group reference, particularly through the subcategory of accusations. The targets of accusations span several major institutions of Polish society, including the Constitutional Tribunal, the government, the police, the Polish Catholic church and occasionally, members of the public who express physically violent opposition towards the protesters.

> Policja i Żandarmeria broni kościołów, tymczasem naziole biegają po ulicach i zaczepiają ludzi. Pamiętajcie: #KiedyPaństwoMnieNieChroniMojejSiostryBędęBronić
>
> 'The police and the gendarmerie protects churches while *naziole* [In Polish, *naziole* is a derogatory neologism derived from the word 'Nazi' and modified by the suffix *-ole* (plural)] are roaming the streets and harassing people. Remember: #WhenTheCountryDoesNotProtectMeIDefendMySister'

This extract, posted on the date of one of the largest protests, expresses several identity claims about the out-group – specifically, the police, the military gendarmerie and the underspecified national institutions. The conjunction *tymczasem* ('while') contrasts the inaction of the police and gendarmerie with the harassment of protesters in the streets. The police and gendarmerie are accused of wrongdoing here when presented as protecting buildings (churches, which arguably stand in metonymically for the Polish Catholic church), rather than protecting people. Later in the post, the accusation is extended to broader national institutions, indexed through *państwo* ('the country'). Against the backdrop of this out-group, we also see the discursive emergence of Polish women's solidarity through references to 'sisterhood'. The power of the assertion of oppositional groups in framing the protest rests on the delineation of opposed sides that go beyond protesters and opponents, feminists and antifeminists, to involve the opposition of women ('angry', and united across all Poland) and the state (as represented by its institutions).

Assertives, then, through their ability to make claims about the world and social actors within it, provide important means of constructing the protest, helping to delineate the boundaries between protesters and those opposing them. At the same time, the construction of opposition allows a construction of in-group protest solidarity. Arguably, this representation of collectivities constitutes one of the key aspects of the discursive construction of protests.

4.2. Expressives

Expressives feature prominently across the posts and allow for the expression of positively or negatively valenced attitudes and emotionality, and with those, the construction of polarised in-groups and out-groups. Constructions of in-group relationships entail the expression of positive emotionality, often through the specific communicative acts of thanking or praising.

[FIGURE 3 GOES HERE]

Figure 3. A co tu się wydarzyło? Dziękujemy! ('What happened here? Thank you!').

[FIGURE 4 GOES HERE]

Figure 4. Love (unicorn emoji).

[FIGURE 5 GOES HERE]

Figure 5. Dziewuchy Węgorzewo (red heart emoji) ('Węgrzowo girls').

These posts express gratitude and praise towards Polish senators (Figure 3) for supporting *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*; towards Greenpeace (Figure 4) for sponsoring a pro-protest banner placed near a nationally important landmark; and towards a local protest group (Figure 5) for staging a demonstration in sympathy with the campaign's cause. Such expressions of positive affect are important aspects of the presentation of *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet's* subjectivity and further delineation of the boundaries between the in-group and the out-group. Such affect is performed both linguistically, through performative verbs (i.e., *dziękujemy* 'thank' and *love*), and visually, through the red heart emoji (Figure 5; Logi and Zappavigna 2021). The unicorn emoji (Figure 4) has an open-ended meaning in Poland, being associated with wishes, uniqueness, peace and love, as well as broadly symbolising the LGBTQI+ community.

By contrast, the out-group become objects of negatively valanced expressions of affect.

> „Wyrokiem" pseudoTK, czyli oświadczeniem, które za kilka lat straci rację bytu, bo sam orzekający Trybunał Konstytucyjny jest nielegalny i jego decyzje będą podważanie [original spelling]. Rzeczywiście, imponujące zwycięstwo w sytuacji, gdy ok. 70% Polek i Polaków opowiada się za wolnym wyborem.
>
> 'Through the "ruling" of pseudoCT [Constitutional Tribunal], an announcement that will lose its validity in a few years as the constitutional tribunal itself is illegal and its decisions will be challenged. Impressive victory, indeed, in a situation where approx. 70% of Poles [in Polish, both in feminine and masculine form] support the freedom of choice.'

This post sarcastically frames the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling as an 'impressive victory' and foregrounds its misalignment with public attitudes around reproductive rights in Poland. This serves to delegitimise the ruling – and, by extension, the authority of the Tribunal itself – while at the same time legitimising the protest campaign's cause. Recurring references to public attitude surveys perform an evidential function in constructing the Tribunal as out of touch with the Polish public. Importantly, this constructs an opposition that goes beyond these women and protesters towards a broader collectivity of Polish people of all and any gender identity. Such constructions of opposition between the 'people' and the 'state' extend to other authority figures and groups, particularly the leader of the governing party, Jarosław Kaczyński.

[FIGURE 6 GOES HERE]

Figure 6. Marta Lempart: Niezmiernie cieszy mnie upokorzenie Kaczyńskiego. Musiał odezwać się do ludzi. ('Marta Lempart: I'm extremely happy about Kaczyński's humiliation. He had to speak to people').

In this and the previous post, empowerment comes not only through referring to out-group 'humiliation', but also through these moments where the power of the state, defended by its institutions, is matched by the collective power of the 'people' – hinting also at the stance of institutional Poland as being only temporary and prone to change.

Criticism is also expressed towards the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, which has been extremely influential for many years in matters relating to gender- and sexuality-related rights (Szwed and Zielińska 2017) and continues to advocate a strong anti-abortion stance.

> Czytałyście pana Gądeckiego, biskupa? Jak cieszy się, że w Polsce będzie zakaz aborcji? Wiecie, jak cieszą się kościelni sadyści? Wiecie, jak jutro katofanatycy będą świętować zwycięstwo nad kobietami? Fakt legalizacji tortur?
>
> 'Did you read [the words of] mister Gądecki, a bishop? [And] how happy he is that there will be an abortion ban in Poland? Do you know, how happy the church sadists are? Do you know, how the Catholic fanatics will celebrate their victory over women tomorrow? The act of legalising torture?'

This extract equates the Tribunal's ruling to the legalisation of the torture of women. It also presents adherents of the Catholic Church as extremists (*katofanatycy*, a derisory neologism and a blend of 'Catholic' and 'fanatics') who are assigned agency in the torture (*kościelni sadyści* 'church sadists').

We also see in these posts how representations of protest collectivity fluctuate between a genderless body of all citizens and one of women specifically. Notably, women tend to be focalised in depictions of victimisation and violence ('the victory over women'). At the same time, victimisation and empowerment go hand-in-hand through creative subversions of dominant discourses, where the visual plays a major role. Subversion of this kind often concerns the church as the out-group target of critical expressives, which grew especially visible in a series of posts in the days leading up to and on a coordinated protest action, *Słowo na niedzielę* ('Sunday message'). Here, protesters were encouraged to visit Catholic churches and distribute campaign materials.

[FIGURE 7 GOES HERE]

Figure 7. Słowo na niedzielę 25/10 ('Sunday message 25/10')

In this post, criticism of the Tribunal's ruling and the church's support of it is expressed through the visual, metaphorical equation of the ruling with women's martyrdom, which can be viewed as an extension of the conception of the ruling as a form of torture. Specifically, a visibly pregnant woman is depicted on the cross in close proximity to the metadiscursive framing of the message as a 'Sunday message' (an expression used in the Polish Catholic Church to refer to readings from the Bible, usually in the context of Sunday sermons). Their layout in this visual configuration works by subversion of the potent Christian visual symbol of martyrdom, establishing a visual discursive link between women's martyrdom and the teachings of the Polish Catholic church.

4.3. Commissives

Interpreted as communicative acts which express commitment to some form of future action, the commissives observed in the posts largely commit their issuers to ongoing participation in the protests.

> A do Was, posępne dziady, mówimy: znacie dnia, ani godziny. Do zobaczenia wszędzie.
>
> 'And to you, miserable gits, we say: you know the day or the hour. See you everywhere.'

> Dałyśmy ultimatum: macie czas do środy. Tymczasem straszy się nas prokuraturą, obwinia za pandemię, która zaczęła się w marcu, Kaczyński szczuje na nas media, wysyła na nas policję,

a niedługo być może wojsko. Czas minął, dlatego jutro z całej Polski zjeżdżamy się do Warszawy…

'We gave [you] an ultimatum: you have time until Wednesday. Meanwhile, we are threatened with prosecutors, we're blamed for the pandemic which started in March, Kaczyński sets the media on us, sends the police to our protests, and soon maybe the military. The time is up, that's why tomorrow, we're coming to Warsaw from every part of Poland…'

Notably in the first post, *dziady* (translated here as 'gits') has recently evolved to mean people, mainly men, with outdated views, while the phrase 'you know the day or the hour' may be a reference to a passage from the Bible: 'you do not know the day or the hour'. Both posts – the first in immediate response to the Constitutional Tribunal ruling and the second in response to the unwavering position of the Tribunal and the government – express commitment to participation in the protests in direct response to the actions of the out-group.

Because the promised future action here is one assumed to be undesirable to its recipient(s), these types of commissives can also be interpreted as threats. The felicity conditions required for such commissives to function as threats (see Christensen 2019) are arguably met through the attendant construction of the protesters as many in number and mobilised to act collectively – they are *wszędzie* 'everywhere' and *z całej Polski* 'in every part of Poland'. At other points, positively affectively marked commissives express a commitment to solidarity and support.

Jesteśmy! Będziemy!
NIGDY NIE BĘDZIESZ SZŁA SAMA / POLSKA!

'We are! [And] we will be [there]!
YOU NEVER WALK ALONE / POLAND!'

This post is accompanied by a link to a report on violence committed against the protesters by some members of the public who opposed the campaign. Importantly, the expression *szła sama* 'walk alone' is rendered in the feminine form, again making identity claims about the addressees of such posts and perhaps reflecting a specific concern for violence committed against women. Tellingly, the post came on the day that the proposed legislation was paused and thus indicates a commitment to a longer-term programme of protest action. However, in order for this ongoing commitment to protest to be continuously expressed, the campaign also requires its supporters remain committed and not be cowed by threats of violence. Such expressions of solidarity with supporters in the context of reports of violence may thus be a way to ensure continued support.

4.4. Directives

Directives serve two primary goals in the campaign discourse: i) mobilising participation in and support for the protests, and ii) making demands of the government and other members of the out-group.

Zapraszamy w piątek na 19.00.Warszawa, Mickiewicza 49, pod dom smętnego dziada Kaczyńskiego. Tramwajem, autobusem, metrem, samochodem, pociągiem, piechotą, rowerem.

> ‘Friday 7pm, we invite you [to meet] outside the house of the miserable git, Kaczyński, [address]. Via tram, bus, underground, in a car, on a train, on foot, on a bike.’

[FIGURE 8 GOES HERE]

Figure 8. NA WARSZAWĘ! 17:00 30/10 #ToJestWojna (‘TOWARDS WARSAW! 5pm 30/10 #ThisIsWar’)

In both examples, requests are issued to followers of the account. The first functions as an invitation to join a protest staged outside Kaczyński’s residence. The second extract (Figure 8) adopts a decidedly more urgent tone; the directive, *NA WARSZAWĘ!* (‘TOWARDS WARSAW!’) is expressed in the imperative mood (resembling a war cry) and enjoins protesters to join the planned march in the nation’s capital, Warszawa. This metaphorical war cry is further reinforced through the inclusion of the hashtag *#ToJestWojna* ‘#ThisIsWar’. The different levels of forcefulness with which these directives are expressed map broadly onto the different stages of the protests, with the organisers arguably adopting a more urgent tone in the lead up to the largest protest, which took place in the capital on 30 October 2020. The extract below was taken from a post which shortly followed the climactic march in Warszawa.

> Wiemy, że jesteście zmęczone i zmęczeni. Lepiej czuć zmęczenie, niż taki potworny strach
>
> We know you are tired [in Polish, both in feminine and masculine forms]. It’s better to feel tiredness than immense fear

Importantly, the elicitation of support and participation in the protests varies in tone over time. At first, when urging followers to participate in demonstrations organised directly after the announcement of the ruling, they were inviting. The tone then grows in urgency at the peak of the campaign. Then, following the climactic protest in the capital, the campaign’s rhetoric becomes more persuasive. Such adaptability in the forms adopted to realise directives reflects, we would argue, an attempt by the campaign to display its cognisance of, and responsiveness to, the mood (and likely fatigue) of many of its followers.

It is interesting to note a great metalinguistic awareness in the posts, especially in the construction of a gendered discourse. The above illustrates one pattern in the posts: the use both feminine and masculine forms, which is in itself indexical of a certain political stance and commitment to antisexism in Poland, and Slavic-language contexts more broadly (Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak 2019). Moreover, direct invitation to a shared rethinking of protest language is part of an important trend in the directives issued towards protesters and account followers. Such posts, which arguably construct the campaign itself as a democratic process, become particularly frequent as the collective action gains momentum.

> Od wtorku zbieramy wasze propozycje i uwagi do naszej wstępnej listy postulatów. Będziemy to robić codziennie, dlatego dalej piszcie do nas o tym, co jest dla Was ważne i co Waszym zdaniem powinno się zmienić w Polsce! Poza tym co w grafice, pojawiła się też (wiele razy) uwaga, żeby z samych postulatów usunąć wulgaryzmy. Co o tym myślicie? Wasz Strajk.
>
> ‘From Tuesday, we are collecting your suggestions and comments on our initial list of demands. We will be doing this daily so continue to write to us about what matters to you and what, in your opinion, should change in Poland! Apart from what’s included in the graphic,

there have been (many) comments about removing expletives from our demands. What do you think? Your Protest.'

This elicitation of participation in coordinating the protests, and regulating its language (avoiding 'expletives'), give its recipients a stake in the campaign. At the same time, it provides a rebuttal against the potential accusation that the demonstration coordinators have imposed their particular worldview onto protesters. In the post above, this is most tangible in the construction of the protest as a thing possessed by reader-viewers (*Wasz Strajk* 'Your Protest').

Directives were also targeted towards the out-group. An example of this is the directive *Wypierdalać!* 'Fuck off!'. As one of the main campaign slogans, this directive features prominently in the language and imagery used across the campaign profile, including in recurrent use of a searchable hashtag at the end of posts and on photographed banners and placards.

[FIGURE 9 GOES HERE]

Figure 9. Wypierdalać! 'Fuck off!'

The intended out-group addressee can be inferred not only from its meaning and form – the demand for ceasing interference in somebody's matters expressed through a direct unmitigated directive – but also through the images that accompany this slogan. For example, in the image in Figure 9, the viewer adopts the perspective of an out-group member, as we are not positioned amongst or behind this crowd of protesters. Instead, we are separated from the group and approach them, and they us, from an oppositional stance. The banner, meanwhile, is positioned at the front of the group so that it will be read by out-group members, with the directive, to 'fuck off!', thereby issued to them.

The directive to 'fuck off!' is also realised through more creative visual means, as illustrated in the example in Figure 10. The foregrounded placard, with its layering of a white outline of the uterus set against the black background, is stylised such that it resembles a sonogram. Sonograms have been observed to offer disembodied depictions of parents, with the unborn instead being the focus (Duden 1993). However, such a representation is importantly counteracted in this case and utilised to place visual agency with the often passive uterus itself. In this case, the disembodied uterus is rendered autonomous and granted agency through personification, being represented to raise its middle finger to the audience, thereby visually performing the directive to 'fuck off!' and acting as a symbolic representation of reproductive rights.

[FIGURE 10 GOES HERE]

Figure 10. Uterus placard.

Directives can perform a range of functions, with two distinct audiences – broadly, the ingroup and the out-group. In the process, the campaign profile adopts a heteroglossic character, wherein its voice can be constructed either as an empathetic and encouraging friend or a threatening foe depending on the addressee of the given communicative act. As the messaging directed at the out-group tends to feature in images more than text, or at least in text embedded within images, such communicative acts are arguably designed to be shared and circulated in contexts and amongst audiences that extend beyond this profile and its followers.

4.5. Declarations

Declarations evoke changes in the world simply by the act of their production. As such, these communicative acts require their producers to be in a position of sufficient power for them to be

felicitous. This renders them particularly susceptible to factors located outside of the act of communication. In the context under study, when declarations are used, it often constructs the protests as well as the broader activities of those involved. The post presented below provides one example of such a declaration, which also forms one of the main slogans of the protests: 'This is war!'.

[FIGURE 11 GOES HERE]

Figure 11. 'This is war!' post.

> 'To anyone, who wants to join us, but can't leave the house. Be with us on [your] balconies, terraces, in windows. Be with one another, together. Make some noise!! Let's remember this day! This is war!!'

Such declarations of war are used in a range of ways, acting simultaneously as means of rallying supporters while also intimidating the opposing out-group (and in this latter sense, arguably functioning as a commissive (threat) as well as a declaration). This declaration also metaphorically frames the protests as a war, foregrounding the protest's oppositional character. In this way, the use of declarations is thus inevitably tied to the construction of the protest.

> To jest PARADA WOLNOŚCI, to jest KARNAWAŁ WOLNOŚCI, to jest WOLNOŚĆ, której nam żaden przestraszony gnojek nie odbierze. Nawet jak będzie go obstawiać, a nas straszyć CAŁA polska policja. #ParadaWolności
>
> 'This is a FREEDOM PARADE, this is a FREEDOM CARNIVAL, this is FREEDOM, which no scared shit can take away from us. Even if he is protected, and we intimidated by the ENTIRE Polish police. #FreedomParade'

[FIGURE 12 GOES HERE]

Figure 12. Robimy rzeczy!!!! Robimy Polskę!!!! Wszyscy razem dla Każdej i Każdego!!!! ('We are doing things!!!! We are creating [in the original text, literally 'doing'] Poland!!!! All together for Everyone [in feminine and masculine forms]!!!!')

In these examples, both posted on date of the large protest in the capital – the tone of the declarations changes away from 'this is war!', which is used more prominently at the start of the weeklong campaign. The declarations frame the activity as a celebration of freedom, and the war has evolved, discursively, into a party (specifically, a 'parade' and 'carnival'). The post in Figure 12 provides images of the march with the accompanying commentary declaring that the protesters are 'creating Poland'. Again, such constructions construe Poland and its ruling institutions as separate things – keying once more into the notion that the government's power and influence is temporary while the power of the people is enduring. This importantly relies on potent national narratives of social movements being able to bring about significant sociopolitical change. If we extend the war frame seen earlier, these declarations can be interpreted as (implied) declarations of victory, since freedom and the opportunity to (re)create a country are, in war, surely spoils reserved for the victors. Yet at the same time, since the protests are not complete by this point, such declarations can also be viewed as contributing to the construction of the protest as a powerful social movement, not only vast in number but also capable of enacting significant social change.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* campaign utilised communicative acts as means to both construct and

indeed enact the 2020 protests around reproductive rights in Poland. It did so by linguistically and visually framing the social actors and events involved, thereby constructing an ingroup with a legitimate cause and an oppositional out-group whose cause was illegitimate. Significantly, the communicative acts drawn upon also contributed to the protest action in more direct ways by orchestrating collective action, ensuring the continuity of that action and warning the out-group of the consequences of interfering with reproductive rights. In this sense, then, the communicative acts observed provide means for the group to both coordinate collective action and to express (feminist) dissent directly.

Central to the campaign's digital presence is the highlighting of the protests' supporters – as Polish women or as all Polish people – on one hand, and the state institutions (that is, the Constitutional Tribunal, the Polish government and the Polish Catholic church) on the other. To an extent, this finding supports recent research on the citizen discourses of the Polish protests as primarily acting via oppositionality rather than a particularly coherent political message (Paradowski 2021); we indeed see little attempt to address the wider systemic hierarchies in which women's struggles in Poland are embedded. Still, the fluctuating representations of collective womanhood and a rising of 'all of Poland' plays a role in disrupting power relations and established patriarchal narratives, especially when the oppositionality becomes multimodally blurred (e.g. in the depiction of the female body and the central Christian symbol of martyrdom). Importantly, this highlights the power of citizen collectivity in contrast to the current – but temporary – authority wielded and defended by state institutions. Mobilisation around reproductive rights, as a central point of the ideological tug-of-war in Poland, is thus also constructed as undermining the (anti-)gender ideological position of the major institutional powers in the country. This is further reinforced through reference to symbols of women's rights and feminist activism, both from within Poland and abroad (e.g. references to an umbrella and international protest songs). Language in itself plays an important role in this process, as well as in the campaign's online communication more generally. Many of the posts we analysed strategically manipulate resources such as grammatical gender, gender-inclusive language and the gendering of inanimate entities in order to construct desired ingroup stances and 'to gender' protest collectivity in varying ways. The meta-attention to language (and its gender-appropriate aspects) could be viewed as integral to regulating power relations within the campaign, from gendering the post addressees in assertives and expressives to inviting participation in fashioning the protest's language and style.

At this point, we want to reflect briefly on how the use of communication acts interacted with the deployment of affordances of social media in the campaign's digital communication. Through hashtags, the major campaign slogans such as 'fuck off' became established across the discourse as a symbol of the angry collective alliances (see also Milani 2021 on the use of 'Fuck Off!' in queer protest contexts), allowing also to express rebellion against gender-based norms. At the same time, their very linguistic realisations were explicitly thematised and negotiated, contributing in many cases to the realisation of communicative acts which furthered the aims of the campaign. Importantly, the 'ambient affiliation' (Zappavigna 2014) afforded within the online spaces that are created by such 'searchable talk' (Zappavigna 2018) allow for the creation of a culturally diverse and geographically sparse ingroup of protest supporters. The more affective communicative acts directed into these spaces then potentially enhance this sense of solidarity, and with that a more coherent ingroup identity. Such searchable talk therefore also offers significant practical benefits to protest organisers, affording means through which campaign messages can spread to and recruit supporters from more geographically and culturally diverse contexts. Likewise, the use of sharable graphics aimed at out-groups, when used in conjunction with linguistic communicative acts instructing the ingroup to circulate those graphics in their own social networks, demonstrates not only the heteroglossic character of many of the postings, but also the potential for social media platforms to extend

participation in the campaign and spread its message globally. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the campaign also frequently relied on specific codes and symbols comprehensible mainly to those familiar with the Polish language and culture; the campaign was clearly influenced by and directed at the sociocultural context in which it was produced.

Poland currently has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. However, results of opinion polls carried out in the country suggest a growing mismatch between the general public's stance on abortion and the position of powerful national institutions such as the government, the Constitutional Tribunal and the Polish Catholic Church. Social movements like *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* have played an important role in the ideological struggle over reproductive rights in Poland, giving voice to large swathes of Polish society. The enduring threat to reproductive rights posed by ultraconservative institutions and populist political powers means that such campaigns are likely to remain not only relevant, but essential in the organisation and expression of feminist dissent. At the time of writing, the United States Supreme Court has overruled the constitutional right to an abortion, immediately outlawing abortion across many states. This controversial ruling has met with protests and other forms of resistance from those who, much like those participating in *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*, seek to defend reproductive rights in the country. To understand these and future mobilisations – in Poland, the U.S. and elsewhere – it will be important to examine the organising role that social media has to play and how future technological developments may provide new opportunities for citizens to engage 'in acts of political creativity, negotiation, dialogue, and productive disagreement' (Shaw 2016:3). The present study has demonstrated the importance of adopting a multimodal perspective in such an endeavour, focusing not only on the linguistic but also the visual and other emergent modes of protest and dissent.

References

Austin, John Longshaw (1962) *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baer, Hester (2016) Redoing feminism: Digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism. *Feminist Media Studies* 16(1): 17-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.1093070.

Brookes, Gavin, Putland, Emma and Harvey, Kevin (2021) Multimodality: examining visual representations of dementia in public health discourse'. In Gavin Brookes and Daniel Hunt (eds) *Analysing Health Communication: Discourse Approaches*, 241–269. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cameron, Deborah (2020) Language and gender: Mainstreaming and the persistence of patriarchy. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 263: 25-30. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2020-2078.

Chrisman, Matthew and Hubbs, Graham (2021) Protests. In Justin Khoo and Rachel Sterken (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Social and Political Philosophy of Language*, 179-192. London: Routledge.

Christensen, Tanya Karoli (2019) Indirect threats as an illegal speech act. In Ken Ramshøj Christensen, Johanna Wood and Henrik Jørgensen (eds) *The Sign of the V: Papers in Honour of Sten Vikner*, 113–130. Århus: Aarhus Universitet.

Duden, Barbara (1993) *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Elnakkouzi, Rania (2019) Strategic manoeuvring in Arab Spring political cartoons. In Christopher Hart and Darren Kelsey (eds) *Discourses of Disorder: Riots, Strikes and Protests in the Media*, 154–174. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Fairclough, Norman (2015[1989]) *Language and Power*, 3rd edition. London: Routledge.

Gamson, William A. (1995) Constructing social protest. In Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds) *Social Movements and Culture*, 85–106. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Gasaway Hill, Mary Lynne (2018) *The Language of Protest: Acts of Performance, Identity, and Legitimacy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Johnson, Michael (2017) Quotation through history: a historical case for the proper treatment of quotation. In Paul Saka and Michael Johnson (eds) *The Semantics and Pragmatics of Quotation*, 281–302. Cham: Springer.

Jones, Lucy, Chałupnik, Małgorzata, Mackenzie, Jai and Mullany, Louise (2022) 'STFU and start listening to how scared we are': resisting misogyny on Twitter via #NotAllMen. *Discourse, Context & Media* 47: 100596. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2022.100596.

Kasanga, Luanga A. (2014) The linguistic landscape: mobile signs, code choice, symbolic meaning and territoriality in the discourse of protest. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 230: 19–44. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2014-0025.

Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak, Agnieszka (2019). Gender specification of Polish nouns naming people: language system and public debate arguments. *Slovenščina* 2.0 7(2): 141–171. https://doi.org/10.4312/slo2.0.2019.2.141-171.

Koller, Veronika (2008) 'Not just a colour': pink as a gender and sexuality marker in visual communication. *Visual Communication* 7(4): 395–423. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357208096209.

Logi, Lorenzo and Zappavigna, Michele (2021) A social semiotic perspective on emoji: how emoji and language interact to make meaning in digital messages. *New Media & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211032965.

Machin, David and Mayr, Andrea (2012) *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. London: SAGE Publishing.

Milani, Tommaso M. (2021) Fuck off! Recasting queer anger for a politics of (self-)discomfort. *Gender and Language* 15(3): 439–446. https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.20885.

Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (n.d.) Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet - Home – Facebook. *Facebook.* Retrieved 8 January 2021 from https://en-gb.facebook.com/ogolnopolskistrajkkobiet/.

Paradowski, Rafał Piotr (2021) Women's strike in Poland as a communication phenomenon on Twitter. In Ewelina Dziwak and Kamila Gheorghe (eds) *Wokół strajków kobiet [On women's strikes]*, 239–268. Katowice: ArchaeGraph.

Plucinska, Joanna and Wlodarczak-Semczuk, Anna (27 Jan 2021) Poland puts into effect new restrictions on abortion. *Reuters.* Retrieved 1 August 2021 from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-abortion-idUSKBN29W1ZN.

RMF24 (26 Oct 2020) Czerwona błyskawica, czarna parasolka, druciany wieszak. Co oznaczają symbole strajku kobiet? [Red lightning, black umbrella, metal hanger. What is the meaning of women's strike symbols?]. *RMF24.* Retrieved 1 August 2021 from https://www.rmf24.pl/raporty/raport-strajk-kobiet/news-czerwona-blyskawica-czarna-parasolka-druciany-wieszak-co-ozn,nId,4816751#crp_state=1.

Searle, John R. (1969) *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, John R. (1976) A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society* 5(1): 1–23.

Shaw, Fiona (2016) "Bitch I said hi": The Bye Felipe campaign and discursive activism in mobile dating apps. *Social Media + Society* 2(4): 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116672889.

Szczuka, Kazimiera (2004) *Milczenie Owieczek: Rzecz o Aborcji [The Silence of the Lambs: On Abortion]*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB.

Szwed, Anna and Zielińska, Katarzyna 2017. A war on gender? The Roman catholic church's discourse on gender in Poland. In Sabrina P. Ramet and Irena Borowik (eds) *Religion, Politics, and Values in Poland: Continuity and Change Since 1989,* 113-136. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

van Leeuwen, Theo (2004) *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London: Routledge.

van Leeuwen, Theo (2008) *Discourse and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Wales, Katie (1996) *Personal Pronouns in Present-Day English.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zappavigna, Michele (2014) Enacting identity in microblogging through ambient affiliation. *Discourse & Communication* 8(2): 209–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481313510816.

Zappavigna, Michele (2018) *Searchable Talk: Hashtags and the Discourse of Social Tagging*. London: Bloomsbury.