

The Discursive Construction of “Truth” in the Email Newsletter of an Anti-Genderist Polish NGO

DOMINIKA BARAN

Duke University

Abstract: *Since at least 2012, right-wing politicians, media, and the Catholic Church have been demonizing the LGBTQ+ community as promoters of the “LGBT ideology,” a substitute term for “gender ideology” in Poland. The vitriolic anti-LGBTQ+ discourse has become a central resource in the right-wing construction of Polish patriotism and national identity. This discourse is adopted by many mainstream conservative public figures and is part of the global anti-genderism register that has been taken up by transnationally linked actors and institutions. In this article, I adopt Critical Discourse Analysis, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, and the Discourse Historical Approach to examine how anti-genderist actors in Poland discursively construct “truth” through what looks like logical argumentation and appeals to assumed “common sense” knowledge, and how such constructions are used to support appeals to emotion and Catholic faith while also co-opting and redefining progressive terms and concepts in service of right-wing agendas. This strategy departs from the anti-intellectual rhetoric typical of right-wing populism. The article is based on an analysis of 216 emails sent in an email newsletter by the ultraconservative Catholic NGO Centrum Życia i Rodziny (Center for Life and Family) between September 2020 and July 2023.*

Keywords: Discourse Historical Approach, Critical Discourse Analysis, LGBTQ+, gender, sexuality, language, Poland

Since “the outbreak of the ‘war on gender’ in the Polish context” in 2012 (Korolczuk and Graff 2018, 800), right-wing politicians, media, and the Catholic Church have been demonizing the LGBTQ+ community as promoters of “LGBT ideology,” a substitute term for “gender ideology” in Poland (Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Baran 2023). The vitriolic anti-LGBTQ+ discourse has become a central resource in the right-wing construction of Polish patriotism and national identity (Baran 2023; cf. Tebaldi and Baran 2023). This discourse, adopted in Poland not just by the far-right fringe but by mainstream conservative public figures, is not isolated: it is part of the global anti-genderism register (Borba 2022) that has been taken up by locally situated but transnationally linked actors and institutions in places as diverse as Bulgaria (Darakchi 2019), Latvia and Lithuania (Chojnicka 2015), France and Italy (Russell 2019), India

(Graff, Kapur, and Walters 2019), Brazil and Hungary—as evidenced in the rhetoric of Jair Bolsonaro and Viktor Orbán—and elsewhere across Europe, the Americas, and Asia (Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Kováts and Põim 2015). In recent years, similar anti-LGBTQ+ discourse has also made it into mainstream right-wing politics in the United States, informing the rhetoric of Republican politicians (Swenson and Colvin 2023). Right-wing groups such as Moms for Liberty, right-wing media, and Republican state legislatures have invoked what Butler (2019, 957) calls the “phantasm” of “gender ideology” to mobilize public support for their queerphobic agendas: removing LGBTQ+-inclusive books from school libraries, banning discussion of any LGBTQ+ topics in school, and restricting access to gender-affirming healthcare (Peele 2023). This embrace of queerphobia by the American mainstream right is significant—and alarming—because of the continued status of the United States as a powerful global player politically, financially, and militarily, and because of its self-proclaimed role as a purported beacon of democracy.

The globally enacted moral panic around “gender ideology” has become a disturbingly fruitful resource in the so-called Global Right’s (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018) project for what Grzebalska and Pető (2018) call an “illiberal transformation,” which includes the maintenance and expansion of the cisheteropatriarchal model of the family and the nation (Wodak 2021; Tebaldi 2023a). Graff and Korolczuk (2022) describe this phenomenon as “opportunistic synergy,” whereby various right-wing actors, including religious and political institutions, have found a way to collaboratively advance their agendas by focusing on the “dangers” of “gender ideology,” oftentimes in relation to children. As others have discussed (e.g., Borba 2022; Butler 2019; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017), the notion of “gender ideology” as a purported threat to children, the family, morality, and the nation brings together loosely related right-wing causes and allows them to appear unified in what looks like a common fight. These include, on one hand, opposition to reproductive rights and healthcare, to marriage equality and LGBTQ+ rights, to comprehensive sex education, and to many forms of gender equality; and on the other hand, advancement of populist nationalisms, of white supremacism, of religious intolerance dressed up as “religious freedom,” and even of such seemingly unrelated agendas as climate change denial—where climate science is framed as challenging the God-given “natural” relations between humans and the earth (Baran, 2024).

Crucially, these right-wing campaigns are fought discursively, through and within language. The very term “gender ideology,” which right-wing actors repeatedly use to mean an ideology promoting “unnatural” notions about gender and sexuality, is an appropriation and redefinition of the feminist concept of gender ideologies as sets of beliefs about socially constructed gender and sexual norms. Borba (2022, 60) points out this appropriation in his analysis of the rise and circulation of what he describes as the anti-genderism register, where a register is “a conventionalized aggregate of co-occurring expressive forms.” In this register, the use of “gender ideology” is an example of conservative “parodying [of] feminist and queer discourses while resignifying them along the way” (60). Significantly, the interdiscursive circulation of this register

across local, national, and transnational institutions is both opportunistic, as Graff and Korolczuk (2022) argue, and supported and funded by coordinated campaigns. For example, the redefinition of “gender ideology” as a threat to the natural order was first articulated by conservative Catholics in the United States in the 1990s, at the encouragement of the Vatican (Borba 2022), which provides important context for its recent reemergence in discourses of the Christian and mainstream US right. Moreover, this interdiscursive strategic co-option of progressive concepts and language by right-wing actors is a well-attested and widespread practice in the conservative playbook. For example, Tebaldi (2021) demonstrates how alt-right digital communities promote the causes of white supremacy and gender essentialism by borrowing the language of critical pedagogy and antifascism. Her discussion shows how these groups redefine and reframe such terms and concepts as multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusivity, as well as ideas based in academic and scientific discourse, to promote and elevate whiteness and white supremacist agendas.

Sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological approaches offer theoretical and methodological tools for analyzing these processes of appropriation and resignification through which right-wing actors construct anti-genderist and white supremacist narratives about feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and religious and national belonging. In these narratives, comprehensive sex education becomes “the sexualization of children,” promotion of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion becomes “grooming,” providing safe spaces for trans, nonbinary, and gender-fluid youth becomes “violation of parental rights,” while at the same time the nation is defined as cisheteropatriarchal, white, and Christian—at least in Europe and North America (see Tebaldi 2021, 2023a). Sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological frameworks and methodologies such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), or the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) help to deepen analyses of the circulation of right-wing discourses. The tools they provide allow researchers to locate and describe the discursive strategies and linguistic means or moves (Wodak and Boukala 2015) that enact these appropriations and reframings. In this way, they help to expose and, hopefully, counter the interdiscursive “web of rightist resources for indoctrination” (Tebaldi 2021, 222) that links redefinition of “gender ideology” with reframings of inclusivity, alternative schooling, healthy living (Tebaldi 2023b), or religious freedom.

In this article, I adopt the analytical tools of DHA (Wodak 2021; Reisigl and Wodak 2016; Wodak and Boukala 2015), as well as CDA and MCDA methods and tools, to examine how anti-genderist actors in Poland construct the opposition between “us”—the true Poles who are loyal to the imagined notion of Poland as inherently and unquestionably Catholic—and “them,” the anti-Polish supporters of LGBT and “gender ideology.” I analyze how these anti-genderists discursively construct “truth” through what looks like logical argumentation and presumed “common sense” knowledge (Fairclough 2001), and how such constructions are used to support appeals to emotion and the Catholic faith. This strategy departs from the anti-intellectual rhetoric typical of populist right-wing discourses as described by Wodak (2021), and it is also not

unique to the Polish context but part of the interdiscursively linked web of resources employed by right-wing activists and communities, as discussed by Tebaldi (2021). The alt-right digital communities that Tebaldi examines likewise employ language that not only co-opts and redefines progressive concepts but uses them to cast progressive ideas as illogical, inflexible, and oppressive, while representing right-wing stances as scientifically grounded and rational. In arguing for the preservation of “white culture” or the common-sense nature of gender essentialism, these groups invoke the language of what looks like fact-based science. In doing so, they define and regiment what counts as truth while also “debunking” what they construct as liberal lies and propaganda.

My focus in this article is the email newsletter sent out to subscribers, on average twice per week, by the ultraconservative Polish NGO Centrum Życia i Rodziny (Center for Life and Family). My data consists of 216 emails dating from September 2020 to July 2023. The Center’s explicit goals are promoting an anti-reproductive rights, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTQ+ agenda. The authors of the emails adopt numerous linguistic techniques to construct “truth” through what looks like logical and scientifically grounded reasoning. These include techniques designed to appeal to a sense of shared understanding and values, and, crucially, pseudolinguistic analysis that attempts to unmask the “real” meaning behind liberal discourse. The use of “data” provided by conservative academics, selective and misleading depiction of current and historical events, and the use of inclusive pronouns (first-person plural “we,” second-person plural “you”) to invoke presumed shared meanings, and other similar techniques, allow these anti-genderist texts to masquerade as arguments rooted in “true” knowledge. As such, the texts can appeal to conservative and religious people who identify with the Center’s purported values of protecting life, families, and children, but who are educated and consider themselves intelligent critical thinkers. When used in tandem with discursive strategies designed to elicit emotions—for example, outrage at the “LGBT lobby” or passionate love for the nation—these techniques anchor such emotional responses in the constructed “true” reality, making them appear rational and logically justifiable. This interplay between emotion and “logic” echoes the alt-right strategies that Tebaldi (2021, 219) describes as “play[ing] with the boundaries between facts and feelings, truth, and interpretations.”

Anti-Genderism and the Construction of “True” Polishness

In previous work (Baran 2023), I examined the discursive processes through which opposition to “genderism” is positioned by Polish right-wing politicians, religious figures, media, and activists as the patriotic duty of “true Poles” through the construction of historicized narratives of nationhood that see Poland as inherently and inevitably Catholic, and as the God-chosen defender of European Christianity. In these narratives European Christianity is represented as the only true and superior civilization and way of life. The right-wing argument for the fight against “LGBT ideology” is anchored in several elements of Polish history. It relies on the centuries-old representation

of Poland as the bulwark of Christianity, located at the edges of Christian Europe, where, according to nationalist interpretations, it successfully defended Europe from numerous non-Christian invaders such as pre-Christian peoples, the Ottoman Empire, and, in 1920, the Soviet Union. It also appeals to more recent events within the living memory of many Poles: the Polish anticommunist struggle in the 1980s, which was centered around and supported by the Catholic Church and tied to the figure of the Polish pope, John Paul II, who was not only a vocal opponent of communism but also a militant anti-genderist whose pontificate significantly expanded the Catholic Church's opposition to reproductive rights and feminist ideas. Anti-genderist appeals to this historical context reinforce the discursive enmeshing of three ideas: what Grzymała-Busse (2015) describes as the historically rooted construct of the fused Polish-Catholic identity; the notion of Poland's unique mission to defend Europe from external and internal anti-Christian enemies (Baran 2023); and the anti-genderism register's insistence that "genderism" is "cultural Marxism." This enmeshing, in turn, facilitates the creation and promotion of narratives that depict any progressive stance around LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive rights, or women's rights as fundamentally and inherently anti-Polish. Within the broader European context, these narratives also rely on another element of the global anti-genderism register: the co-option of anticolonial discourse whereby "gender ideology" is imposed on "us," the true Poles, by "them"—the supposedly Marxist and godless elites represented by the European Union and related transnational institutions (Gal 2019; Borba 2022; Korolczuk and Graff 2018). Here, again, Poland is depicted as being called to defend Christianity against godlessness.

As I explain in Baran (2023), these anti-genderist narratives utilize the appeal to emotionally charged themes that resonate with collective constructions of Polishness via recognizable cultural referents, such as revered historical figures, events, and myths. But as part of this discourse, not unlike in right-wing evangelical discourses in North America, the existence and inevitable truth of the Judeo-Christian God is set up as an a priori fact rather than a set of beliefs. As I will show in this article, the adoption of this a priori assumption is partly what allows Catholic-aligned right-wing actors in Poland to develop their anti-genderist arguments in ways that mimic logical and fact-based reasoning. Furthermore, faith-based assumptions are often represented as scientific by implicitly equating "God-given" with "natural." In this way, a socioculturally constructed reality is reframed as universally and objectively true—and, simultaneously, "natural" is reframed as "inherently good" rather than simply naturally occurring, as same-sex sexual behavior in nature in fact frequently does (see Gómez, González-Megías, and Verdú 2023).

Analytical Framework: Concepts and Tools

Discourse analysts who study the way language can be manipulated to produce multiple layers of meaning have developed extensive sets of analytical tools that I draw on in this article. Specifically, I rely on the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) developed

by Wodak (see Wodak 2021; Reisigl and Wodak 2016; Wodak and Boukala 2015), as well as on methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), discussed in detail by Machin and Mayr (2012).

The central feature of DHA is that it considers historical context as crucial to interpreting texts and discourses because this opens the way to mapping how they are recontextualized across time and space (Reisigl and Wodak 2016, 32). Wodak also emphasizes that DHA methodology is based on triangulation between three dimensions of discourse analysis: “*the contents or topics of specific discourses; discursive strategies; and the linguistic means that are drawn upon to realize both topics and strategies*” (Wodak and Boukala 2015, 93, original emphasis). This approach “allows relating the macro- and meso-level of contextualization to the micro-level analysis of texts” (Wodak 2021:73). In other words, DHA explores how discourses emerge from and make sense in specific historically shaped contexts, and how they are constructed and recontextualized through the use of broad discursive strategies and, on a micro-level, concrete linguistic tools.

To examine the discursive strategies and linguistic means through which discourses are constructed and reproduced, the DHA framework builds on the analytical tools of Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA. Originally developed by Norman Fairclough (1995, 2001), CDA takes the theoretical perspective that the social world is constituted by discourse, which is a social practice that is in dialogic, mutually constitutive relationships with other social practices or dimensions (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 61). Discursive practices thus reflect, as well as create and reproduce, social inequalities, hierarchies, and power relations (62). Critical discourse analysts set out to identify and describe the linguistic processes that produce these discursive practices. Wodak’s DHA model refers to these practices as “discursive strategies” that are enacted through particular linguistic means, tools, or resources—for example lexical and pragmatic choices, connotations, grammatical structures, hyperbole and emphasis, quotation, or punctuation.

Critical Discourse Analysis tends to be concerned “with the ‘hidden agenda’ of discourse” (Cameron 2001, 123)—in other words, with exposing, uncovering, or unmasking the “hidden meaning” behind texts, whether written, spoken, visual, or multimodal. The notion of “hidden” meanings suggests intentionality, whereby texts are purposely constructed to mislead or confuse and thus “cover up” unpopular or even harmful agendas of their authors. This is frequently the case with political and other institutional discourses that both mask and reproduce social inequalities, which is why CDA is especially interested in them. The Center for Life and Family, the Polish NGO discussed in this article, uses this type of intentional construction of texts to promote a queerphobic, anti-genderist agenda. But it is important to note that all discourse is in a dialogic relationship with social reality, both produced by it and reproducing it—and sometimes challenging and reconstituting it—whether intentionally or not.

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, or MCDA, emphasizes that the visual aspects of messages are as important to pay attention to as their content. The size, shape, and color of the font used, the placement of words on the page, videos and images that accompany the text, and other visual features, all work to frame and contextualize the

message in the text and “are amenable to—and require—analysis beyond the literal and linguistic” (Mooney and Price 2022, 678). MCDA thus builds on CDA to outline tools for identifying and examining visual choices made by the creators of a particular text (Van Leeuwen 2000; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; Machin and Mayr 2012).

Below I outline the discursive strategies and linguistic means or resources used in my analysis of the written texts that follow, drawing and building on Machin and Mayr (2012), Wodak (2021), Reisigl and Wodak (2016), and Wodak and Boukala (2015).

Relational tactics, establishing familiarity and connection with the audience

- The use of inclusive or exclusive pronouns (we/they/you)
- Direct appeal to the audience, constructing the illusion of conversation
- Speaking in the first person, as if confiding in a friend
- Appeal to presumed shared values and meanings

Suppression and lexical absence

- Strategic deletion of facts and contexts
- Selective and strategic use of quotes, facts, and statistics

Appeal to what looks like rational reasoning and scientific discourse

- Appeal to authoritative sources
- Invoking scientific language and the language of rational argument

Erasure of the agent or the subject of the action

- Use of passive voice with no subject
- Nominalization, e.g., “attacks on our values” without specifying the “attacker”
- Aggregation, or making one example appear part of a larger phenomenon

Manipulating emphasis through grammatical resources

- Word order choice, e.g., foregrounding specific points, actions, or objects
- Lexical choice, e.g., neutral quoting verbs (“say,” “report”) or ones with meaning potentials (“claim,” “refute”)

Presupposition, whereby assumptions are presented as agreed-upon facts

- Assumptions about the meaning of events

- Assumptions about the meaning of words and concepts, including the implicit redefinition of words and concepts
- Assumptions about shared judgments and values
- Appeal to things being self-evident by using phrases such as “of course,” “as we know,” “in reality,” etc.
- Assumptions about “true facts,” presenting opinions as facts (e.g., true Poles are Catholic, gender is binary, etc.)

Structural oppositions such as good/bad, young/old, etc.

- Using terms that imply qualities opposite to those presumed as desirable, e.g., “illegal immigrant” implies the opposite of law-abiding citizen

Appeal to emotions

- Hyperbole and the use of exclamation marks for emphasis
- Using emotive language (“upset,” “hurt”)

Use of metalanguage

- “Deconstructing” the language of liberal / left-wing actors and media
- Explicitly redefining terms and concepts

Trivialization and delegitimization of liberal / left-wing terms and concepts

- Ironic use of quotation marks (e.g., same-sex “marriage”)
- Use of sarcasm to ridicule liberal / left-wing terms and concepts

While the above list is intended to describe and organize various discursive strategies and linguistic means for the purpose of systematic examination of texts, discourse analysis is not an exact science. When faced with specific texts one may notice that the same linguistic means may be used for different effects, and discursive tactics may overlap and intersect. For example, the use of sarcasm can simultaneously delegitimize the opposite side’s stance, and work as a relational tactic by establishing a sense of shared understanding around the idea that “they are ridiculous.” Consequently, in this article I will discuss the above strategies and resources as they apply to the Center for Life and Family, but not necessarily in the order presented above.

The Center for Life and Family: Background and Significance

144

The NGO Centrum Życia i Rodziny (Center for Life and Family) is part of a network of anti-genderist, ultraconservative organizations in Poland and globally that support each other and collaborate by promoting and participating in each other's events and initiatives, featuring each other's prominent members as guest speakers or event sponsors, and benefiting from shared financial resources. While tracing funding streams is a huge undertaking beyond the scope of this article, Graff and Korolczuk (2022) suggest such financial connections in their discussion of transnational anti-gender right-wing networks. In Poland, groups linked with the Center for Life and Family include, among others, Fundacja Życie i Rodzina (Foundation for Life and Family), which in 2021 drew up a bill titled "Stop LGBT" aimed at censoring Pride parades, and the Ordo Iuris Institute, an ultraconservative think tank providing legal advice to right-wing politicians and groups in Poland and Europe since 2013. Ordo Iuris was formed and is funded by the Father Piotr Skarga Association for Christian Culture, a Polish NGO that itself was established by the right-wing Catholic organization Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP). Meanwhile, TFP has been sponsoring and funding far-right agendas around the world since its founding in Brazil in 1960 (Graff and Korolczuk 2022). The websites of Ordo Iuris and the Skarga Association have long featured articles promoting the Center for Life and Family and its activities, as does the Skarga Association-sponsored right-wing news outlet *Polonia Christiana*. More recently, the Center for Life and Family has openly joined forces with Ordo Iuris in its various campaigns. At the same time, the right-wing Law and Justice party, which was in power from 2015 until its election loss in October 2023, placed numerous Ordo Iuris allies in high-level government posts (Mierzyńska 2020), while its politicians regularly attended events such as the annual March for Life and Family—anti-choice rallies celebrating cisheteronormativity, ultraconservative Catholicism, and nationalism—organized by the Center for Life and Family. While this article focuses on the Center's email newsletter, it is crucial to emphasize that the Center is not an isolated or fringe group but rather one part of a mutually supportive network of institutions promoting queerphobia, misogyny, and the cisheteropatriarchal social order in Poland and beyond.

The Center for Life and Family has for years been active in organizing anti-choice, anti-LGBTQ+ events such as the March for Life and Family. The Center's longtime president, Paweł Ozdoba (replaced in February 2024 by Marcin Perłowski), has maintained a close relationship with the Polish Catholic Church as well as with right-wing political figures and media. In May 2021, the Center set up a now defunct online news outlet linked with its website, called *Marsz.info* after the "life and family" marches. According to one of Ozdoba's emails, *Marsz.info* received over 50,000 visits each month. As of November 9, 2023, the Center's Facebook page had 45,000 followers, its X (formerly Twitter) account had 4,500, and its YouTube channel had 8,650 subscribers. For comparison, the LGBTQ+-allied organization *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii* (Campaign Against Homophobia) had 111,000 Facebook followers, 25,100

X followers, and 7,002 YouTube subscribers. While I have not conducted any reliable investigation into the size and demographic of the audience that the Center for Life and Family and its affiliate Marsz.info reach, the numbers above suggest a significant impact, especially since the Center and other anti-genderist groups work closely and publicly with influential figures in the Catholic Church and in right-wing politics and media.

An example of the type of messaging that the Center disseminates is illustrated in its Twitter post published on May 17, 2022 (figure 1).¹ In this post, we immediately notice how the Center defines “family” in the emoji to the right of the group’s name, which shows a simple graphic of a man, a woman, and two children. The Center’s logo appears to be two intertwined wedding bands, linked so that they are inseparable, thus emphasizing the Center’s often-stated commitment to the sacramental permanence of Catholic cisheterosexual marriage. This point seems further highlighted by the difference in the bands’ sizes, as might be expected of a man’s and a woman’s ring. Furthermore, the larger ring—the man’s ring—is on top, and the smaller one dangles from it, as if to represent the hierarchical structure of Catholic marriage, with the man as the head of the family and the woman as his dependent.

The post itself is intended as a “celebration” of the “International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia,” as can be seen in the hashtags and as stated in the bottom left-hand corner of the image included in the post. Just above, and below the Center’s wedding-band logo, the larger capitalized text informs the reader that the Center “is joining the international coalition supporting persons wishing to overcome unwanted homosexual attraction,”² emphasized with an exclamation mark. The second part of this text, starting with “persons,” is set apart in yellow, and the word *niechciany* (unwanted) is also underlined in red, producing additional emphasis. The text is placed on a dark blue background and takes up the left half of the image, while on the right half the background fades into an illustration: a rainbow-colored sea, indexing the LGBTQ+ rainbow flag (Baran 2022; Baran, forthcoming), underneath a partly cloudy sky, with a large hand in the foreground that appears to jut out of the water with fingers spread apart. The hand is positioned with its palm facing the viewer, with the English word “help” written on the palm in red letters. It appears as if the hand belongs to someone reaching out to be saved from drowning in rainbow-colored waters, implying they are being killed by “gender ideology.” To the right of the jutting-out hand we see the words *TAK! dla pomocy* (YES! to help) and to the left *NIE! dla nienawiści* (NO! to hate). The “yes” and “no” are written in large capital letters, in green and red respectively, and emphasized with exclamation marks. Finally, the text of the post itself, found above the image, reads: “We are joining the International Foundation for Therapeutic and

1 Twitter was renamed X on July 23, 2023; thus, the name Twitter will be used for posts prior to that date.

2 All translations from Polish are the author’s.

Counselling Choice! The Center for Life and Family supports persons struggling with unwanted sexual attraction toward people of the same sex!” The final exclamation mark is in red, followed again by the “NO to hate!” and “YES to help!” slogans.



Figure 1. Twitter post by the Center for Life and Family on May 17, 2022, the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia.³

Crucially, the International Foundation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC), cited in the post in figure 1, is a pro-conversion therapy organization. According to its website, it is devoted to “empowering” and “advocating” for LGBTQ+ people “within the Judeo-Christian context,” couching its agenda in terms of freedom of “choice.”⁴ IFTCC chose Poland to hold its ninth annual conference in October 2023, under the seemingly neutral title “Turning the Tide: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to Sexuality and Gender.” The conference featured talks by right-wing anti-genderist academics, therapists, and medical doctors, as well as by Christian religious leaders. Its program, available in full on IFTCC’s website, framed non-heterosexual orientations and non-cisgender identities as disorders that can and should be corrected. The conference was thus structured around two of the discursive strategies discussed above: on one hand, it presumed that the tenets of Christian religion are established fact, in particular by including Christian services and sessions such as “Free to Pray: Integrating

3 Centrum Życia i Rodziny (@CentrumZycia), Twitter, May 17, 2022, 7:09 a.m., https://twitter.com/CentrumZycia/status/1526520302469013504?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1526520302469013504%7Ctwgr%5E2fc1e34eda0ff859c61cd97772940f7f7b0a871a%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fmarsz.info%2Fszrodowisko-lgbt-obchodzi-dzisiaj-miedzynarodowy-dzien-walki-z-homofobia-transfobia-interfobia-i-bifobia%2F.

4 See the IFTCC’s home page: <https://iftcc.org/> (accessed January 8, 2025).

Biblical Truth” in its program; and on the other hand, it utilized the academic register and appeal to ostensibly scientific research and rational argumentation to support its queerphobic agenda.

In its May 17, 2022, Twitter post in figure 1, the Center for Life and Family invokes the appeal to reason and scientific authority by aligning itself with IFTCC and, implicitly, with the latter’s pseudoscientific arguments. This appeal to reason is complemented by the appeal to emotion, as shown in the image of the drowning person’s hand, reaching out to be saved from “gender ideology.” This juxtaposition of emotional despair and “scientific” reasoning reinforces each strategy: the post can be read as saying something like, “How can you let people suffer when science shows how to save them?” In the process, the Center’s post appropriates and redefines—in semiotic terms, resignifies—key terms taken from progressive and LGBTQ+ discourse: homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are redefined as referring to discrimination *by* the LGBTQ+ community *against* people who wish to be “cured” from their non-heterosexual orientations and non-cisgender identities.

This strategy aligns well with IFTCC’s redefinition of “cross-disciplinary approaches to sexuality and gender” (part of its conference’s title) as inclusive of widely discredited views of heterosexuality as the only healthy form of sexuality, and of gender as biologically inherent and binary. It also aligns with how IFTCC’s very name—Foundation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice—co-opts pro-choice language. Meanwhile, the post’s claim of supporting those with “unwanted homosexual attraction” borrows from the language of community-building and supporting oppressed groups. Similarly, the progressive language of anti-discrimination and anti-hate is appropriated and twisted into a near caricature, illustrating what Borba (2022, 60) describes as the “parodying” of progressive discourses, both in the Center’s aligning itself with the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, and in its use of the “NO to hate!” slogan. This strategy serves also to delegitimize progressive ideas by turning them on their head, and simultaneously mobilizing them in service of conservative agendas (Tebaldi 2021). Finally, this example illustrates the transnational connections between anti-genderist, ultraconservative actors and how they are reinforced and reproduced intertextually and interdiscursively across the domains of academia, religion, politics, and media.

Constructing “Truth” in the Email Newsletter: Data and Analysis

The Center for Life and Family sends out an email newsletter to subscribers on average twice a week. In the early days of my exploratory research into anti-LGBTQ+ discourses and Polish right-wing nationalism, I subscribed to the newsletter without much thought. Since then, I have reflected on the ethical questions raised by such a subscription, which I would examine in more depth if I were to consider subscribing today. I have maintained the subscription because the emails do not contain ads nor do they require a monetary donation, and they provide access to a very clearly defined

set of texts sustained over time. This article draws on a corpus of 216 of these emails, inclusive of all the emails I received between September 2020 and July 2023. Many of these came from Paweł Ozdoba’s email address and are composed as if written by him personally: they use first-person singular masculine grammatical forms and are signed by him with his photo attached (Ozdoba was the Center’s president at the time). Others are sent from the address Marsz.info and are structured more as previews of the news outlet’s current articles. All of the emails utilize multiple discursive and linguistic resources for constructing and reinforcing the notion of “truth” in their communication with the Center’s intended audience: devout Catholics who oppose abortion and do not question gender essentialism, as evidenced by the a priori assumption underlying all these texts that Christian belief is tantamount to indisputable fact. There is no element of genuine debate with the other side in the emails. They do, however, define “truth” through interweaving appeals to emotion and reason in ways that may prove persuasive to educated and intellectually curious readers, who nonetheless identify strongly with the values professed by the Catholic Church. I analyzed the emails by coding them for specific discursive and linguistic strategies in the qualitative analysis tool Dedoose.

“I Realize that Such Words Upset You”: Setting Up Interpersonal Relationship and Shared Meaning

Relational strategies that focus on establishing a sense of an interpersonal relationship between readers and Ozdoba himself or the Center’s and Marsz.info’s activists are ubiquitous in the email newsletter. One of the linguistic resources utilized to this end is the direct appeal to the reader: the use of first-person forms to refer to the author(s) and second-person plural forms to refer to the audience, and the construction of connection and similarity or sharedness of feelings and experience between the author(s) and the reader(s), as shown in the two examples in figures 2 and 3.

Context: Email reacting to claims that Pope John Paul II was responsible for the cover-up of pedophilia in the Catholic Church.			
Polish text: <i>Tak, piszę tego maila wzburzony, ale myślę, że Państwa również dotykają takie ataki.</i>			
Gloss: Yes, I am upset while writing this email, but I believe that you are also hurt by such attacks.			
Analysis:			
1	<i>Tak, piszę</i>	<i>tego maila wzburzony</i>	<i>ale myślę</i>
1	Yes, I am writing	this email upset	but I believe
	[1 st person singular]	[masculine singular]	[1 st person singular]
2	<i>ze Państwa</i>	<i>również dotykają</i>	<i>takie ataki</i>
2	that you	also hurt	such attacks
	[plural formal “you,” Accusative]	[3 rd person plural]	[Nominative]
	Direct Object	Action Verb	Subject

Figure 2. Example 1, from an email sent by Ozdoba on November 20, 2020. Source: author’s possession.

In example 1 (figure 2), I first cite the Polish text and its most appropriate English gloss, followed by a detailed breakdown of the literal structure of the Polish sentence, which is important given the particular affordances of Polish morphology and syntax. As can be noticed immediately, the author—in this case Ozdoba—uses the first-person singular forms in ways that position him as a real person with human feelings that the reader can relate to. In line 1, he uses first-person singular verbs *piszę* (I am writing) and *myszę* (I believe), as well as the singular masculine adjective *wzburzony* (upset), to describe his state of mind. In line 2, he speaks directly to his audience by addressing them with the formal—friendly but respectful—Polish plural “you,” *Państwa*, while also assuming that they share his own upset feelings: “I believe that you are also hurt by such attacks,” further underscored by the adverb “also.” Ozdoba’s vulnerable humanity is emphasized in the way he opens this sentence (line 1): “Yes, I am upset while writing this email.” The initial “yes” functions to highlight his admitting to having strong feelings, which he then portrays as justified because they are—he presumes—shared by his readers. These linguistic maneuvers construct a sense that Ozdoba and his audience are familiar with and understand each other.

However, other tactics are being employed here as well. While the English gloss appears in the passive voice, in Polish the verb is active, and the subject or agent of the action is *takie ataki* (such attacks). The plural you, *Państwa*, is in the accusative case and is the direct object of the verb *dotykają* (hurt—literally: touch in a painful way). In this way, the readers are constructed as passive recipients of a hurtful action, but the action’s actual performer remains obscured through the linguistic tactics of nominalization and aggregation. We do not find out who is doing the attacking; rather, the attacks themselves are positioned as an agent (nominalization), and the plural adjective *takie* (such) portrays specific events described elsewhere in the email as part of a larger, nonspecific phenomenon of “such attacks” (aggregation). Finally, placing a word or phrase in sentence-final or clause-final position often has an emphasizing effect, and here this is achieved in two places. First, the adjective *wzburzony* (upset) appears at the end of the first clause (line 1), which I translated in the gloss as “I am upset while writing this email” for the sake of clarity in English. But in Polish, the clause is constructed as “I am writing this email upset,” where “upset,” in its singular masculine form, clearly refers back to the subject of the verb “write”—the email’s author—and thus can be placed clause-finally without creating confusion. By comparison, English adjectives and nouns do not exhibit grammatical gender. In the second clause (line 2), the subject and agent of the sentence, “such attacks,” is also placed at the end, drawing attention to the aggression and violence implied in the noun “attacks.” To maintain the sentence-final position of “such attacks,” I translated this clause in the passive voice in English. But in Polish, while the default or unmarked word order is subject-verb-object (SVO), it is possible to change this around because case marking (nominative, accusative, etc.) clearly shows which noun is the subject or object of the verb. Accordingly, in line 2, the word order is object-verb-subject: “you (direct object) also hurt (third-person plural active-voice verb) such attacks (subject).” In this way, Polish morphosyntax allows the

email’s author to simultaneously emphasize the aggregated noun “such attacks” through sentence-final placement, and to represent “you” as a passive victim—the direct object—of the attacks’ hurtful actions. This construction of victimization further solidifies the sense of familiarity and shared understanding between the presumed author (Ozdoba) and his audience.

Example 2 (figure 3) is similar. Here we also see the first-person singular verb and pronoun use that make the email appear to be written by Ozdoba himself, as well as the direct appeal to the plural “you” and an assumption of shared (upset and hurt) emotions.

Context: Email reacting to a leftwing Polish MP who openly and harshly criticized the total abortion ban in Poland.				
Polish text: <i>Zdaję sobie sprawę, że, podobnie jak mnie, takie słowa Państwa wzbudzają.</i>				
Gloss: I realize that, just like me, you are upset by such words.				
Analysis:				
1	<i>Zdaję sobie sprawę</i>	<i>że</i>	<i>podobnie jak</i>	<i>mnie</i>
1	I realize	that	similarly as	me
	[1 st person singular]			[1 st person singular pronoun, Accusative]
				Direct Object
2	<i>takie słowa</i>	<i>Państwa</i>		<i>wzbudzają</i>
2	such words	you		upset
	[Nominative]	[plural formal “you,” Accusative]		[3 rd person plural]
	Subject	Direct Object		Action Verb

Figure 3. Example 2, from an email sent by Ozdoba on February 5, 2021. Source: author’s possession.

In addition to the first-person singular verb phrase *zdaję sobie sprawę* (I realize—more literally: I am aware of the matter), the first-person pronoun *mnie* (me), and the direct address to the audience as *Państwa* (the plural “you”), the affordances of Polish morphosyntax are again utilized in example 2 for emphasis and connection-building. The first-person pronoun *mnie* (me) appears in the accusative case, as the direct object of the verb *wzbudzają* (upset), in parallel to the accusative case of *Państwa* (you). The sentence is in the active voice, unlike the English gloss, so that the presumed author, Ozdoba, and his readers are connected as passive victims of the upsetting action performed by the subject, *takie słowa* (such words). Again, as in example 1, the actual agent of the action—the person(s) producing the upsetting words—is erased through the tactic of nominalization, even though in reality the speaker is identifiable: it is the left-wing MP who criticized the abortion ban. But erasing the speaker through nominalization in this sentence allows the additional employment of the tactic of aggregation, so that this particular MP’s specific comments are repositioned as part of a larger, nonspecific set of upsetting behaviors (“such words”). The effect is that instead of denouncing one statement made by one person, the audience is encouraged to join the author in feeling upset at a large set of other similar—but imagined—statements or comments, presumably made by other progressive politicians and entities. The overt case marking, meanwhile, permits the default SVO word order to be rearranged as subject-object-

verb (SOV), so that the third-person plural verb *wzburzają* (upset) appears at the end and is thus emphasized. In this way, the author suggests that he and the audience share the same emotion, which is inflicted on them by the aggregate “such words,” and the audience’s attention is further drawn to the nature of this emotion—being upset—as it closes the sentence.

Metalinguage

The same email from February 5, 2021, also utilizes the discursive strategy of attempting to explicitly “deconstruct” liberal discourse through what resembles metalinguistic commentary. The email quotes the MP, or more accurately member of the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish national legislature), Joanna Senyszyn, also identifying her by name before using the nominalization aggregation strategies to shift agency from her to “such words.” Senyszyn is a longtime professor of economics at the University of Gdańsk, and a political and social activist. For the past two decades, she has been active as a representative to the Sejm from leftist parties and coalitions. Senyszyn’s comments, quoted in Ozdoba’s email (figure 4), constitute a rather blunt and perhaps darkly sarcastic critique of the most recent (October 2020) iteration of Polish anti-abortion law, which bans abortion even in the case of severe fetal abnormality or incurable illness that will not allow the baby to live much past birth, if at all.⁵ This drastic expansion of the abortion ban triggered mass protests in Poland—“black protests,” so called after the black outfits worn by participants—with tens of thousands of women and men taking to the streets. Many of the protests were organized by the feminist group All-Poland Women’s Strike (Chałupnik and Brookes 2022). The specific comments by Representative Senyszyn quoted in the email, followed by Ozdoba’s response, are presented in Polish and English translation in figure 4.

Senyszyn’s statement, reported in many Polish media outlets, was immediately decried in right-wing media and represented as a serious proposal to euthanize infants. Articles criticizing Senyszyn bore titles like “Joanna Senyszyn Supports the Murder of Sick Children,”⁶ or “Abortion Is No Longer Enough for the Left. They Also Want to Kill Children Who Are Born.”⁷

5 “Poland: Abortion Witch Hunt Targets Women, Doctors,” *Human Rights Watch*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/14/poland-abortion-witch-hunt-targets-women-doctors#:~:text=Polish%20law%20now%20permits%20abortion,pregnant%20women%20refused%20terminations%20demonstrate>.

6 “Senyszyn popiera mordowanie chorych dzieci,” *Narodowcy.net*, February 4, 2021, <https://narodowcy.net/senyszyn-popiera-mordowanie-chorych-dzieci/>, accessed November 11, 2023.

7 “Zaczęło się. Aborcja już Lewicy nie wystarczy. Chcą jeszcze zabijać dzieci urodzone,” *Frona.pl*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.frona.pl/a/zaczelo-sie-aborcja-juz-lewicy-nie-wystarczy-chca-jeszcze-zabijac-dzieci-urodzone-1,156585.html>.

The same misleading reframing is used in Ozdoba’s email, which additionally attempts to deconstruct Senyszyn’s words as linguistic manipulation. Ozdoba repositions infants born with abnormalities so severe that they have no path to survival as “people fighting for their own lives,” in this way appealing to the readers’ empathy. At the same time he criticizes Senyszyn for using what he describes as this very tactic: emotional appeal through “powerful negative images—torture, seizures, pain” (even though her words, while emotionally evocative, describe reality). Furthermore, Ozdoba prefaces this attempt at deconstruction of Senyszyn’s words with a metalinguistic commentary, printed in bold, in which he also generalizes or aggregates the MP’s specific words as typical of liberals as a collective: “Representative Senyszyn’s statement ideally illustrates the tactic of people with leftist, pro-abortion views.” This strategy of metalinguistically identifying leftist “tactics” works to position—and redefine—the concepts and ideas espoused by liberals and the left as overly emotional exaggerations, and to contrast them with what Ozdoba constructs as the logical reasoning of right-wing arguments. He builds on this strategy in the next paragraph (not cited here), in which he cites statistics of how rare anencephaly in children is.

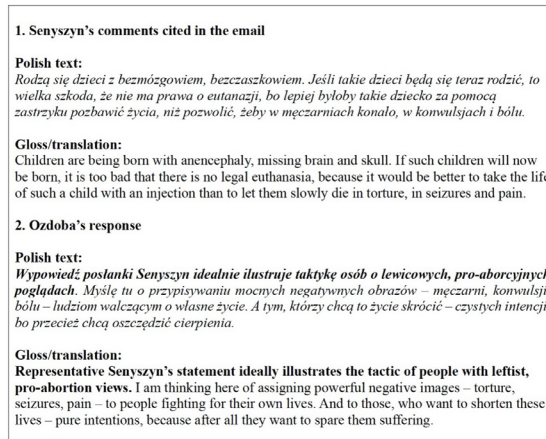


Figure 4. Example 3, from an email sent by Ozdoba on February 5, 2021. Source: author’s possession.

“This Simple Fact” and “Killing of Children”: Presupposition and Structural Oppositions

The next example (figure 5) utilizes multiple discursive strategies and linguistic tactics. As in examples 1 and 2 above, it relies on the relational tactic of establishing a sense of interpersonal connection, familiarity, and shared beliefs and experiences. But it also uses presupposition: it appeals to “common sense” by claiming that certain things are self-evident, and it presents opinion and belief as established fact. It also employs structural oppositions, as will be discussed below.

Context: Email with a misleading report on a survey asking scientists about the start of human life.

Polish text:
Wiemy, że dla Was ta sprawa jest oczywista i niepodważalna – życie ludzkie zaczyna się od momentu poczęcia. Nie wszyscy chcą jednak przyjąć do wiadomości ten prosty fakt... Jesteśmy przekonani, że każdemu z Was przyszło w swoim życiu zmierzyć się ze zwolennikami zabijania dzieci. Także i my wielokrotnie stawaliśmy się stroną w słownych utarczkach, kiedy w rzeczywistości zaczyna się ludzkie życie.

Gloss/translation:
 We know that for you [plural, informal] this matter is obvious and indisputable – human life begins from the moment of conception. Not everyone, however, wants to acknowledge this simple fact... We are convinced that each of you [plural, informal] has had to, in their life, confront proponents of killing children. We also have numerous times become a party to verbal arguments about when in reality human life begins.

Figure 5. Example 4, from an email sent by Marsz.info on September 20, 2022. Source: author's possession.

Starting with relational tactics, we notice the use of first-person verb forms and pronouns by the authors—this time these are plural, since the email is sent by the team of Marsz.info rather than Ozdoba—paralleled by the informal second-person plural pronoun *Was* (you), which constructs the authors and the audience as an intimate in-group. In the second instance, the audience is addressed simultaneously as a group and as individuals in the phrase *każdemu z Was* (each of you), which can be argued to reinforce the message that each reader is seen both as a separate human being to whom the message is directly addressed, and as sharing in the in-group's common experience.

The verbs *wiemy* (we know) and *jesteśmy przekonani* (we are convinced) imply that the authors understand the beliefs and experiences of their audience, establishing familiarity and connection. But, crucially, the sentences that these verbs open presuppose the content of what the audience thinks, and reinforce this assumption by presenting these thoughts not as opinions but as facts that one would be foolish to refute. Thus, we read “We know that for you this matter is obvious and indisputable—human life begins from the moment of conception,” which is further described as “this simple fact.” Structural opposition is used when advocates for reproductive rights are referred to as “proponents of killing children”: since killing is universally perceived as a fundamentally immoral act, the use of this phrase also activates its opposite—the presumed correct and moral position of the audience, defined as knowing without a doubt “when in reality human life begins.” Finally, the claim that they—the authors and the audience, or the in-group—have often “become a party to verbal arguments” with reproductive rights supporters (“proponents of killing children”) constructs the anti-choice anti-genderists as not only morally superior but also reasonable and ready to argue rationally in defense of the “obvious” and “simple” facts.

“Grammatically Correct Language Forms”: Suppression and Misrepresentation of Facts

The final example discussed in this article (figure 6) comes from the email sent by Marsz.info on September 13, 2022, in which the writers report the story of the Irish school teacher Enoch Burke, who spent eleven days in prison in the aftermath of his refusal to address a transgender student with the pronoun “they.” According to *The Guardian* newspaper, Burke refused to honor the student’s and their parents’ wishes on the grounds of his religious beliefs, and subsequently “confronted the principal at a public event and questioned her in a ‘heated’ manner” (Carroll 2022). The school placed Burke on administrative leave, but when he ignored it, it obtained a court order to keep him away from campus. Burke was jailed for contempt of court when he continued to show up at the school.

Accessing this story in international media requires knowledge of English, which is presumably not universal among the Center for Life and Family’s Polish audience, and we can further guess that even English speakers among this audience would not necessarily fact-check Marsz.info’s version by turning to a liberal publication like *The Guardian*. Meanwhile, Marsz.info’s email represents Burke’s story—in Polish—completely differently through a series of linguistic tactics.

Harmful ideologies promoted by leftist-liberal circles ceaselessly destroy not only social and community life, but also the lives of ordinary, individual citizens...

This happened to a teacher, who addressed a boy using grammatically correct language forms, and did not – according to the demands of the naughty youngster – refer to him with the pronoun “they.”

The teacher admits that his faith, conscience, and beliefs do not allow him to incorrectly name the child’s gender. Meanwhile the boy, who imagined himself to be a “transgender person,” demanded that his “difference” be acknowledged and that he be referred to in the plural. Although most of the teaching staff succumbed to the young man’s emotional blackmail, in light of opposition on part of the above-mentioned teacher, the matter became widely known. First, he clashed with the director of the institution, and subsequently with the court, which forbade him from working in his position as a teacher. And that is despite the fact that opposition to the alleged “transgenderism” was the teacher’s only *offense*.

Luckily, the brave educator ignored the court’s scandalous ban and continued to teach children. Unfortunately, the court, in order to make this impossible, locked him in jail until such time as he gives up his religion, beliefs, and faithfulness to his conscience, and apologizes to the boy for calling him a boy.

Figure 6. Example 5, from an email sent by Marsz.info on September 13, 2022. The emphasis (bold and italics) is in the original email. Source: author’s possession.

Figure 6 shows an excerpt from Marsz.info’s email, in the interest of space in English translation only. The Polish-language article that the email linked to was formerly found on the (now defunct) Marsz.info website, although that text differed somewhat from the email. The email purports to report on a news story, in this way utilizing the tactic of appealing to authoritative sources (i.e., real events) and to logical argumentation, since it does indeed seem unreasonable that a person would be jailed for refusing to honor a student’s pronouns. But when we compare the story as represented in the email in figure 6 to the way it is reported in *The Guardian*, inaccuracies and suppression or

misrepresentation of facts become apparent. The email claims that Burke “clashed with the director of the institution” and then “with the court,” but the way this is framed in the relevant paragraph suggests that the “clash” was a disagreement over Burke’s right to follow his religious conscience—and not, as was the case, the result of his problematic interaction with the principal at a public event. The email reframes the court’s order barring Burke from the school’s grounds as “for[bidding] him from working in his position as a teacher,” which constructs the court’s decision as unjust. Burke is depicted as a devoted teacher who simply wants to keep doing his job, while the court insists on denying him this wish. The use of a neutral, factual tone in this sentence works to present the court’s actions as objectively irrational. In the next sentence, the email’s authors inaccurately claim that Burke’s only “*offense*”—emphasized or perhaps parodied through the use of italics—was his opposition to the use of the “they” pronoun. The last paragraph of the excerpt uses some emotive language, such as describing the court’s order as “scandalous.” But the final sentence is again written in a neutral tone: reading it, one might imagine that the court literally stated that Burke would be jailed until he gave up “his religion, beliefs, and faithfulness to his conscience, and apologize[d] to the boy for calling him a boy.” If this statement were accurate, the court would appear objectively unreasonable—and this is the effect that the email’s wording produces for its readers. But, crucially, the claim is not accurate at all, and is instead an interpretation by Marsz.info writers in which anti-genderist opinions are presented as facts.

The suppression and misrepresentation of facts in this example is also enacted through mistranslation. The email translates the English pronoun “they” as *oni*, which in Polish is specifically the third-person plural masculine pronoun used to refer to human males or mixed-gender groups, and which does not have a long history as a gender-neutral third-person pronoun referring to individuals like the English “they.” While recently some Polish non-cis people do use *oni* as their pronoun, others use the feminine/neuter plural form *one*, while still others opt for innovations that bypass the strictly gendered Polish grammatical structures, including *onu*, *ony*, and *vono*.⁸ As such, the pragmatic uses of “they” and *oni* do not directly correspond to each other.

In addition to the suppression and misrepresentation of events and the use of seemingly neutral and rational reporting and argumentation, this email also utilizes presupposition whereby transgender identity is represented as an agreed-upon impossibility. This strategy can be observed in phrases such as “his faith, conscience, and belief do not allow him to incorrectly name the child’s gender,” where the student’s experienced gender identity is framed as “incorrect;” or “the boy, who imagined himself to be a ‘transgender person,’” where the verb “imagined” invalidates and denies the

8 See, for example, “Sugerowane formy niebinarne i neutralne,” Zaimki [Pronouns], accessed April 9, 2024, <https://zaimki.pl/zaimki>; or Klaudia Bobela, “Zaimki.pl: Powstała strona ułatwiająca dostosowanie języka polskiego osobom niebinarnym,” *Queer.pl*, updated July 30, 2020, <https://queer.pl/artykul/204685/zaimkipl-strona-jezyk-polski-niebinarnosc>.

student's experience on the assumption that they are, undeniably, a boy. The student is further described as "naughty," which is not supported by any evidence but works to trivialize their requests to be addressed as "they" as unreasonable acting out.

Finally, a linguistic device utilized in this example that is afforded specifically by the written medium of the email is the use of quotation marks when mentioning LGBTQ+ terms and concepts: "transgender person," "difference" (presumably referring to non-cisgender identity), and "transgenderism" all appear in quotes. This use of quotation marks works to delegitimize and trivialize LGBTQ+ terms, concepts, and issues, and is frequently encountered in the Center's emails. Other examples from emails not discussed in this article include "same-sex 'marriages'" (August 5, 2022), "attempts at legalizing 'partnerships'" (meaning civil unions, August 5, 2022), or "the left invents toilets for the 'nonbinary'" (June 9, 2022).

Conclusion

The above analysis of emails sent out by the Center for Life and Family illustrates how the right uses language to reframe and redefine reality, and to manipulate and persuade its audiences through multiple discursive strategies. It also shows how discourse analytic methods such as the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) can contribute to a detailed and productive examination of right-wing language. While the observation that language can be manipulated for political or ideological ends is not new, theoretical and methodological tools like DHA and CDA allow us to not just observe such manipulations but to identify, describe, quantify, and demystify them through systematic analysis. As a result, we can also trace the interdiscursive circulation of linguistic strategies employed by various right-wing actors, exposing how they support, learn from, and connect with one another in both local and, crucially, global contexts. The similarity of tactics used by the Polish Center for Life and Family and the International Foundation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC), which the Center references in its Twitter post, on one hand, and by the alt-right digital groups analyzed by Tebaldi (2021), on the other, illustrates these interdiscursive links and circulations.

Furthermore, systematic analyses of right-wing language expose how right-wing discourses borrow from, co-opt, redefine, and repurpose progressive terms, concepts, and ideas in service of right-wing agendas, while simultaneously delegitimizing their use by progressives. This process is reinforced through the tactics of anchoring religious and patriotic feelings in what appears like rational argumentation, including drawing on scientific and academic discourse, as in the case of the Center's emails. By appealing to logic, purported scientific "facts," and presupposition about what is "common sense" and self-evident, these texts construct cisheteropatriarchal and queerphobic beliefs as indisputable "truths" and the only correct interpretations of reality, while at the same time constructing progressive stances on gender and sexuality as illogical and absurd.

Crucially, the delegitimization of progressive discourses is also enacted through explicit metalinguistic “deconstructions” of progressive meanings, as I have shown in this article. Such deconstructions, whereby right-wing actors claim to identify and “unmask” linguistic “tactics” used by progressives, highlight the extent to which right-wing discursive strategies are intentional and well informed. They appear, in fact, not dissimilar to linguists’ own methods of discourse analysis, such as CDA, perhaps because the right surely has its own linguists. Recognizing the building blocks of these right-wing discourses is an important step, but it is also a call to action. The next step, perhaps, is utilizing the tools of discourse analysis to construct effective public messaging that reaches beyond academia, and that could help to demystify and expose right-wing discursive tactics for those who encounter them in politics and the media every day.

References

- Baran, Dominika. 2022. “‘Rainbow Plague’ or ‘Rainbow Allies’? TĘCZA ‘Rainbow’ as a Floating Signifier in the Contestation of Poland’s National Identity.” *Gender and Language* 16 (3): 286–307.
- . 2023. “Defending Christianity from the ‘Rainbow Plague’: Historicized Narratives of Nationhood in the Anti-Genderism Register in Poland.” *Gender and Language* 17(1): 77–101.
- . 2024. “‘Crown Jesus, Not the Virus’: COVID-19 Denial, Catholic Conspiracist Thinking, and Right-Wing Nationalist Populism in Poland.” In *COVID Semiotics: Magical Thinking and the Management of Meaning*, edited by Colleen Cotter and Mark Peterson, 41–61. London: Routledge.
- . Forthcoming. “The Lexeme and Image of TĘCZA ‘Rainbow’ in the Discursive Struggle over LGBTQ+ Rights in Poland: A Multimodal Analysis of a Floating Signifier.” In *Battlefield Linguistics*, edited by S. Burnett and F. Vigo. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Borba, Rodrigo. 2022. “Enregistering ‘Gender Ideology’: The Emergence and Circulation of a Transnational Anti-Gender Language.” *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 11 (1): 57–79.
- Butler, Judith. 2019. “Anti-Gender Ideology and Mahmood’s Critique of the Secular Age.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87 (4): 955–67.
- Cameron, Deborah. 2001. *Working with Spoken Discourse*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Carroll, Rory. 2022. “Irish Teacher Jailed for Breaching Court Order to Stay Away from School.” *Guardian*, September 15, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/15/irish-teacher-jailed-contempt-of-court-after-refusing-student-pronouns>.
- Chałupnik, Małgorzata, and Gavin Brookes. 2022. “Discursive Acts of Resistance: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of All-Poland Women’s Strike’s Social Media.” *Gender and Language* 16 (3): 308–33.
- Chojnicka, Joanna. 2015. “Homophobic Speech in Post-Socialist Media: A Preliminary Typology of Homophobic Manipulative Discourse.” *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 4 (1): 138–73.

- Darakchi, Shaban. 2019. "The Western Feminists Want to Make Us Gay': Nationalism, Heteronormativity, and Violence against Women in Bulgaria in Times of 'Anti-Gender Campaigns.'" *Sexuality & Culture* 23: 1208–29.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- . 2001. *Language and Power*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Gal, Susan. 2018. "Registers in Circulation: The Social Organization of Interdiscursivity." *Signs and Society* 6 (1): 1–24.
- . 2019. "Making Registers in Politics: Circulation and Ideologies of Linguistic Authority." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 23 (5): 450–66.
- Gómez, José M., A. González-Megías, and M. Verdú. 2023. "The Evolution of Same-Sex Sexual Behaviour in Mammals." *Nature Communications* 14 (5719). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-41290-x>.
- Graff, Agnieszka, and Elżbieta Korolczuk. 2022. *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*. London: Routledge.
- Graff, Agnieszka, Renata Kapur, and Suzanna Danuta Walters. 2019. "Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right." *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 44 (3): 541–60.
- Grzebalska, Weronika, and Andrea Pető. 2018. "The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland." *Women's Studies International Forum* 68: 164–72.
- Grzymała-Busse, Anna. 2015. *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Jørgensen, Marianne, and Louise Phillips. 2002. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: SAGE.
- Korolczuk, Elżbieta, and Agnieszka Graff. 2018. "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43 (4): 797–821.
- Kováts, Eszter, and Maari Pöim, eds. 2015. *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilization in Europe*. Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. 2001. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Hodder Education.
- Kuhar, Roman, and David Paternotte. 2017. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Machin, David, and Andrea Mayr. 2012. *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. London: SAGE.
- Mierzyńska, Anna. 2020. "Podboje Ordo Iuris. To rozpędzona maszyna polityczna fundamentalistów" [The conquests of Ordo Iuris. The fundamentalist political machine that is barreling forward]. *Oko.press*, January 6, 2020. <https://oko.press/podboje-or-do-iuris>.

- Mooney, Tara, and Gareth Price. 2022. "Utopia, War, and Justice: The Discursive Construction of the Estate in ISIS' Political Communications." *Journal of Language and Politics* 21 (5): 675–96.
- Paternotte, David, and Roman Kuhar. 2018. "Disentangling and Locating the 'Global Right': Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe." *Politics and Governance* 6 (3): 6–19.
- Peele, Cullen. 2023. "Roundup of Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation Advancing in States across the Country." Human Rights Campaign (press release), May 23, 2023. <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/roundup-of-anti-lgbtq-legislation-advancing-in-states-across-the-country>.
- Reisigl, Martin, and Ruth Wodak. 2016. "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)." In *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd ed., edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 23–61. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Russell, Eric L. (2019) *The Disursive Ecology of Homophobia: Unraveling Anti-LGBTQ Speech on the European Far Right*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Swenson, Ali, and Jill Colvin. 2023. "Trump and DeSantis Court Moms for Liberty in a Sign of the Group's Rising Influence over the GOP." *AP News*, June 30, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/moms-for-liberty-trump-desantis-2024-republicans-8e17f7587bba9cf6dd316c3ef2eb6a19>.
- Tebaldi, Catherine. 2021. "Speaking Post-Truth to Power." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 43 (3): 205–25.
- . 2023a. "Tradwives and Truth Warriors: Gender and Nationalism in US White Nationalist Women's Blogs." *Gender and Language* 17 (1): 14–38.
- . 2023b. "Granola Nazis and the Great Reset: Enregistering, Circulating and Regimenting Nature on the Far Right." *Language, Culture and Society* 5 (1): 9–42.
- Tebaldi, Catherine, and Dominika Baran. 2023. "Of Tradwives and TradCaths: The Anti-Genderism Register in Global Nationalist Movements." *Gender and Language* 17 (1): 1–13.
- van Leeuwen, Theo. 2000. "Semiotics and Iconography." In *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, edited by Theo van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt, 92–118. London: SAGE.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2021. *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-right Discourse*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE.
- Wodak, Ruth, and Salomi Boukala. 2015. "European Identities and the Revival of Nationalism in the European Union: A Discourse Historical Approach." *Journal of Language and Politics* 14 (1): 87–109.