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## ***KILLING OR TERMINATING?* PRO-LIFE VS PRO-CHOICE ABORTION DISCOURSE SURROUNDING WYDRZYŃSKA'S COURT CASE**

Key words: abortion discourse, Wydrzyńska's case, pro-life, pro-choice, discourse analysis.

### **ABSTRACT**

Abortion, unsurprisingly, remains a polarizing topic in the media. Recent events surrounding the controversial court case of Justyna Wydrzyńska raised a number of questions about Poland's abortion law, judicial independence, and women's rights. Through a linguistic analysis of two parameters: lexeme markedness (and thus sentiment overtone) and framing, this paper aims at exploring the discourse surrounding Wydrzyńska's court case in two language contexts: Polish and German. Overall, 604 comments were extracted from the comment sections of articles written for conservative affiliated *niezależna.pl*, *Kronen Zeitung*, and *Die Welt*, as well as liberal affiliated *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Die Zeit* and *Der Standard*, and analyzed to examine two areas: the correlation of sentiment between the respective portals and comment sections, and the differences between Polish and German-speaking discourse. The results suggest that the comment sections reflect, to an extent, the general sentiments expressed in the articles, as long as they are compatible with the portal's assigned political affiliation. What is more, the analysis shows that there are significant differences in framing and lexeme markedness depending on the language context, which might stem from the considerable disparity in the statistical religiousness of the states and their legislative backgrounds. While Polish commenters tend to refer to more specific instances, public figures, and specific organizations, German-speaking commenters focus more on general ideas and bigger institutions. This, as well as the proximity of the case, results in a higher level of emotionality being expressed by the Polish commenters. Despite the differences between the two languages, pro-life and pro-choice proponents interlingually make use of certain frames. Following Desperak's (2003) division, pro-life advocates most often follow a line of argument based on morality and fetuses' right to live, often relying on the image of 'death civilization'. Pro-choice proponents, on the other hand, most often refer to the backwardness of their opponents, which is strongly related to traditional values and, frequently, religiousness. Interestingly enough, not only differences but also similarities were observed in the conflicting pro-life/pro-choice discourse around Wydrzyńska's case. Those include references and juxtapositions of the opponents with totalitarianism/dictatorship on both sides of the conflictual spectrum.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Abortion is a socially divisive topic across different cultures and dimensions. As mentioned by Sharma et al. (2017, 1), abortion discourse is immensely versatile because of its “multiple facets [...] such as political, religious, medical, legal.” Its character is strongly dependent on context, i.e., conditions of the specific case such as country (and thus culture), and historical as well as social background. There are, however, always two dominant sides in the debate: *pro-life* and *pro-choice*. Wejbert-Wąsiewicz (2012, 102) states strongly that in the official Polish discourse there are just two polarizing stances and nothing in-between: *pro-* and *anti-abortion*<sup>1</sup>. Such a dichotomy may be deemed characteristic of public discourse, and especially propaganda, where polarization between the two conflicted sides is emphasized via simplification and stigmatization (Szkudlarek-Śmiechowicz 2022, 87). Those two extreme stances are further reinforced by the current abortion laws in Poland. Legislative changes concerning abortion in Poland have been the subject of broad debate for over fifty years, as abortion under communism in Poland was legal due to the fear of the potential negative consequences of illegal, and thus unsafe, procedures to terminate pregnancies (Ignaciuk 2014). After the fall of communism, abortion law was changed, and only three cases remained in which abortion could be legally conducted. However, it was the recently introduced restrictive laws that evoked especially strong reactions among the public and provoked a heated debate. As of 2023, abortion can only be legally performed until the 12th week of pregnancy, if either the pregnant woman’s health is in danger or there is a suspicion that the pregnancy is the result of a crime (Dz.U. 2022 poz. 1575, Art. 4a). The situation is different in countries such as Austria or Germany, where pregnancy termination is not criminalized and can be performed on demand up to the 12th week of pregnancy after medical counseling. After that time, abortion can still be legally performed if there are circumstances that allow it (World Health Organization 2023, Österreichs Digitales Amt 2023). Undoubtedly, the legislative background has an impact on how national abortion discourse is formed. Another strong factor in the conceptualization of issues such as abortion is the social impact of religion on the state. Although politics and religion are not as institutionally separated in Germany as, for example, in the US, culturally they are quite isolated (Ferree et al. 2002). In 2021, 41.9% of the German population identified as non-religious, and 52.7% as Christian (*Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland* 2022). In Austria, the ratio of religiously unaffiliated to Christians in 2019 was 25% to 59.2% (*Office of International Religious Freedom* 2021). The situation in Poland is significantly different. In 2020, 91% of the population openly declared religiousness (*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej* 2020). Since religiousness is one of the dimensions of the abortion

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<sup>1</sup> org. Pol. „W dyskursie oficjalnym istnieją tylko dwa stanowiska: pro- i antyaborcyjne. Głosu jednostek niezdecydowanych nie ma.” (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2012, 102) [this, as well as the rest of translations provided in the paper are own translations].

debate, such a drastic difference in the percentage of believers vs. non-believers must have a significant effect on social perception.

Desperak (2003) found that frames that dominate in the Polish pro-life discourse are focused on the trope of “death civilization”<sup>2</sup>, which is most likely a reference to “death culture”<sup>3</sup>, a phrase coined by John Paul II, himself a strong abortion opponent (Baniak 2015). The pro-choice camp, on the other hand, often frames its arguments based on the presupposition that pro-life supporters are characterized by “backwardness.” Interestingly enough, both sides often refer to one another as “murderers”, with pro-life supporters referring to killing fetuses, and pro-choice referring to killing pregnant women by limiting the accessibility of medical procedures. This perspective can be broadened to a discourse beyond Poland: Reich (1995) notes the way the anti-abortion movement prioritizes the fetus’ life over the woman’s life, and degrades her to a motherly figure by “trivializing [...] impulses towards education, independence, self-determination [and] self-indulgence” (1995, 16).

Budnik (2016, 93) in her research shows that the pro-life movement often uses lexemes such as *murder*, *homicide*, *Holocaust*, *baby*, *tiny human being*, or *God*, as if in polar opposition to the pro-choice preferred words: *decision*, *right to choose*, *termination of pregnancy*, *individual matter*, *fetus*, *embryo*, and *Law*. Szkudlarek-Śmiechowicz (2022, 88) mentions the “petrification” of language in the pro-life/pro-choice environments, where the use of specific lexemes (*infanticide* vs. *termination*, the aforementioned *God* vs. *Law* or *baby* vs. *fetus*) indicates the adherence to one of the sides. This, as a result, fuels the already existing social dichotomy between *us* and *them*, rooted in the long-term conflict between traditional and contemporary values (Zalewski 2021, 84).

In their broad study on the contrast between German and American abortion discourse, Ferree et al. (2002) came to the conclusion that while German discourse focuses on the opposition of the fetal life and women’s right to choose, in America it is more concerned with the moral aspect of abortion and the social effects it may have. In practice, German pro-abortion proponents highlight the social aspect of women’s rights but also the potential negative effects of criminalizing abortion: underground illegal, unsafe, and stigmatizing procedures. American pro-abortion proponents, on the other hand, are more preoccupied with rebutting anti-abortion activists’ claims about morality (Ferree et al. 2002, 127). Despite the relatively equal proportion of pro-life and pro-choice supporters across the US (46% pro-life and 47% pro-choice according to a 2016 Gallup report, as cited in Sharma et al. 2017, 2), Sharma and colleagues report that in over 730 thousand posts containing abortion discourse from the social media platform Twitter<sup>4</sup>, over sixty percent express against-abortion sentiments, while pro-abortion is less than twenty. Neutrality, in contrast to the previous observation on the polarization of the

<sup>2</sup> The phrase does not translate well into English, which is why the provided translation should be considered indicative only; Pol. *cywilizacja śmierci*.

<sup>3</sup> As above; Pol. *kultura śmierci*.

<sup>4</sup> Now X.

Polish discourse, is expressed in the remaining 19.5% of the tweets. The discrepancy between the statistical pro-life/pro-choice division and the significantly higher number of tweets posted by the pro-life movement might suggest a stronger desire to express pro-life sentiments more outwardly.

Certain techniques applied by the pro-life and pro-choice movements have been shown to be applied interlingually. Thus, “those who provide abortions are often referred to as *abortionists* and *murderers*” (Mitchell et al. 2004 as cited in Kumara et al. 2009, 632) across different language contexts, as exemplified by Matuchniak-Krasuska (as cited in Wejber-Wąsiewicz 2012, 83): “[in the Polish pro-life discourse] a doctor is not a gynecologist but an *abortionist*; people who decide to terminate their pregnancies are [...] *murderers of the innocent*.”<sup>5</sup>

The language used to describe such sensitive topics is incredibly important in forming social perception. In the British context, the terms *abortion* and *miscarriage* only began to be distinguished in the medical environment after 1985 and Richard Beard’s public letter to *The Lancet*, where, based on patients’ testimonies, he explained how stigmatizing and unjust the synonymous use of these two words can be (Moscrop 2013, 98). The stigmatization of abortion, for the most part, stems from the use of “negative language and discursive associations” (Purcell, Hilton, McDaid 2014, 1144). This is often framed in controversial and sensational terms: “binge drinking, terrorism and slavery, underage [...] /casual sex [...]”. Women who decide to terminate their pregnancies are deemed “different, outcasts [or] deviant” (Purcell, Hilton, McDaid 2014, 1144), or “promiscuous, sinful, selfish, dirty, irresponsible, heartless or murderous” (Kumara et al. 2009, 630). This perception is exacerbated by techniques often deemed characteristic of the pro-life movement: use of strong adjectives, binary lexemes, references to temporal and historical dimensions, and lexical adjustments: replacing neutral terms with emotionally-charged lexemes (e.g. *fetus* for *baby*), or completely redefining words (Desperak 2003, 198–199).

On March 14th, 2023, a verdict in the high-profile court case of Justyna Wydrzyńska was announced, sentencing the defendant to eight months of community service. Wydrzyńska, an activist and cofounder of the abortion rights group in Poland (*Aborcystyczny Dream Team*) was charged for providing abortion pills to an anonymous woman identified by the pseudonym *Ania*, a victim of domestic abuse who did not want to have another child with her abuser. One day later, on March 15th, the judge who sentenced Wydrzyńska was promoted, which raised questions about the political dimension of the trial and undermined judicial independence in Poland. The controversial case quickly resounded in the media, including the international press, and the discourse shifted from an individual instance to a broader spectrum. The internet debates expanded to broader subject matters such as freedom, women’s and human rights, and values of the European Union.

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<sup>5</sup> Pol. „Lekarz nie jest ginekologiem, ale «aborterem», a osoby decydujące się na przerwanie ciąży są «aborterami» lub «mordercami niewinnych»” (Wejber-Wąsiewicz 2012, 83).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

As discussed in the previous section, the discourse surrounding abortion, despite interlingual similarities, is multifarious and variable due to its contentious character. It differs greatly depending on context and, first and foremost, the country in which the issues are discussed. These discursive aspects include the dominant political and religious affiliations of a given state as well as the generalized sentiments of the participants, which undoubtedly influence the overall character of the discussion. Wydrzyńska's case is unique, and because of its political character it is potentially strongly polarizing. Many news portals, Polish as well as international, published articles about the controversial court case, but only a few made comment sections available. Initially, this paper intended to analyze and compare linguistic tools employed by commenters across three language contexts: Polish, German, and English, but because none of the English-speaking portals provided an open comment section, the analysis was reduced to the remaining two languages. In total, six articles were retrieved and analyzed together with their respective comment sections: two from each of the liberal and conservative affiliated German portals, and one each from the liberal and conservative affiliated Polish portals. The reason more German articles were chosen is the numerical disparity: the German-speaking comment sections are significantly smaller than their Polish equivalents, which can be explained by the lower social impact of the case in the German-speaking context. Therefore, a comparable number of samples – 308<sup>6</sup> comments from the German-speaking media (conservative: 6 *Kronen Zeitung*<sup>7</sup>; 103 *Die Welt*; liberal: 55 *Die Zeit*; 144 *Der Standard*) and 296<sup>5</sup> comments from the Polish-speaking media (conservative: 98 *niezależna.pl*; liberal: 198 *Gazeta Wyborcza*) – were retrieved in order to elaborate on the following research questions:

RQ1: Is the language employed in the online comment sections of newspaper articles concerning Wydrzyńska's case reflective of the political affiliation of the source? If so, how are these differences realized?

RQ2: Does the discourse in comment sections concerning Wydrzyńska's case differ depending on the dominant language of the site, i.e., German vs. Polish?

For each of the research questions, the following hypotheses have been propounded:

H1: Based on research concerning political psycholinguistics (e.g. van Dijk 2006, Sylwester & Purver 2015, Cichočka et al. 2016), it can be hypothesized that the overall linguistic tools employed by commenters of the liberal affiliated media differ from those of the conservative affiliated media.

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<sup>6</sup> Size limitations of the corpora result from the specificity of the study. The paper delves exclusively into articles and comment sections concerning Wydrzyńska's court case. As mentioned earlier in the paper, not much comparable data is available in this particular debate.

<sup>7</sup> *Kronen Zeitung* (*krone.at*) is an Austrian medium, that is why the paper always refers to *German-speaking* and not *German* context.

H2: Based on previous interlingual research conducted on German and American newspaper abortion discourse (cf. Feree et al. 2002), it can be assumed that there are significant differences entrenched in the cultural, historical and political background that influence the discourse depending on the dominant language.

In order to put the hypotheses to the test and answer the research questions, an analysis of two linguistic factors, sentiment/markedness and framing, was performed. All used materials, i.e., the articles and their respective comment sections, were published between October 2022 and March 2023, and each tackles the topic of Wydrzyńska's court case, either before the official verdict announcement or after it.

To measure markedness of the relevant lexemes as objectively as possible, two systems of sentiment analysis were applied: *CLARIN-PL*, a tool for Polish sentiment analysis; and *SentimentWortschatz* with the assistance of corpus-analysis software *WordSmith* for the German sample.

Finally, the comments were qualitatively assessed and divided into framing categories, which represent the sentiments expressed in the comments.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Lexeme markedness

Detailed results of the sentiment analysis are presented in Table 1. The quantitative data shows that when it comes to the German articles, the more conservative affiliated media employ more positively marked lexemes (6%) and fewer negative words (2.4%). Liberal media, similarly, use more positive (4.1%) than negative words (3.8%) but the difference is less pronounced. These numbers are also reflected in the comment sections: conservative media show 5.7% positively marked, and 2.9% negatively marked lexemes in their comment sections, compared to liberal: 5.2% positive and 2.6% negative. Therefore, it can be inferred that although negative lexemes are infrequently employed in both types of media, they are preferred on liberal platforms in both articles and in comments. Conversely, positive lexemes, although always used more often than negative ones, are more favored on conservative platforms.

The sentiments are more polarized across the Polish media. When it comes to the articles, the conservative affiliated medium uses 12.8% positive lexemes and 7.2% negative. Liberal affiliated articles contain 7.8% positive words and 5.6% negative. Markedness reflected in the comment sections reverses these results. Overall, comments in the liberal sample contain 12.2% negative and 6.8% positive words, while in the conservative sample it is 18.8% negative and 7.5% positive lexemes. This may suggest that although both types of articles insert more positive markedness, commenters on both sides of the political spectrum focus more on the negatively marked words.

Interestingly enough, sentiment expression is visibly more prominent in the Polish rather than German media. In both German and Polish samples, it can be observed

that articles gravitate more towards positive markedness, and conservative media, on average, employ it more frequently. Comment sections, on the other hand, are not as globally unified. While Polish commentators, especially those on the conservative medium, employ negatively marked lexemes far more often, German comment sections, independent of political affiliation, prefer to use positive markedness. Still, the overall level of markedness is significantly lower in the case of German media, where it never exceeds 8.5%. On the other hand, in the case of Polish media, the level is never below 13.4%, which might suggest that Polish articles, as well as the comment sections, are emotionally concentrated, and thus more focused on opinion-forming. What might be of interest is the correspondence between the markedness employed in articles and their respective comment sections. While in nearly all cases it is the comment section that is more marked (German liberal media are the only exception here), percentage-wise, the markedness of comment sections reflects the markedness of their respective articles; for the most part the difference varies between 0.1 and 6.6 percentage points (here, negative markedness across the Polish conservative medium exhibits the highest error margin: 11.6 percentage points). This might reflect the strong effect that an article has on its audience. This finding reveals the great potential of the six analyzed news portals to form opinion, since their comment sections reflect the sentiments expressed in the articles.

Table 1.

*Sentiment analysis results*

	Polish liberal	Polish conservative	German liberal	German conservative
Positive markedness				
Articles	147/1894 tokens <b>(7.8%)</b>	78/607 tokens <b>(12.8%)</b>	48/1179 tokens <b>(4.1%)</b>	126/2114 tokens <b>(6%)</b>
Comment sections	220/3211 tokens <b>(6.8%)</b>	118/1561 tokens <b>(7.5%)</b>	524/10234 tokens <b>(5.1%)</b>	388/6748 tokens <b>(5.7%)</b>
Negative markedness				
Articles	107/1894 tokens <b>(5.6%)</b>	44/607 tokens <b>(7.2%)</b>	45/1179 tokens <b>(3.8%)</b>	52/2114 tokens <b>(2.4%)</b>
Comment sections	393/3211 tokens <b>(12.2%)</b>	294/1561 tokens <b>(18.8%)</b>	264/10234 tokens <b>(2.6%)</b>	197/6748 tokens <b>(2.9%)</b>
Overall level of markedness				
Articles	254/1894 tokens <b>(13.4%)</b>	122/607 tokens <b>(20.1%)</b>	93/1179 tokens <b>(7.9%)</b>	178/2114 tokens <b>(8.4%)</b>
Comment sections	513/3211 tokens <b>(17.4%)</b>	412/1651 tokens <b>(26.4%)</b>	788/10234 tokens <b>(7.7%)</b>	585/6748 tokens <b>(8.5%)</b>

Source: own elaboration.



### 3.2. Framing

In 98 comments under conservative affiliated *niezależna.pl*'s article – tententiously titled “Abortion activist sentenced. Politicians of the Left supported her in the court – now they are enraged”<sup>8</sup> – comments insulting the activists constitute the most prominent category (at least one instance of an insult directed towards activists can be observed in 32 comments, i.e. 32.6%). Many of these *ad hominem* arguments fall into the category of animalization. Commenters, in order to ridicule and degrade the pro-choice advocates, especially females, refer to them using derogatory terms stemming from the world of animals: e.g. *hieny* (E: ‘hyenas’), *krowy* (E: ‘cows’), *barany* (E: ‘rams’), *lochy* (E: ‘sows’), *zdechłe szczury* (E: ‘dead rats’), *byki* (E: ‘bulls’). Moreover, they often insinuate sexual promiscuity amongst them:  *prostytutki* (E: ‘prostitutes’), *zdzira* (E: ‘whore’), *alfonsy* (E: ‘pimps’) *ścierwa* (E: ‘scumbags’). What seems to be the most often employed, however, is *body-shaming*, i.e. comments directed at the appearance, rather than the actions or beliefs of the activists: e.g. *brzydkie* (E: ‘ugly’), *brak urody* (E: ‘no beauty’), *nikt ich kijem nie tknie* (E: ‘nobody would touch them with a ten-foot pole’), *paskudne* (E: ‘disgusting’), *czarownice* (E: ‘hags’), *załoga szambiaraki* (E: ‘honey wagon team’), *wstrętne purchawy* (E: ‘disgusting puffballs’). These comments are most likely a response to unfavorable photos of the activists chosen for the article, which further reinforces the impact that a medium has on its audience. In 26 comments (26.5%), abortion is directly equated with murder: e.g. *killerzy* (E: ‘killers’, an instance of an *ad hoc* loan<sup>9</sup>), *zbrodnia* (E: ‘crime’), *zabijanie* (E: ‘killing’), *trucizna* (E: ‘poison’), and thus portrayed as a deed deserving punishment. 17 comments (17.3%) criticize the opposition but, as might be expected, they do not simultaneously express direct support for the party currently in power. The opposition is therefore referred to as *odpady społeczne* (E: ‘social waste’), *wyrzutki* (E: ‘outcasts’), *swolocz* (E: ‘scum’), *śmieci* (E: ‘trash’), *bezkarnie deprawujący młode pokolenia Polaków* (E: ‘corrupting the young generations of Poles with impunity’). 8 commenters (8.2% of all comments) criticize the judge’s verdict in Wydrzyńska’s case as too lenient: e.g. *powinna siedzieć* (E: ‘she should go to jail’), *podnieść karę* (E: ‘increase the penalty’), *taki niski wyrok to skandal* (E: ‘such a low penalty is scandalous’). References to dictatorship and the juxtaposition of activists with extremist historical figures appear in 6 comments (6.1% overall): e.g. *Lenin, bolszewizm* (E: ‘bolshvism’), *sowiecka i szwabska swolocz* (E: ‘Soviet and Boche scum’), *holokaustnicy* (E: ‘holocausters’).

In 198 comments under liberal affiliated *Wyborcza.pl*'s article titled more neutrally “Eight months of community service for aiding abortion. Here’s the verdict in

<sup>8</sup> Pol. „Aborcystka aktywistka skazana. Politycy Lewicy wspierali ją w sądzie – teraz są wściekli po wyroku”.

<sup>9</sup> *Ad hoc* or *nonce* loans can be defined as rare, unassimilated lexical inventions (cf. Kuźniak & Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2014).



Wydrzyńska's case"<sup>10</sup>, comments which criticize the current government constitute the most prominent category. 33 comments (16.7%) make use of simultaneous criticism and insults, e.g. *dewianci* (E: 'deviants'), *nieuki* (E: 'uneducated'), *przestępcy* (E: 'criminals'). Criticism of clergy or the influence of Catholicism on the state is often raised in the comments: 27 comments (13.6%) make use of utterances such as *katotaliban* (compound: *Catholicism* + *Taliban*), *zbożeniec kościoła* (E: 'church perverts') or *tępotą katolicką* (E: 'Catholic obtuseness'). 16 comments (8.1%) juxtapose the government with extremist organizations/states, e.g. *pisłam* (compound: *PiS*<sup>11</sup> + *Islam*), *Iran*, *Talibowie* (E: 'the Taliban'), *Witamy w Iranie...* (E: 'Welcome to Iran...'). Of special interest is the use of historical extremist figures (observable in 11 comments, 5.5%), similarly to the comments on the conservative medium. Here, however, it is the government, not the activists, that is juxtaposed with dictatorship, e.g. *bolszewicy* (E: 'Bolsheviks'), *fascyści* (E: 'fascists'), *Putin*, *III Rzesza* (E: 'Third Reich'), *komuna* (coll. E: 'communism'), *okupacja* (E: 'occupation'). As in the conservative comment section, Wydrzyńska's sentence is criticized by the liberal commenters (10 comments, 5.1%). Here, however, it is because of its "scandalous" character: e.g. *hańba* (E: 'disgrace'), *skandaliczny wyrok* (E: 'scandalous sentence'). Other than that, 15 comments (7.6%) criticize *Ordo Iuris*<sup>12</sup>, e.g. *terrorysty* (E: 'terrorists'), *kryminaliści* (E: 'criminals'), and 12 refer respectively to: the violation of women's rights (6.1%), injustice (6.1%) and the criticism of the judge/court (6.1%). Strong insults are not as frequent as in the conservative comment section, but they can be found in 8 comments (4%) when referring to pro-life proponents, e.g. *szmaty* (E: 'sluts'), *popaprańcy* (E: 'assholes'), *zbożeniec* (E: 'perverts'), *bezmózgowe potworki* (E: 'brainless monsters', about aborted fetuses<sup>13</sup>).

In 109 comments under conservative affiliated *Kronen Zeitung* (neutrally titled "Verdict in Poland: Aiding abortion: An activist sentenced"<sup>14</sup>) and *Die Welt*'s (tendentiously titled "The hidden European network of abortion pill activists"<sup>15</sup>) articles and comments which criticize abortion constitute the most prominent category (45 comments, 41.3%), e.g. *Wer entscheidet ob ein Mensch leben darf?* (E: 'Who decides whether a human being is allowed to live?'). The second broadest category, i.e. 28 comments and 25.7%, is the reference to the fetus as a child and its right to live, e.g. *Wenn die Eizelle befruchtet ist, ist es ein Mensch* (E: 'when an egg is fertilized it is a person'). On the other hand, messages supporting women and their right to choose are almost as common, appearing in

<sup>10</sup> Pol. „Osiem miesięcy prac społecznych za pomoc w aborcji. Jest wyrok ws. Wydrzyńskiej”.

<sup>11</sup> *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, Polish Law and Justice Party.

<sup>12</sup> *Ordo Iuris* is a think tank and a radically conservative legal organization widely known for its extreme Catholic affiliations.

<sup>13</sup> Pamuła (2020) wrote about the unjust terminology exploited by pro-abortion movements insulting and degrading disabled people. She proposes a term *reproductive equity* (org. pol. "sprawiedliwość reprodukcyjna") to raise social awareness and destigmatize disability in the abortion discourse.

<sup>14</sup> Ger. "Urteil in Polen – Beihilfe zur Abtreibung: Aktivistin verurteilt”.

<sup>15</sup> Ger. "Abtreibungs-Aktivistinnen: Europas geheimes Netzwerk”.

24 comments, (22%), e.g. *Jede Frau hat das Recht, über ihren eigenen Körper zu bestimmen* (E: ‘every woman has a right to decide about her body’). 10 comments (9.2%) refer to previous international events and controversies concerning abortion laws, especially the American *Roe v. Wade* case, and 8 (7.3%) criticize the wide spread of misogyny and patriarchal sentiments in society, e.g. *Wenn Männer Kinder bekämen gebe es Mifegyne an der Supermarktkasse* (E: ‘If men had children, Mifepristone<sup>16</sup> would be available at supermarkets’). 7 comments (6.4%) outwardly criticize the government/legislation (whether the Polish government specifically or conservative legislation more generally) for abusing women with such laws, e.g. *diese “Gesetze” menschenverachtend sind* (E: ‘these “laws” are inhumane’). 6 (5.5%) commenters explicitly express their support for the activists, e.g. *Jetzt weiß ich wohin mit Spenden* (E: ‘Now I know where to donate’).

Liberal affiliated German articles on *Die Zeit* (titled tendentiously “Abortion in Poland: For the Polish state, she is a criminal”<sup>17</sup>) and *Der Standard* (titled neutrally “Polish activist Justyna Wydrzyńska convicted of assisting with an abortion”<sup>18</sup>) gathered 199 comments overall, which are not as polarizing as those in the conservative media. Criticism of the Catholic Church is the most prominent category with 30 comments referring to it (15.1%), e.g. *mit Unterstützung der katholischen Kirche* (E: ‘with support of the Catholic Church’). The second broadest category is the reference to a popular saying among pro-choice activists: “My body, – my choice”. 23 commenters (11.5%) mention that women should have agency over their pregnancies, e.g. an emphatic comment *ENTSCHEIDUNGSMACHT!!!* (E: ‘POWER OF DECISION!!!!’). 11 comments criticize conservatism as an outdated system, e.g. *junge Menschen nicht wählen gehen* (E: ‘young people do not go to vote’); the same number, 11 (5.5%), refer to the societal oppression of women, e.g. *Frauen nachhaltig eingeschränkt, unterdrückt und kriminalisiert werden* (E: ‘women have been restricted, oppressed and penalized for a long time’).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Interestingly, the only sample where opinions actually clash is from the German-speaking conservative media, specifically a comment section of *Die Welt*’s article. This might be explained by several factors, but primarily the general character of the article. For a medium broadly deemed conservative, the overtones of the article are liberal in nature. By the choice of language, the author nearly explicitly expresses support for the pro-choice activists and portrays them as protagonists, e.g. by using phrases such as *Frauen kämpfen weite* (E: ‘women keep fighting’ or *Kinderlos glücklich* (E: ‘happily childless’). This perhaps simultaneously invites more liberal commenters to the discussion as well as encouraging conservative readers to defend their stance. Such debates do not take place in other comment sections, or if they do, they are conducted on a small scale: in

<sup>16</sup> Medication frequently used as an early miscarriage inducer.

<sup>17</sup> Ger. “Für den polnischen Staat ist sie eine Verbrecherin”.

<sup>18</sup> Ger. “Polnische Aktivistin Justyna Wydrzyńska wegen Beihilfe zur Abtreibung verurteilt”.

the case of (conservative) *niezależna* only one comment expressed pro-choice sentiments; in (liberal) *Wyborcza*, one comment does not directly express any stance, but rather criticizes the lack of objectivity of the article; and in the case of German-speaking liberal media, there are only a few comments that express pro-life inclinations: 4 comments equate abortion with a murder; 3 comments mention the necessity of considering consequences before having intercourse; and 3 comments – not directly taking a pro-life stance but hinting at it – criticize the current condition of society by demonizing dating sites, one-night stands, and polyamorous relationships. All in all, those constitute 5% (10 instances) of all comments in the liberal German-speaking section, which shows that pro-choice stance is more frequently taken by those commenters. Once again, this shows the importance of political affiliation in shaping the comment discourse of a given medium – if an article does not comply with the general character of the site, the audience experiences dissonance, and is more likely to take positions starting a larger-scale ideological debate.

Because of the national nature of the case, it is logical to assume that Polish commenters are more likely to express emotionality and address the specifics, such as the judge, verdict, specific politicians, and public figures engaged in or associated with the case, e.g. *Biedroń*<sup>19</sup>, *Godek*<sup>20</sup>, *Kaczyński*<sup>21</sup>, *PO*<sup>22</sup>, *PiS*<sup>7, 23</sup>. Simultaneously, German-speaking comment sections refer more to general ideological issues, such as morality, lawfulness, and the violation of women's rights, but also large institutions engaged in or associated with the case, such as the Catholic Church or the European Union, suggesting that they should intervene or penalize conservative countries like Poland or Hungary<sup>24</sup>. This contrast is observable in the framing of the comments: while the broadest Polish sample categories, on both sides of the political spectrum, are rooted in *ad hominem* arguments towards the activists (conservative) and the party currently in power (liberal), German-speaking commenters focus more on criticizing the idea of abortion *per se* (conservative) and on criticizing a large institution: the Catholic Church (liberal).

Based on an analysis of these four examples: conservative and liberal, as well as Polish and German-speaking media, it can be said that certain linguistic tendencies can be assigned to news website commenters, on both sides of the political spectrum. While conservative commenters, in both Polish and German discourse, collectively criticize abortion and refer to the fetuses' right to live, comment sections in the liberal media collectively criticize the Catholic Church and clergy. This finding is consistent with Desperak's (2003) theory of the primary lines of argumentation of pro-life and

<sup>19</sup> Robert Biedroń, one of the leaders of *the Left* Polish political party (mentioned in *niezależna*).

<sup>20</sup> Kaja Godek, a pro-life activist (mentioned in *Wyborcza*).

<sup>21</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, a CEO of *PiS*, a Polish political party currently in power (mentioned in *Wyborcza*).

<sup>22</sup> *Platforma Obywatelska*, Polish Civic Platform, currently one of the opposition parties to the government (mentioned in *niezależna*).

<sup>23</sup> Mentioned in *Wyborcza*.

<sup>24</sup> Such claims appear in 10 comments in the liberal German-speaking comment sections (5% of the comment section).

pro-choice proponents, i.e., the criticism of the “liberal approach to killing” (pro-life) and the criticism of “backwardness” (pro-choice), understood as being entrenched in traditional values. Therefore, H1 can be partially confirmed, since firstly, the comment sections reflect the general sentiments expressed in the articles (with one exceptional instance in the conservative German-speaking medium, where the discussion, although more heated, numerically gravitated more towards the pro-life approach). Moreover, there are interlinguistic parallels in the framing of conservative and liberal lines of argumentation in the Polish and German discourse. Those are: the conservative focus on the intrinsic right to live, with abortion posing a threat to it; and liberal focus on women’s rights, criticism of the Catholic Church, and conservative government. In the context of lexeme markedness, conservative comment sections overall are more likely to express their sentiments more explicitly. However, in the case of German-speaking comments, that difference is not as great as for the Polish commenters. These results partially confirm H2 by reinforcing the fact that the linguistic tools employed in both conservative and liberal environments differ between the two language contexts: Polish and German. Not only are Polish comment sections more abundant in lexeme markedness, they also, in the context of framing, make use of more *ad hominem* arguments, refer to specific public figures, and use bald insults more often. German comment sections refer more often to general concepts, such as *abortion*, *conservatism*, *religiousness*, while Polish commenters refer more specifically to the case, particular people, and smaller institutions. However, this is most likely motivated by the personal dimension and the effect of proximity. The case took place in Poland and raised many questions – not only about abortion *per se*, but also about legislation and the independence of the Polish judiciary, which naturally triggered more emotional responses. What is perhaps of great interest is the use of similar tools for contrastive purposes: in the case of Polish commenters, both political affiliations make use of references to the historical context and dictatorships. As can be seen, both sides of the spectrum insult one another, frequently employing exactly the same references, e.g. *bolszewicy*<sup>25</sup>/*bolszewizm*<sup>26</sup> (E: ‘Bolsheviks/bolshevism’). Due to the specificity of the sample and, consequently, its size limitations, none of the tendencies mentioned can be extrapolated to a larger abortion discourse. The discourse surrounding Wydrzyńska’s case is unique; however, it significantly overlaps with previous linguistic findings concerning the broader spectrum of abortion discourse. It can thus be concluded that, despite small scale of the discourse, high profile of the case makes it an important part of the discussion. The language used by both sides of the conflict exhibits instances of manipulation. However, as rightly observed by Wejbert-Wąsowicz (2012, 84), anti-abortion proponents are still winning the “battle of language”, 21 years later, through extensive use of manipulative techniques. As a result, the gulf between the two positions is not soon likely to be filled, but rather deepened as time goes on.

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<sup>25</sup> *Gazeta Wyborcza*

<sup>26</sup> *niezależna*

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**Zabić czy przerwać? Dyskurs aborcyjny pro-life vs pro-choice wokół sprawy Wydrzyńskiej**

Słowa kluczowe: dyskurs aborcyjny, sprawa Wydrzyńskiej, pro-life, pro-choice, analiza dyskursu.

**STRESZCZENIE**

Aborcja, jak można się tego spodziewać, pozostaje tematem polaryzującym w mediach. Ostatnie wydarzenia wokół kontrowersyjnej rozprawy sądowej Justyny Wydrzyńskiej podniosły wiele pytań dotyczących polskiego prawa aborcyjnego, niezawisłości sądów oraz praw kobiet. Poprzez analizę dwóch parametrów lingwistycznych: nacechowania (a więc wydźwięku) oraz opracowania narracji, niniejsza praca ma na celu eksplorację dyskursu wokół sprawy Wydrzyńskiej w dwóch kontekstach językowych: polskim oraz niemieckim. W sumie 604 wpisy z sekcji komentarzy pod artykułami napisanymi dla konserwatywnych mediów: *niezaleznej.pl*, *Kronen Zeitung* oraz *Die Welt*, a także liberalnych mediów: *Gazety Wyborczej*, *Die Zeit* oraz *Der Standard*, zostały przeanalizowane celem odpowiedzi na dwie postawione hipotezy dotyczące korelacji wydźwięku komentarzy z wydźwiękiem artykułów, oraz różnic między polskim i niemieckojęzycznym dyskursem. Wyniki sugerują, że komentarze, do pewnego stopnia, odzwierciedlają generalny wydźwięk wyrażony w artykułach, pod warunkiem, że jest on kompatybilny z założoną afiliacją polityczną danego medium. Co więcej, analiza pokazuje znaczące różnice w metodach kreowania narracji oraz stopniu nacechowania leksemów zależące od kontekstu językowego, co może wynikać z silnej dysproporcji statystycznej w religijności państw, a także ich tła legislacyjnego. Podczas, gdy polscy komentujący częściej odnoszą się do konkretnych przykładów, osób publicznych oraz mniejszych organizacji, komentujący niemieckojęzyczni skupiają się raczej na ogólnych conceptach oraz wielkoformatowych instytucjach. To, zarówno jak bliskość polskich czytelników do wyroku, ma swoje konsekwencje w wyższym poziomie emocjonalności polskich wypowiedzi. Pomimo różnic międzyjęzycznych, polscy oraz niemieckojęzyczni zwolennicy pro-life i pro-choice często kreują swoje wypowiedzi w podobny sposób. Zgodnie z podziałem zasugerowanym przez Iżę Desperak (2003), środowisko pro-life zazwyczaj tworzy swoją argumentację opierając się na koncepcjach moralności, prawa do życia, a także *cywilizacji śmierci*. Z drugiej strony, narracja pro-choice zwykle oparta jest o krytykę zacofania, silnie związanego z tradycyjnymi wartościami oraz religijnością. Co ciekawe, obserwować możemy nie tylko różnice, ale także podobieństwa w narracji dwóch środowisk. Z dwóch krańców politycznego spektrum dostrzec można bowiem odwołania do totalitaryzmu, dyktatury i bezpośrednio zestawianie ich z przeciwnikami w dyskusji.