

Таким образом, для коммуникационного процесса обязательным условием является взаимопонимание его участников. Без правильного восприятия, оценки и взаимопонимания весь процесс коммуникации теряет смысл. Для эффективной и успешной коммуникации с представителями других культур необходимы определенные знания, навыки и способности, которые формируют взаимопонимание партнеров по коммуникации. Изучение проблем и возможных путей преодоления конфликтов в межкультурной коммуникации создают благоприятный климат не только для развития международных отношений, но и предотвращают «столкновения цивилизаций».

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## LANGUAGE: A PRICELESS GIFT, A WORTHLESS WEAPON

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The article discusses a number of issues related to language as a unique ability granted to man, the mystery of its essence and purpose, its role and significance in the cultural and social development of society. The author touches upon the problems of political correctness as a cultural, behavioral and linguistic category, gives her own assessment of its “logical” sequel – a new phenomenon of “cancel culture” – illustrating by examples how, sometimes, even the most noble intentions can be brought to the point of absurdity. Language can and should be an instrument of creative activity, mutually beneficial cooperation, and not serve as a weapon of obscurantism in the modern “witch hunt”.

Key words: language, thinking, means of communication, political correctness, “cancel culture”.

## ЯЗЫК: БЕСЦЕННЫЙ ДАР, БЕЗДАРНОЕ ОРУЖИЕ

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В статье рассматривается ряд вопросов, касающихся языка, как уникальной способности дарованной человеку, загадки его сущности и предназначения, его роли и значимости в культурном и социальном развитии общества. Автор затрагивает проблематику политкорректности как культурно-поведенческой и языковой категории, даёт собственную оценку её «логическому» продолжению – новому явлению «культуры отмены», - на примерах иллюстрируя то, как, порой, до абсурда можно довести даже самые благородные интенции. Язык может и должен быть инструментом созидательной активности, взаимовыгодного сотрудничества, а не служить оружием мракобесия в современной «охоте на ведьм».

Ключевые слова: язык, мышление, средство общения, политкорректность, «культура отмены».

Once a rich man sent his son so that Socrates might look him over and judge of his talents. “Well, my lad,” said Socrates, “speak, so that I can see you.” The underlying meaning of the words is that man’s nature is reflected in his speech rather than in his face. And Socrates the philosopher spent his entire life speaking. He was not handsome to charm the audience with his good appearance, therefore, if Socrates were to have said “Follow me, and I will give you a lecture on philosophy,” no one would have followed him, but they *did* follow him, and follow to this day: for his eloquent language, his wit, his powerful speech. Daring to paraphrase Socrates’s words, I would say “speak, so that I may know you”, because you are what language you speak.

All creatures communicate, but none of them, except people, have language. Language is not just a set of phonemes and morphemes, vowels and consonants, that sound specifically and are symbols to attach to different objects, phenomena, etc. Language is the ability to voice your thoughts, emotions and feelings. If the point was only to name the things we see or hear around, would there be so many synonyms to express a vast spectrum of shades and hues of the *human emotion*? Would there be a need for such a diversity? Would there exist literature, poetry or beauty to a language? Or would there be the need to share this beauty with generations or with other cultures throughout the entire human existence? If there was no language, would we be able to speculate about the *Black Square* by Malevich or try to elicit some hidden meaning from it? I am not at all sure that the *Black Square* would exist, likewise any other form of art, without language... Trying to understand the *essence of language*, its greatness, and the mystery of its origin is like trying to understand the emergence and immensity of the Universe. The infinitude of both is inconceivable, simply mindboggling! Right here, with this thought in mind, anyone could put an end to any further speculation, and just take this fact for granted. But people are inquisitive by nature, and there is virtually no stopping them when it comes to solving riddles. And the riddle of language as the faculty inherent exclusively to man will always excite our minds, since we are most unlikely to find the answer.

Language is closely interconnected with perceptions, emotions and feelings which may be so intense, fragile or elusive that you often lack precise words to explain them, so that you can only resort to extensive descriptions while only approximating you to their true sensation.

Language is a most precious gift that no other living creatures can boast of having. Well, undoubtedly, all the existing living beings have the ability to communicate, and not only higher animals, but also insects, birds, fish and even plants and mushrooms. History knows examples when primates mastered quite an impressive human vocabulary, and knew exactly the semantics of those words, because they were able to use them in appropriate contexts. Dolphins are known to have the brain twice bigger than human’s and a rather intricate system of communication through ultrasounds, and the birds from the raven family are said to be extremely smart

and can even imitate the sounds produced by some other creatures. All this can be, fairly enough, called communication, and yet, is it language? Hardly. The sounds or signals produced by creatures of various species are limited to 10, 20, or 100 and cannot exceed that limit, they are used by them only to survive and reproduce in their natural habitats, i.e. in order to communicate such needs within the frames of their own population of species and a given environment. Quite remarkable is the fact, that most animals communicate in the same way in different geographical locations, although some higher animals, like dogs, undoubtedly distinguish human commands spoken in different languages. Human language is remarkably distinctive for its productivity – the ability to create and comprehend completely new messages – and a tiered structure, that is, the presence of phonological, morphological, syntactic levels, and the level of discourse. And all this is permeated with semantics.

Is it possible to give a proper definition of language apart from the most commonly accepted one, which delineates it as “a means of communication or a system of communication that comprises a set of sounds and written symbols, or the use of such system by people in a certain region to express their ideas orally or in writing”? There are hundreds of such definitions, many succinct, some extended, but none of them are sufficient enough to disclose the whole essence of language, yet, all of them are extremely valuable, because each opens the door to this understanding and gives us more food for reflection. Despite the gigantic scientific research that has been conducted over the centuries and around the world, no explanation has yet been found to the origin of language, its emergence, or its multi-variance.

One of the most outstanding linguists in the world, Noam Chomsky, adhered to a very tough opinion: “Language is not for communication.” He believed that language was good “for thinking”. Being highly polysemantic, language depends on a huge number of factors and events, and each event is full of its own meanings and we interpret them differently in different circumstances. In early childhood children do not know complex language patterns. And we do not need a complex set of phrases to explain to a toddler the danger of fire, for example. In order to do so we will resort to a set of inarticulate “frightening” sounds and facial expressions, which only proves again the axiom that not all communication is verbal or needs words. The most primeval people, having no language at all, also communicated with some sounds, gestures, facial expressions, but then something happened, and, from the point of view of evolution, it happened so instantly that it cannot be explained by evolutionary processes alone. Some scientists claim that the language emerged in the course of a gene mutation, but other equally influential scientists refute this. In any case, so far no one knows the right answer, however one thing remains clear: had it not been for the emergence of language, we would still be living in caves to this very day.

A perfectly wonderful thought was expressed by Martin Heidegger, the German thinker and founder of existentialism, who claimed: “Language is a tool to fight death.” Indeed, language provides us with magic, with the ability to convey the

achievements of our life to others, to our descendants, rather than to inevitably end everything with death. In other words, language makes us immortal, this is why we remember the great scientists, poets and writers, and we know them and talk about them as if they were alive among us, and this is why we commemorate our deceased relatives and friends, because we remember our conversations with them and their thoughts, which they shared with us. No less interesting is the idea conveyed by David Primack, an American biopsychologist and behaviorist, who wrote: “The emergence of language does not fit with evolution”, or the belief that “language is a move away from nature.” Obviously, when it comes to nature and evolution, *neither* needs a human language. Everything that should exist already exists, and language by no means affects the existence of, say, electricity, molecules, atoms, all sorts of objects and phenomena.

The origin of the first-spoken human language is still unidentified. There exist many hypotheses and assumptions, but anyone who could find the correct answer to this riddle would deserve not just a Nobel Prize, but the entire Nobel Foundation. Why? Because this would be the discovery of *the human genome*, and would surpass all the other discoveries *ever* made by Man. This would help us understand how human brain works, in other words, we will probably discover the Godly Particle of Man! Language is the quintessence of man's being, it is a tool that has made man Man, that helped man to develop as a biological species, that triggered man's social advancement. It is language that endowed “homo sapiens” with self-cognition and made him “homo eloquent”.

### **Part of culture?**

Language is considered to be an inseparable part of culture. This assertion has become a popular truism, but here arises the question: which appeared first? It may well be culture that is part of a language, not the other way round, as we have always believed. After all, according to the Book of Genesis “first was the *word!*” Be that as it may, these two things are certainly intertwined, and one cannot be perceived without the other.

Whatever the culture, language is a marker. It is a marker of a social group, worldview, ideology, culture, education, age, place of birth, profession or belonging to a specific subculture, and of another zillion factors. Language is a very convenient identification mark for groups, especially for identifying “outsiders”. Being an “outsider” does not necessarily mean belonging to a foreign culture. Often people living on the same territory (in the same country), and sharing a common language, may find it difficult to understand each other anyway. Thus, a 70-year old man may not comprehend a teenager's patter, let alone a certain subculture's slang. Professional IT jargon may well be mumbo-jumbo for an outsider, and so on, and so forth.

Given the ability of language to delineate the alleged belonging of an individual to the categories marked above, language is an extremely powerful tool and should be used with mastery. The language you speak can either make or kill you as a speaker or even as a successful member of society. An eloquent speaker, someone

who is said to be able “to charm the birds out of the trees”, produces a favorable impression on any interlocutor or audience. Good speech helps in many practical ways, e.g. to go through a job interview, succeed at work, make friends and establish good contacts. In other words, a masterful command of language is an indispensable tool in your hands, that helps you throughout life.

On the other hand, however, if you are tongue-tied, struggle for the right words to express yourself clearly or get your message across, you are most likely to be doomed to failures in social and professional interactions, which is a very unpleasant thought. Sure, there are people who simply cannot voice their ideas, but they may well be quite expressive in writing. It is rather painful for some introverts or technically minded people to express themselves verbally, let alone to socialize. Some greatest minds of the world, e.g. Einstein and Nils Bohr, are said to have admitted that the most complicated task for them was to put down to paper the verbal explanations of the ideas that had already formed in their vision as solid pictures. Apparently, for them, the understanding of the laws of physics did not require language (aka words), it was a well-formed and complete visualization of such things. All this only adds to the enigma of language. If, when *thinking* about ideas or things we *visualize* them rather than “*pronounce*” them in our heads, what do we need language for, at least in such an incredible variety? As for unsophisticated communication, we probably do not need language at all, some signals will do just fine, like the Morse code. Communication, as a mere exchange of information, can be held on a very primitive level, just like animals do, so, obviously, human communication is not just reduced to the exchange of information, it encompasses much more diverse and complicated vectors of interaction. That’s why it was language that helped man to become a most perfected species, not ideal of course, but most sophisticated, because it enabled us to think. It endowed us with “consciousness”, self-awareness, and empowered us with mind.

Language is the indicator of culture, although the concept of “culture” is so multifaceted that it can be applied virtually to anything. Culture itself is an inherently difficult notion, arguably without a distinct definition, it is most unlikely that you will ever be able to settle on just one definition that will be suitable for all possible cases. Undoubtedly, the word *culture* is used clearly and unambiguously in such combinations as *European culture*, *British culture*, *youth culture*, or even a *cultured pearl*, *bacterial culture*, *agriculture*, or *cultivation of soil*. The problem is, however, that even in these examples the term “culture” seems to have half-a-dozen different meanings.

### **Language as a weapon of political correctness**

When speculating about the issues of language and culture, I cannot forego such a social phenomenon as political correctness, which can well be attributed to the cultural-behavioral and language category. We live in a global world, where representatives of different cultures and beliefs inevitably “collide” and communicate with each other. And everyone has their own ideas and norms, defined by upbringing

and education, but people often make gross mistakes when expressing their own thoughts. Progress is changing society at an increasing rate, but internal culture is not always keeping up with it. Within the framework of generally accepted behavior, we strictly adhere to the moral norms inherent in our own culture, while we may not know anything about others. Political correctness appeared as a way to introduce unified rules of communication that do not touch on the raw the people with views different from our own. This is an attempt of society to reach a consensus in an ethical sense.

Political correctness, undoubtedly, has a specific content: it is based on an ideological and mental attitude to overcome international intercultural, interethnic contradictions and conflicts, and, at the same time, it is revealed through language with the help of various language means.

As a language category, political correctness has the following two characteristics: 1) an integral feature – the absence of discrimination in the connotative meaning of a language unit based on race, nationality, gender, age, property status, or health status; 2) a differential feature – the ability of a language unit to exclude the manifestations of the above types of discrimination. There have appeared in the language special words and terms that replace ethnonyms that did not initially have, but eventually acquired a negative connotation. Here belong, for example, names of national, racial and social groups, such as Negro, Orientals, Indian, old, disabled or handicapped, poor, retarded, and many others. In the relatively recent past, these words were part of the language norm, but due to social and cultural changes, they transferred into the category of negatively evaluative words and were duly substituted by their politically correct opposites respectively: African-American, Asian, Native American, senior, physically challenged, low-income, special, etc.

Likewise, there have appeared euphemisms that directly reflect the ideas of political correctness by mitigating various types of discrimination. Thus, today we distinguish euphemisms that exclude racial and ethnic discrimination, mitigate discrimination based on gender and exclude sexism in the language (*domestic partner/companion* instead of husband/wife), *flight attendant* (instead of steward/stewardess), exclude discrimination based on social status (*economically disadvantaged, high/ low-income*), exclude health discrimination (*aurally inconvenienced* instead of mute, *visually challenged* instead of blind, *immuno-compromised* instead of HIV-infected people).

The phenomenon of political correctness has existed for several decades now, and a lot of researchers, political scientists and linguist scholars, have dedicated enough effort to its study. Political correctness causes turmoil in the hearts and minds of all those who encounter it one way or another. The whole world seems to have split into two sides: into zealous advocates and no less ardent opponents, because it is hard to stay out of this and not to take sides. On the one hand, the followers of political correctness set decent and virtuous goals. On the other hand, what once used to be a noble idea has turned into a monstrous octopus, whose tentacles permeate every sphere

of human existence, be that history, culture, language or even external appearance. Slowly, political correctness has begun to morph into a means of surveillance and control over the manifestations of any dissent and nonconformity, becoming all the more like the “vice police”. All dissenters can now easily be subjected to public lynching, including a subpoena, and even risk losing their jobs and livelihoods. At one time, the English sociologist Karl Popper discovered a paradox: “Unlimited tolerance automatically leads to the disappearance of tolerance as such.” And political correctness turns into the dictatorship of an aggressive and loud minority. And then the freedom of speech and creativity is replaced by an absolute rejection of a dissimilar point of view, and one discrimination is replaced by another.

When society consists of representatives of diverse religions, sexual minorities, ethnic groups, it is quite difficult to consider the interests of all. But the western world has set itself such a goal and is steadily moving towards it. Many a lance has been broken over this issue in the expert community. Some try to prove the progressiveness of this phenomenon, its usefulness to society. Others are perplexed: what can political correctness bring to our civilization? Opponents of political correctness put forward quite weighty counter-arguments. The “affirmative action programme” has triggered a process of “reverse discrimination”, which infringes the rights of the people not belonging to national minorities when they enter educational establishments or when they are being hired to work. Such discrimination has led to a wave of backlash from the white population of the United States, known as a “white boomerang”, *whitewash*. To restore justice, people sometimes have to turn to the judicial authorities. The zealots of political correctness, in their turn, do not leave their citizens a choice or any chance, and violation of the imposed rules leads to inevitable punishment. A person offended by a non-politically correct statement has the right, according to the law, to go to court. The lawsuit threatens the careless commentator with an exhausting litigation and a fine.

There are many oddities and twists in this confrontation. Here are some relatively recent examples. The British screenwriter Carla Mary Sweet was outraged by the cast of actors in the popular TV series “Chernobyl”. She wrote on twitter: “There are so many black actors in our country who would look great in this series. I am extremely annoyed by another rating show that is filmed as if black people did not exist.” In the comments, she was advised to learn history and was explained that there were very few, if any, black people among the residents of Ukraine at that time. The discussion ended quite predictably: the dark-skinned “authoress” of the tweet called “racists” everyone who disagreed with her.

Political correctness penetrates even into areas where it has never been anticipated, like precise sciences, which by definition have nothing to do with ideology. In 2017, Rachel Gutierrez, a professor at the University of Illinois, made a “shocking discovery”: mathematics is a racist science! “Algebra and geometry promote and strengthen the privileges of the whites in society. Those who show an aptitude for mathematics are treated as white.” Professor Gutierrez added that

teachers of mathematics should be politically correct and take into account the fact that mathematics was invented by the whites and not follow the wrong standards.

The classical literary language also suffers from politically correct followers, although sometimes this phenomenon takes anecdotal forms. In English, the word “rape”, in addition to meaning the agricultural crop “rapeseed”, also means “a sexual assault”. Therefore, there emerged an opinion that the word “rape” should not be used everywhere, because this rude word indicates inhumane things. Canada’s Teasdale is known as a center for growing this crop and beekeeping, which was reflected in the city’s motto: “land of rapeseed and honey”. It caught the eye of representatives of the “progressive public” and shocked them with its political incorrectness. They read the slogan as “land of rape and honey”. The city had to urgently change its motto and now it reads “place for growing opportunities”. And rapeseed has been called “canola” ever since.

For some time now, it has become unacceptable to use unambiguous, clear and succinct definitions. With the apogee of absurdity and the triumph of political correctness, soon everyone will have to solve charades, i.e. when the word is not pronounced but described, for example, *chronologically gifted* (the old), *spatially deprived* (drunks), *horizontally oriented* (fat), *alternatively gifted* (people with Down syndrome).

#### **“Cancel culture” as a logical sequel of political correctness**

And like the icing on the cake, as if political correctness alone were not enough for us, there has appeared “cancel culture”, and for several years now has been marching victoriously on the newspaper sheets and social media feeds of the whole world. The word “boycott” in English-speaking culture has recently acquired a tarnished reputation, as it is a frequent tool of bullying, so much condemned in schools. Nevertheless, “cancel culture” is precisely a boycott, a call to the like-minded to refuse to communicate or have any contacts with a person who has “violated” certain rules. According to all the canons of the school boycott, the punishment for communicating with the boycotted is a boycott of the one who supported the renegade. Therefore, companies prefer to quickly dismiss employees who have become the object of attention of “cancellers”, even if the employee did not intend to outrage the public at all, but got into an unpleasant situation quite accidentally.

Mostly, it is celebrities that risk being “cancelled” and becoming outcasts, and today it is difficult to find a famous person who would not be forced to apologize for thinking, writing and saying something wrong. Yet, common people can also get a portion of “righteous indignation”, if some of their careless remarks or a photo catch the eye of a popular blogger who decides to initiate harassment. Quite remarkable and absurd is another story that happened to a Tumbler user under the nickname *higitsunes*: she was attacked for taking a picture of herself wearing a kimono. A lot of people wrote to her that it was “a disgusting cultural appropriation to wear national outfits and thus misappropriate the culture of the aboriginal peoples...” The girl replied that, for a start, it was not a kimono, but a yukata, and that the Japanese



did not mind at all if anybody wore their national outfits. At the same time, she posted a picture of her Japanese passport and asked the public whether they were not satisfied enough with the distinct Japanese shape of her eyes.

The sad thing is that cancel culture extends beyond the borders of the present, all the more persistently it looks into the past. Thus, in the autumn of 2020, the British Library compiled “a list of disdain” with the names of cultural figures whose ancestors had been involved in the colonization of new lands and in the slave trade. George Gordon Byron, Oscar Wilde, George Orwell, and many others who personally never had anything to do with slaves and new lands, were blacklisted anyway, because their great-grandfathers or great-uncles were mixed up in all that. And while their books have not yet been burned, they are specially marked so that people should know who they are dealing with. According to the staff library, these people were able to become famous writers because their families enjoyed the wealth acquired in an unmerited way.

Fortunately, not all the progressive minds of the world support “cancel culture”. In July 2020, over 150 writers, thinkers, publicists and scientists wrote “*A Letter on Justice and Open Debate*”, an open letter, explaining the harm and danger of this phenomenon. The letter condemns “an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty”. The authors of this epistle write that they understand the desire of defenders of minority rights to ensure an atmosphere of equality and acceptance in society, despite the fact that “the forces of illiberalism are gaining strength throughout the world”, but they urge not to turn the ideals of resistance into their “own brand of dogma or coercion — which right-wing demagogues are already exploiting”. Among well-known authors who signed the open letter, there is the sociologist and futurist Francis Fukuyama, the political scientist Farid Zakaria, the emeritus philologist Noam Chomsky, the writer Salman Rushdie, persecuted for criticizing Islam, the author of the cultish novel “*The Handmaid’s Tale*” Margaret Atwood, and the Russian former world chess champion Garry Kasparov. The actor Rowan Atkinson, Mr. Bean, made an excellent comment on this subject: “What we have now is the digital equivalent of a medieval mob that roams the streets looking for someone to burn. And it fills me with fear for the future.” Keith Hampton, one of the US largest political scientists, a professor at the University of Michigan, believes that “cancel culture” will eventually lead to extreme polarization of any society and, as a result, to serious social conflicts in most of today’s advanced countries. If some control, prevail, impose and domineer, and the others get used to keeping silent, the tension will inevitably grow and eventually will lead to an explosion.

The crowd has no tolerance for other people’s opinions. And, probably, many activists of the “cancelling” process would be terribly outraged if they realized that their actions are in many ways akin to the actions of vulgar bullies. Their ideas about the preferred way of behavior in these conditions become beliefs, turn into behavioral stereotypes and norm of communication practices. And a witch hunt is

announced for all the dissenters. In order to understand the scale of the problem, here are the data from an all-American survey conducted in July 2020 by the analytical company Morning Consult. 53% of the respondents claimed that a person should expect serious social consequences for publicly expressing unpopular opinions, 40% reported that they participated in at least one act of canceling, including in social networks, refusing to support public figures and companies, because they did or said something that is considered undesirable or offensive. However, 44% of Americans consider “cancel culture” an adverse phenomenon and treat it sharply negatively, but, they are a minority.

What linguistic, economic or social necessity, what psychological factors push people to choose, as well as to impose on others with such aggression and the power of a steam roller, all these good intentions, which inevitably lead to a hell of discord, segregation and mutual rejection? Language was bestowed on people for creation, but they are piling up the Tower of Babel of a new format, when they do not understand each other, even though they speak the same language. They create buzz word combinations, compared to which Orwell’s Newspeak is childish babble, they impose politically correct norms that already border on insanity and obscurantism rather than intend to help those who need help. What urges people to propagate cancel culture, while destroying someone’s fate, career, and, at the same time, doing virtually nothing to facilitate the lives of those “oppressed”, whose rights are allegedly infringed? If people have any sense left, they need to understand that this is a way to nowhere, a dead end, that they need to learn to talk to each other, to use the language for its intended purpose, i.e. for thinking, establishing good relations and contacts, and not for hostility, hate speech or verbal harassment. Language is the reflection of your inner culture, you do not need to be politically correct to be polite, tactful and considerate to other people’s needs. You are what you speak, then just think how you do it. Speak, so that I may know you; speak well, so that I can trust you.

## **СОЦИАЛЬНО-КОММУНИКАТИВНОЕ ИЗМЕРЕНИЕ ДИСКУРСА ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ МИГРАНТОВ**

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В своей статье автор обращается к проблеме изучения дискурса идентичности мигрантов и осуществляет попытку вписать лингвистическое исследование в более широкое социально-научное поле. Автор обращается к западным концепциям исследования дискурса мигрантов и демонстрирует их потенциал в описании дискурсивной реальности. Положения статьи обосновываются выводами, полученными путем изучения глубинных интервью с мигрантами Беларуси и Германии, проведенных автором в рамках диссертационного исследования.

Ключевые слова: дискурс, идентичности мигрантов; конструктивизм; критический дискурс-анализ; дискурсивный конструкт; дискурсивное значение; адресат; коммуникативная стратегия.