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## **DUALISM OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS CONCEPT IN MODERN CULTUROLOGY**

*The research considers the language of political correctness ranging from gender-neutral euphemisms to other anti-discriminatory semantic innovations promoted by international and domestic public institutions. The author hypothesizes the factors that have split the public opinion and caused a dramatic rejection of new language norms by their opponents.*

**Keywords:** *language, political correctness, gender-neutral, verbal discrimination, semantic innovations, challenge*

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## **ДУАЛИЗМ КОНЦЕПЦИИ ПОЛИТКОРРЕКТНОСТИ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ КУЛЬТУРОЛОГИИ**

*В исследовании рассматривается язык политкорректности: от гендерно-нейтральных эвфемизмов до иных антидискриминационных семантических инноваций, внедряемых международными и внутренними общественными институтами. Автор выдвигает ряд гипотез относительно факторов, которые разделили общественное мнение и вызвали резкое неприятие новых языковых норм со стороны их оппонентов.*

**Ключевые слова:** *язык, политкорректность, гендерно-нейтральный, вербальная дискриминация, семантические инновации, вызов.*

The contemporary world torn apart by sociocultural controversies is plunged into a mess of hostilities, capital punishment for misdemeanors or prohibition of university education for female citizens in some countries. A mere empty pumpkin illuminated from inside can be regarded somewhere as a token of something utterly detrimental for the public sanity and cultural welfare.

No wonder that utmost manifestations of violence and intolerance are confronted with counteraction of people who strive to make the world better by fighting everything associated with discrimination with both legal and verbal tools. The research deals with the latter only, viz. the politically correct language which is persistently introduced by the most reputable international institutions.

Surprisingly enough, the concept of political correctness is considered to have been invented in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by apologists of Marxism who utilized it to fight revisionist tendencies amongst their partisans. Now their ideological heirs, apart from the general public worldwide, condemn and ridicule the politically correct language devised by ‘unfriendly’ Anglo-Saxon civilization, in particular, for gender-neutral vocabulary allegedly undermining true orthodox values.

The actual idea of politically correct language is the use of egalitarian, gender-neutral words and word combinations to equalize the social status of men and women, as well as the utilization of euphemisms to exclude possibility of hurting the feelings of people who may face any kind of discrimination because of their physical, mental, or social position (racism, sexism, ageism, etc.).

A laudable public intention to create humane, civilized sociocultural environment free of abuses and infringement of human rights was, quite predictably, supported at an official level. In 1999 UNESCO published «Guidelines on Gender-Neutral Language» [4]. 10 years later similar guidelines

titled «Gender-Neutral Language in the European Parliament» were issued by the European Parliament [2]. It becomes clear from their titles that the brochures were aimed at consolidating gender equality by means of the language devices.

They stipulated certain alterations of the historical norms. Some examples of the new rules imposed on the English-speaking community via the above documents comprised the changes as follows. The ‘man’ words were ostracized and substituted with their sexless alternatives: businessman – business manager, executive, head of firm, etc.; mankind – humanity, human-beings, humankind, etc.; manpower – staff, workforce, employees, personnel, etc. Stewards and stewardesses «lost» their gender and became flight-attendants or cabin crew. Women’s salutations were deprived of any hints of marital status, so ‘Mrs.’ and ‘Miss’ were turned into businesslike ‘Ms.’. If «John and Mary both have full-time jobs», Mary would probably be shattered to reveal that «he helps her with the housework» so it was recommended to say «they share the housework» under the circumstances.

Swedish myrmidons of gender neutrality have gone further by introducing the artificial pronoun ‘hen’ which does not belong to any gender, unlike male ‘han’ and female ‘hon’. They claim it can be used in kindergartens until children make up their minds consciously whether they are boys or girls. As well, this word is allegedly convenient to be used in legal practice when it is not clear what a criminal’s sex is.

The US society proved to be especially sensitive to humanitarian buzzwords giving birth to a tremendous number of semantic innovations: pets – nonhuman animal companions, poor people – the disadvantaged, old people – seniors or senior citizens, naughty child – attention-deficit disordered child, invalid or cripple – disabled person, drug addict – substance abuser, slums – substandard housing or low-income areas, dumb or stutterer – speech-impaired, etc. [1].

A vast layer of politically correct word partnerships, mainly originating in the US, have the ‘challenged’ component: horizontally challenged (fat, stout, plump), vertically challenged (short, low, undersized or a dwarf), sartorially challenged (dressed inelegantly or tastelessly), financially challenged (poor), visually challenged (blind or unable to see well), aurally challenged (deaf or unable to hear well), technologically challenged (experiencing problems in operating technical devices), attention-challenged (inattentive), cerebrally challenged (stupid or insane), ethically challenged (neglecting public morals and ethical conventions), follicularly challenged (bald), intellectually challenged (backward), etc. [6].

Such amplitude may even trigger a frivolous hypothesis that everyone can promote the politically correct English by making up their own ‘challenged’ words: a man who cannot hammer in a nail might be classified as ‘manually challenged’; or a person who has gone bankrupt or become insolvent might be called ‘commercially challenged’, etc. At least, if such euphemisms can lighten one’s mood or downplay a problem, they are entitled to exist until there emerges an individual who imposes them on others as a social norm or form of censorship. Anyway, this humble attempt might have been appreciated by George Orwell inventing examples for his «Newspeak».

There is good news for ‘challenged’ people who do not feel entirely protected from potential insults yet. In December 2022 scholars of Stanford University, California, released a new list of «harmful language» with a view to be more sensitive to marginalized groups. The name of this «politically correct» guide is «The Elimination of Harmful Language Initiative» [1]. The endeavor contains the content warning «This website contains language that is offensive or harmful. Please engage with this website at your own pace» and 10 sections: «ableist, ageism, colonialism, culturally appropriative, gender-based, imprecise language, institutionalized racism, person-first, violent and additional considerations».

Below are some bright examples from the guide that will definitely broaden our horizons by revealing «harmful» meanings of the words we have been using since birth and providing us with their presumably correct substitutes.

Instead of 'American' we are supposed to say 'US citizen' because «this term often refers to people from the United States only» while the Americas comprise 42 countries.

The 'African-American' notion which has been the summit of political correctness for ages is outside the updated law of morals now, according to Stanford, and should be swapped for the capitalized 'Black' because «Black people who were born in the United States can interpret hyphenating their identity as «othering». It is not out of the question though how 'Blacks' will perceive such an explicit reference to the color of their skin.

At the same time, 'whitespace' ought to be swapped for 'empty space' since the former «assigns value connotations based on color (white = good), an act which is subconsciously racialized». 'Black sheep' referring to a person should be replaced with 'outcast' as the idiom «assigns negative connotations to the color black, racializing the term».

If you are used to calling your grandfather as 'grandfather', you will have to abandon this «harmful» habit. You will have to call him 'legacy' now, «Hey, legacy, how about going fishing?» The point is that «this term has its roots in the «grandfather clause» adopted by Southern states to deny voting rights to Blacks».

Another word 'banned' by Stanford scholars is 'brave'. One of the first written mentions of this word dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD in the epic poem «Beowulf». So, its line 865 says, «Hwilumheathorofehleapanleton, on geflitfaranfealwemearas», which means «At times brave warriors let their dun horses gallop racing one another». «Heathorofe» is a complex word where 'heatho' is Old English for 'war' and 'rof' for 'brave'. Presumably, the combination of the first two letters of 'heatho' and 'rof' gave birth to 'hero' in modern English. One is tempted to ask the question how the word 'brave' has degenerated into a culprit, from the viewpoint of Stanford linguists. Quite a bizarre reason given is that one of the meanings of 'brave' is an Indian warrior. Hence, «this term perpetuates the stereotype of the «noble courageous savage», equating the Indigenous male as being less than a man». Hopefully, we can still use the word 'bold' instead, although, if we give rein to our fancy, it can be associated with 'bald' which had better be substituted with 'follicularly challenged'.

Do not even try 'calling a spade a spade'. Instead, 'call something what it is' as «although the term has its origins in Greek literature, the subsequent negative connotations with the word «spade» means that the phrase should be used with caution or not at all». Every time, digging our flowerbed, we may train our mind striving to understand the «negative connotations» connected with the «harmful» word 'spade'.

Democratic professors entering the audience with the salutation «Hi guys» should get rid of this detrimental custom now. According to their Stanford colleagues, «this term reinforces male-dominated language» and had better be changed for 'folks, people, or everyone'.

Fortunately, our 'nonhuman animal companions' got their share of tenderness too. Now we cannot 'kill two birds with one stone' because «this expression normalizes violence against animals». «Accomplish(ing) two things at once», as well as becoming a vegetarian, will probably never cause any animal to suffer.

One might suppose the Western public burst into a storm of applause. In fact, they did not. Gloomy silence would have been much better than the public response ranging from caustic remarks and poignant sarcasm to undisguised disgust. Vox populi which is known to be vox Dei has awarded apologists of political correctness and their creative products with such terms as «the Thought Police, uglification of English, claptrap, absurd», etc. Web forums favor anonymous politically correct professors with such honorary titles as «douche bag» for «brainwashing», «bastardizing God's creation» and «making policy to fix a problem that does not exist» [4].

Alas, it happens every time when public servants or scholars do a favor to the people without caring to wonder whether the people need it. Most amazingly, women who were expected to be the very target group meant to benefit from the gender-neutral language did not seem to be enraptured

whatever either. As usual, the road to hell turned out to be paved with good intentions. The question is why such beneficial building materials as the intention to eliminate verbal discrimination of a human-being have paved the road to such a woeful destination.

There seems to be several reasons for that.

First of all, adherents of politically correct language fighting for «elimination of harmful language» do not seem to differentiate such pivotal linguistic phenomena as language, speech and speech act. It would scarcely have been appreciated by Ferdinand de Saussure whose «Course in General Linguistics» («Cours de linguistique générale») states that language (Fr. 'langue'), speech (Fr. 'parole') and speech act (Fr. 'langage') should be considered separately. Language is understood as a social phenomenon common for all users. It is homogeneous in nature, being «a product passively registered by a person». Speech is «an individual act of will and understanding» that has nothing collective. A speech act is heterogeneous and tends to present information and perform an action simultaneously. In other words, scholars can only establish («register passively») facts of the language rather than interfere with it trying to impose their ideas on the public of how the language must look or work. The language is common by default, like the air we breathe, and no one is authorized to dictate us how we must breathe or speak individually. Thus, confusing language and speech is erroneous, in terms of linguistics.

It allows coming to the second conclusion. Our speech is reflection of our verbal freedom, and freedom of speech is stipulated and guaranteed by constitutions of all democratic countries. Any attempts to restrict this paramount personal liberty look utterly inconsistent with the system of values of the countries that position themselves as democracy spotlights. Quite logically, the ban on particular verbal expressions can be followed by the prohibition on public demonstration of opinions. What appears to be a good intention the society would benefit from actually creates a precedent that can result in a social disaster. Perhaps, just therefore the politically correct language (which is actually the politically correct speech) encounters such a strong opposition on the part of society instead of being widely welcomed.

Third, one cannot fail to see that the idea of tolerance that underlies the contemporary «Newspeak» has grown to its opposite, viz. intolerance to everyone who dares call a spade a spade. However, the only guilt of opponents of «Newspeak» is that they are as conservative in terms of saving the language as their UNESCO counterparts who are aimed at saving the architecture by declaring ancient architectural masterpieces to be the world's cultural heritage, although modern construction technologies allow erecting higher, stronger and brighter buildings.

Another weird culturological phenomenon worth mentioning to cut a long story short is the coexistence of two polar approaches in terms of the bounds of decency in vocabulary use. So, demonstrating a great degree of intolerance to inequality in gender related issues, the Anglophone society remains surprisingly tolerant to the use of obscene language in movies or standup comedies although it would be superfluous to remind of what kind of components that language consists of. Some timid attempts to avoid the words legitimately disseminated via TV-sets result in emergence of memes like the four Fs in evolutionary psychology which says that «the hypothalamus plays a major role in the regulation of basic biological drives related to survival, including the so-called «four Fs»: fighting, fleeing, feeding, and mating».

As a conclusion, it should be noted that, irrespective of our own attitude to the issue of dualism of political correctness concept, we ought to stick to the principle «When in Rome, do as Romans do» and respect sociocultural assumptions formally accepted by other nations.

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