

Политически корректная лексика как отражение современных реалий

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается влияние современных реалий на политически корректную лексику. Кроме того, рассмотрены значения политически-корректной лексики в формировании картины мира.

Ключевые слова: язык, реалии, языковая картинка мира, политическая корректность, лексика.

Politically correct vocabulary as a reflection of modern realities

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Abstract. The article describes the influence of modern realities on politically correct vocabulary. In addition, the significance of politically correct vocabulary in the formation of a picture of the world is considered.

Key words: language, reality, world image, PC (political correctness), vocabulary.

Many scientific works deal with the concepts of language and reality. Some scholars have tried to answer the question of how language shapes our reality, while

others have assumed that it is reality that influences the way we speak. However, there are also those who consider that the influence is mutual. The relationship between language and consciousness was first studied in detail by Wilhelm von Humbolt in a series of sixteen theses, “On Thinking and Speaking”. Then two prominent American scientists, Sapir and Wharf, developed the hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which stems from the assumption that the particular language a person speaks affects the way he or she thinks about the reality [7, p. 13487]. Also, this topic was included in the studies of such linguists as N. Chomsky, F. Bopp, F. Boas, L. Weisgerber, O. Potebnya, V. Yuzhchenko and many others.

The material for this study was politically correct vocabulary used in mass media, such as “New York Times”, “The Guardian”, and socially significant events foreshadowing the introduction of this vocabulary were described as well.

Any language is an ordered system of signs that follows certain rules. It consists of a special set of words called a lexicon, which never stops developing; new words enter the vocabulary every year. Because of this, people can only name the things they have in their language. Consequently, we can argue that through vocabulary, language determines how we see the objects around us. This is why the lexicons of different languages are quite different, as they have names only for those concepts that are essential and important to their culture [4]. Moreover, when naming an object, we pay attention to its main characteristics or functions, and this choice varies from a language to language.

Nevertheless, each language has a limited number of words, and mostly for those concepts that are part of its culture and daily life, but it would be wrong to say that people could only perceive aspects of the world for which their languages have words for [4]. In fact, people are able to notice things that do not have names in their language, but they may not be as good at distinguishing them as those who have such concepts in their native language.

Gender, for example, as a category, influences people's perception of the real world. It is worth clarifying that not all languages have the category of gender. Various

experiments conducted in the 90s showed that the grammatical category of gender can evoke different feelings and associations to a particular object in different languages. In a study, native speakers of German and Spanish were asked to describe how they see objects such as “*bridge*” or “*key*”. German speakers associated “*bridge*” with typical “feminine” adjectives such as “elegant, slender”, whereas most Spanish speakers used typical “masculine” adjectives such as “tall, long, strong” [6]. In the case of the word “*key*” being masculine in German and feminine in Spanish, German speakers were more likely to use words such as “hard, heavy, jagged, metallic, and useful”, whereas Spanish speakers tended to say “golden, intricate, small, cute, shiny, tiny” [5]. These different results were due to the opposite grammatical gender of words in both languages. Thus, studies have proven that even grammatical category can affect perception; people tend to follow the rules set by the language they speak.

From the other side of the issue, reality also influences our thinking and, consequently, our language. For example, we can consider the “artificial” rejection of the words aimed at insulting someone else's dignity or right to choose. As reflected above, the category of gender evokes certain associations that are historically correlated with a particular gender, which in turn causes some social resentment. To resolve conflict situations, lexical units are abolished, substituted, and new grammatical structures are introduced. In such a case, we speak of political correctness.

Speaking of the category of gender, many people in the English-speaking community advocated for the abolition of gendered nominations in the profession, as almost all of them were associated with “male” work, neglecting women even at the level of language. While “strong, powerful, leadership” positions were given to men: “**businessman**”, “**policeman**”, “**chairman**”. Women were left with the roles of assistants or artists: “**actress**”, “**waitress**”, “**poetess**”, “**stewardess**”. Because of such linguistic injustices, society has created the concept of politically correct language, which has already made changes to the current language.

The term “political correctness” itself is difficult to define. Noam Chomsky once defined it as “a healthy extension of moral concern”. Compared to the current definition

of the term, it is clear that it no longer has the former meaning. Political correctness could be equated to adherence to certain speech codes that were established in the guidelines of professional societies for a bias-free language [2, p. 57].

S.G. Ter-Minasova offers a definition of political correctness as “the desire to use new ways of linguistic expression to avoid offensive and unacceptable expressions related to race, gender, age, health, social status, appearance, etc., and to respect the feelings and dignity of each individual” [1, p. 143].

Under the influence of the advocacy of equal rights, a number of occupational titles have been changed, so that many professions have lost their gender markers: “chairman” – “**chairperson**” or “**chair**”; “fireman” – “**firefighter**”; “stewardess” – “**flight attendant**”. The pronoun “they” is also actively introduced in cases where gender is irrelevant in the adjectival sentence: “*Somebody left their wallet*” instead of “*Somebody left his wallet*”. It is worth noting that there are several variants of the heterogeneous combinations “**he/she**”, “**she/he**”, “**he or she**”, “**(s)he**”, “**s/he**”. In formal writing style, it is preferable to use the variant “**he or she**”.

At the same time, the struggle for equal rights in Russia led to the introduction of a large number of feminitives into the speech turnover: «**психологиня**» (psychologist), «**докторка**» (doctor), «**режиссерка**» (director), «**авторка**» (author). This division was to emphasize the presence of women in professional spheres, but due to other events there was a ban on the official use of new-wave feminitives.

Recent events related to the BLM (Black Lives Matter) community in the United States, and later in many countries around the world, have raised questions about tolerance and racism. Such a significant social event could not but leave a mark on the language. Many lexical units were adopted as taboo words and respectful alternatives were introduced to describe members of different races: “**African American**”, “**African European**”, “**Asian American**”.

Also in recent years, there has been a general trend towards tolerance and acceptance of people who are different from the majority. This can include several groups of people:

- people with different physical and intellectual abilities (“**physically different**”, “**differently abled**”, “**mentally challenged**”);
- people with a non-standard appearance (“**plus size person**”, “**aesthetically challenged**”, “**short statured person**”);
- people in difficult economic situations (“**low-income person**”, “**disadvantaged background**”, “**the underprivileged**”);
- people with non-standard gender and sexual preferences (“**LGBT-person**”, “**partner**”).

It is worth noting that in Russia the word «инвалид» (disabled) does not have negative connotations, so this word is a respectful address. Moreover, the stigmatization of people with various diseases is not monitored, so there is no need to introduce a politically correct vocabulary.

The recent armed conflicts taking place in the world have also brought the politically correct vocabulary of this subject back to use in the media. This is due to the fact that the need to provide information in the right way and with the right presentation is still present. Thus, traumatizing terms like “*war*” and “*corpses*” are avoided and replaced by “**armed conflict**”, “**body count**”, respectively.

According to the Wharf's hypothesis, “our perception of reality is determined by our thinking processes, which are influenced by the language we use. Thus, language shapes our reality and tells us how to think about and respond to that reality. Language also reveals and promotes our biases” [3, c. 282-287].

Hence, according to the hypothesis, the use of sexist language promotes sexism, and the use of racist language promotes racism, which in turn created a certain social problem that helped to introduce politically correct language, which influenced language itself in general, which in turn influences thinking, and so on. We can go back to the previous explanations that reality and language influence each other and are in symbiosis. However, the existence of such a concept as “a politically correct language” may suggest that some aspects of language are a product of a particular time and situation in society.

Language is indeed an integral part of human life, allowing us to communicate with other people, to know the world and to describe things in it. However, the question of whether language affects our perception of reality is still debatable and there is no definite opinion on it. It cannot be denied that people speaking different languages may see the world differently. The reason for this is that different languages have different vocabularies, as words were formed according to different patterns and reflect the phenomena of cultures. Thus, these two concepts, language and reality, so dissimilar in nature, serve the same purpose. They do influence human consciousness, and the only question is to what extent language influences our perception of the world, or reality shapes the way we speak.

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