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PECULIARITIES OF THE POLITICAL CORRECTNESS PHENOMENON IN THE ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN WORLD-IMAGES

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Abstract

The article studies the concepts of political correctness and language tact from the point of view of their reflection in the English and Russian world-images. The category of political correctness is considered from the linguistic and linguacultural aspects as one of the powerful means of people's linguistic behavior regulation in a multinational society and ensuring effective process of intercultural communication with the maximum conflict situations risks reduction. The objective of the given research is to conduct a comprehensive comparative study of the political correctness phenomenon in two unrelated languages using the methods of continuous sampling and comparative analysis of the linguistic facts. In recent decades, the need to abide the language tact has come to the front not only in Western European countries, but also in Russian society. Correct interpretation of statements becomes one of the prerequisites for an effective process of intercultural communication, as well as compliance with the rules of language tact when communicating with representatives of the same country. The authors draw attention to the fundamental differences in the frequency and validity of politically correct words usage in the English and Russian languages, due to different historical background for the development of the political correctness concept in the national world-images.

1. Introduction

The importance of studying the phenomenon of political correctness in the modern multicultural world is undoubted. Having become a powerful language policy tool political correctness can help to avoid different social and cultural conflicts between people. The habitual character of the political correctness in the US and Western countries is out of the question, but in Russia this phenomenon is still quite new. That is why it seems necessary to compare and analyze the notion in two national world-images – those of American and Russian ones.

2. Problem Statement

The vital necessity of observing the rules of political correctness in different situations of communication. The study proves the insufficient degree of the problem development in the Russian world-image.

3. Research Questions

3.1 clarification of the concept "political correctness";
3.2 its correlation to speech etiquette, the definition of linguistic and cultural features of this phenomenon in the English and Russian languages;
3.3 a comparative analysis of politically correct vocabulary usage frequency in the English and Russian languages.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main objective the given interlanguage study is that of conducting a comprehensive comparative study of the political correctness phenomenon in two unrelated languages.

5. Research Methods

The main methods used in the study are continuous sampling and comparative analysis of the linguistic facts taken from mass media and live everyday communication which demonstrate the fundamental difference in the politically correct vocabulary of two languages.

6. Findings

Language can be described as a repository of mankind experience which is reflected in the meanings of separate words and set expressions, in the norms of behaviour fixed in a language determining a person's particular culture affiliation. Cultural and specific information accumulated in a language reflects people's mentality, their outlook, their place in the world, their attitude to the social realm and its interpretation peculiarities, different from native culture. Linguistic world-image as a verbalized part of the conceptual world-image determines the outlook of this linguistic and ethnic society

both as a native speaker of a language and a personality reflecting native speakers' cultural characteristics.

In the process of cross-cultural communication all its participants to some extent recognize and consider their mutual dissimilarity, that is "other language code, other customs, traditions, guidelines, everyday means of communication" (I.I. Khaleeva). Study and identification of common points in different cultures actively contribute to international cooperation of different countries and nationalities' representatives. This, as a result, makes contribution to cultural dialogue development (Startseva, Likhachyova, & Mishin, 2012, p. 28).

Speaking about cross-cultural communication the importance of translation as its part should be noted. In translation as a type of language mediation a translator has to take into account two linguistic world-images, as well as to compare and adapt conceptual world-images of two linguistic cultures. Among the main factors that cause translation difficulties linguists point out:

1. the specificity of language units semantics;
2. the discrepancy between the world-images created in languages for non-linguistic reality reflection;
3. differences in reality itself (Kamenskaya, 1990, p. 125).

These difficulties overcoming is directly related to a translator's competence. A translator is not just a mechanism for transformation of one language units to another one, but a participant of cross-language communication and a significant mediator [Ibid.]. It means that his functions are very often not reduced to simply a translation, but also include pragmatic adaptation, social and cultural studies and historical comments. In this case a translator must separate knowledge that is universal for most people and knowledge specific to the representatives of some culture. He also must be aware of and take into account the differences in categorical notions of different cultures and nationalities, not to mention speech etiquette and conventional norms (Startseva, Likhachyova, & Mishin, 2012, p. 30).

Ryadchikova and Tkhakushinova (2009, p. 151) state that speech etiquette is a set of requirements to form, content, order, character and situational relevance of statements in a given culture (2009, p. 151). "Speech etiquette is a microsystem of nationally specific verbal units accepted and prescribed by the society for interlocutors' contact establishing and desirable communication tone maintaining according to the rules of speech behavior" (Nevezhina, 2012, p. 324).

The key to successful communication is to observe the following speech rules: friendly attitude to the addressee, interest in conversation, attention, sincere opinion expression. In addition to the general requirements, communication has developed some specific concepts, such as political correctness and tolerance. Ter-Minasova (2000, p. 216) defines political correctness of a language as a desire to find new ways of language expression instead of those hurting a person's feelings and dignity by habitual linguistic indelicacy and/or straightforwardness in relation to nation and gender, age, health, social status, appearance, etc.

At first the phenomenon of political correctness appeared in the United States in the second half of the XX century. Its necessity was explained by the fact that the US population of African descent began expressing negative attitude to the "racism of the English language", and thus demanding changes in its vocabulary. The first word to criticize was "black", which was perceived by Negroid race representatives

as their personal dignity belittling. From now on, new neutral concepts for naming different nationalities representatives have appeared in the American version of the English language.

Since English is the international language of communication, as well as the language of politics, economics and business, it is quite natural that the phenomenon of political correctness has spread not only in the United States but also in many other countries. Currently, the phenomenon of political correctness is international and is more or less common in almost all languages all over the world.

Political correctness finds itself in the system of education, science, religion, everyday communication and is mandatory at the legislative level. The influence of political correctness in fiction, mass media and other sources of information is also noticeable.

The category of political correctness is most evident in the vocabulary of a language, which leads to the creation of new correct units instead of those that can hurt other people's feelings. The list of words not recommended for usage, which are reflected in the dictionaries of politically correct vocabulary with corresponding more "tactful" equivalents, is being expanded (Khizhkina, & Shurupova, 2016, p. 514).

The main "purpose of political correctness is to eliminate stereotypes rooted in the human consciousness (first of all, those of people of a different nationality, sex, physical or mental condition existing in a language in the form of words, which can be interpreted as insulting dignity of these categories representatives" (Shejgal, 2002, p. 24).

Political correctness does not simply soften the true meaning of what is happening, but also protects the oppressed by language various means (Misyuk, 2015, p. 31). As a linguistic phenomenon, political correctness is based on such a lexical stylistic means as a euphemism, which presupposes replacement of an existing word for softening its meaning. For example, there have been made a number of attempts in this field in the US schools – teaching materials are being revised in order to protect children from the negative phenomena existing in the American society by excluding from use such words as death, disease, crime, unemployment, poverty, divorce, slavery, alcoholism, drug addiction, etc. (Zajtseva, 2015, p. 107).

Nowadays political correctness is becoming an indispensable part of both American mass media and everyday colloquial communication. The number of politically incorrect words which are to be removed from the language has grown significantly in recent years. Political correctness has had such a strong impact on the language that it has become in fact a way of self-censorship and turned into a threat not only for the intellectual activity of the country, but also for its international communication (Visson, 2005, p. 41).

There is a certain difficulty in nomination of people with different mental and physical disabilities in the English world-image. The politically correct vocabulary of this group is formed by the component "-challenged", which supersedes words such as "disabled", "invalid", "defective" ("mentally retarded") or "handicapped". New words are built on the following model: "disabled" – "physically challenged", "blind" – "visually challenged", etc.

For gender political correctness the following restrictions when translating are applied: morphemes of words that previously indicated gender (such as "-man" or "-ess") are now either replaced by neutral "-person" or the words undergo a fundamental change ("salesman" – "salesperson"; "actor", "actress" – "actron").

Regarding the nomination of elderly peole, the use of the definition "old" is most often perceived as an insult. Therefore, today it is quite possible to find synonymous expressions that not only carry a neutral characteristic ("senior citizen", "mature"), but also expressions that describe this period of life from the most favorable view. For example, a "third age person", i.e. a person who has retired after "the Second Age" ("years of working life") and has a lot of free time for leisure, additional education or travel. Also, in relation to the elderly, the definition of "golden ager" is applicable – "a person in the most beautiful period of life".

Social political correctness also requires a tactful attitude to the representatives of non-prestigious professions, as the direct naming carries a negative connotation and offends the workers' dignity. So, janitors are now called "sanitation engineers", "housewives" are now referred to as "domestic engineers" ("specialists in the field of household"). Unemployed citizens should also be treated correctly: instead of the usual "unemployed" it is now customary to use "involuntarily leisured" ("forced to rest") (Khizhkina, & Shurupova, 2016, p. 515).

In order to analyze and compare the political correctness phenomenon in two languages, it will also be important to consider politically correct terms used in the Russian language. This once again proves the fact that political correctness expands its language space and is not a characteristic phenomenon only for English-speaking countries.

There is no doubt that the notion of political correctness does exist in Russia, but unlike the US here it has not become somewhat of an ideology. Sometimes Westerners and Russians simply have a different understanding of what is offensive and what is not, and this can lead to misunderstandings and disagreements (Yegorov, 2018).

Russian philologists have repeatedly tried to introduce other terms to denote the essence of this phenomenon. For example, Ter-Minasova suggested that the term "linguistic tact" should be used instead, Kiseleva uses the term "communicative / cultural correctness". Despite the fact that in the Russian-speaking background these terms would be more understandable and mean exactly what we mean by political correctness, they still could not get assimilated, since the term "political correctness" is already quite firmly in use. Thus, for Russians, the political correctness mainly means compliance with the language of tact (Ivanova, 2015).

It should be mentioned that most publications in Russia demonstrate critical understanding of the political correctness phenomenon. Beloyar (2007) in his "Explanatory dictionary of new democratic language and euphemisms" considers political correctness as "a kind of unofficial undeclared censorship, which has found its greatest spread in the United States, as well as in other Western countries, and recently in Russia. Political correctness in its practice is usually disguised as what might be called "good manners" and is officially aimed at not offending or humiliating anyone's feelings. However, such "good intentions" hide the main purpose of political correctness – that of classifying and regulating the information space and flow: cutting off the spread of politically unreliable subjects and shaping public opinion in the "right direction" (Beloyar, 2007, p. 184).

As can be seen, Beloyar (2007) expresses his negative attitude to this phenomenon and criticizes its excesses. "Political correctness" means, first of all, the ability of the ruling class to influence people. Similar thoughts are found in the works of other researchers and linguists, so it is not surprising that

political correctness is not that common in Russia. Thus, Bohm (2012) states that the term "political correctness" evokes an immediate negative reaction among many Russians. They like to say that political correctness is "not for the Russian climate", that they are too accustomed to call things the way they see them (Bohm, 2012).

At the same time, it is necessary to notice the increased interest of the Russian mass media to the problems of national character, gender equality, social stratification, i.e. all those problems that political correctness phenomenon affects. The growing number of more and more politically correct words and expressions in the Russian language proves the language consciousness liberation, its readiness to change the established norms. Political correctness has the most tangible impact on the lexical structure of the language. Vocabulary, as the most flexible level of the language system, instantly reacts to the changes taking place in society. This process becomes especially noticeable during periods of economic, social and other changes: it is when a large number of neologisms appear, most of which eventually safely come out of active use.

Politically correct dictionary of the Russian language contains the following words – "African American", "representative of the Negroid race", "dark-skinned", "guest worker", etc. As can be seen, all these words are the borrowings from the English language. On Russian mass media pages one can often face a situation where instead of the word "Negro" "dark-skinned", "African (Afro) American" or "representative of the Negroid race" are used. In order not to offend the poor, the word "poor" is replaced by "needy" (Khizhkina & Shurupova, 2016, p. 516).

It should be noted that some politically correct units are not borrowed from the English language and have always been part of our culture. Nevertheless, attention must be drawn to the fact that over time the words (expressions), which were originally perceived as politically correct, acquired a negative connotation and in modern language conditions can be perceived as offensive. Here are some examples to prove: "bomzh" (= a homeless person – a person without a certain place of residence) – this acronym was used in Russia in the 90-s of the last century in order to soften and oust the coarser word "brodyaga", "bich" (= "tramp") (originally the word "bomzh" was a police term, then acquired the label "slang"). The term "prostye smertnye" (= "mere mortals"), which is intended to replace the offensive word "poor", also has a derogatory connotation and may hurt the feelings of financially unsuccessful people to a much greater extent than the original word "poor". The same applies to the expression "litsa Kavkazskoy natsionalnosti" (= "Caucasians"), which negatively characterizes both any inhabitant of the Caucasus and at the same time does not apply to any nationality in particular. This expression was also a police term in the 1990-s and is a characteristic feature of stereotype thinking.

Nevertheless, we should mention the positive impact of the political correctness phenomenon on the vocabulary of the Russian language in recent decades. For example, the expression "termination of pregnancy" has become generally accepted in mass media, replacing the politically incorrect word "abortion". The same applies to expressions such as: "prostitute" – "a woman with a low social responsibility", "poor" – "needy social layers", "disabled" – "a person with special needs". The last example, however, needs some comment. In Russian society until recently the word "disabled" was not perceived as something offending dignity of a person having certain health problems. That is why in mass

media along with politically correct expression "people with special needs", one can meet such words as "incapable", "disabled", "invalid". All this highlights the need to improve the language culture and tact.

The phenomenon of political correctness and its expression in the language people use play the most important role in creating and maintaining a communicative balance during communication. At the same time neglecting the use of politically correct terminology can lead to negative results, or at least to a conflict situation in communication (Urmanova, 2014, p. 151). The given study proved that the notion of political correctness has deeply rooted in English-speaking countries national morale as a part of their life (the number of examples given in the study supports this statement). At the same time in Russia this notion is still based on the rules of euphemistic usage of words only in some certain situations of communication, mainly because Russians are accustomed to call a spade a spade. We now can witness the situation of language policy improving due to the mass media influence on people and we are sure this process is going to develop.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion it should be said that according to the principles of political correctness, it is unacceptable to divide people into "normal" and "abnormal", taking into account their age, social or health status, physical abilities and appearance.

Political correctness in both English and Russian world-images must be an effective means of preventing interethnic, intercultural and interpersonal conflicts. This statement is based on the fact that the tendency to compromise, conflicts avoiding, the spread of multiculturalism ideas, the inadmissibility of negligent attitude to the values of different nations are fundamental for political correctness.

Acknowledgments

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