

THE BASICS OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

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Articolul de față este dedicat noțiunii de corectitudine politică, ce reprezintă un obiectiv lingvistic care afirmă că limbă trebuie să contribuie la respectarea drepturilor omului și să reflecte așa-numite minorități în modul neutru, fără să le umilească. Articolul prezintă regulile de bază ale corectitudinii politice și tipurile de limbaj care le calcă. De asemenea, articolul demonstrează necesitatea predării regulilor corectitudinii politice viitorilor specialiști în domeniul limbii și descrie în linii generale principalele obiective ale predării.

One of the indispensable elements of language teaching is cultural awareness or what is sometimes called “country study”. It should be taught together with the four basic skills to ensure a comprehensive mastery of the language. Cultural awareness is essential for learners as it enhances their adoptability to a new linguistic environment and facilitates communication with the native speakers. An integral part of the modern English speaking reality is undoubtedly political correctness.

Political correctness is understood in this context as a linguistic policy which requires that language should reflect fair treatment of all members of society regardless of their ethnicity, sex, beliefs or lifestyle. The origin of the notion is unknown but is hypothetically considered to have appeared in the United States of America in the 60s-80s under the pressure of minority groups (especially African-Americans and women) fighting for their civil rights. Since then political correctness has spread to many countries of the world and has been assimilated into many languages. Besides it has considerably eased the process of establishing contact in today’s global village. Therefore it is advisable to get acquainted with this phenomenon if one studies the English language seriously.

When teaching political correctness to the learners of EFL it is necessary to meet two goals:

1. Familiarize learners with the politically correct vocabulary
2. Train them to construct politically correct discourse

The first goal presupposes acquainting learners with the rudiments of political correctness.

According to Maggio (1990) these include:

- Calling people the way they want to be referred to and not the way “outsiders” choose to call them (*Roma* instead of *Gypsy*, *African American* instead of *Negro*, *Hispanic* instead of *Mexican*)
- Judging people on the basis of their individuality, not stereotypes (not all the Arabs are rich terrorists; not all the African-Americans are poor ghetto-dwellers; not all the men are smarter than women, etc.)
- Including everyone in the category of people (“*Every person has a right to live*” instead of “*every man*”)
- Avoiding unnecessary mention of belonging to a certain group or of possessing certain characteristic features (the fact that Condoleeza Rice is a single African-American woman does not influence her ability to fulfill her duty of Secretary of State of the USA)
- Considering people’s feelings when talking about sensitive issues

The above mentioned rules instruct learners to avoid certain types of language. These types include:

1. Racist (reflecting biased treatment of some races and nationalities)
2. Sexist (discriminating people of a definite gender, especially women)
3. Ageist (underestimating some age groups, especially the elderly or the young)
4. Ableist (treating people with disabilities as second-rate or nonexistent)

Crystal (1997) suggests the following examples:

5. Heterosexist (offending people of a non-traditional sexual orientation)
6. Lookist (being harsh on plain looking people)
7. Heightist (discriminating against people of certain height, either very tall or very short)

Proceeding from modern language practices it is possible to point out some other types, such as:

8. Healthist (denigrating people with a disease considered contagious or “dirty”)
9. Classist (belittling representatives of various social classes both higher and lower)
10. Familist (slighting people who have no family or children)
11. Theologist (classifying religions into true and pseudo religions)

Unfortunately this list is not exhaustive: it is constantly replenished by numerous examples of offensive language as new groups provoke public dissatisfaction and draw discrimination upon themselves.

The second goal presupposes helping learners to acquire the techniques of building politically correct discourse. This implies, first of all, instructing them what topics are considered taboo and should therefore be avoided. Such topics include sex, bodily functions, extremist political and religious views, money matters, etc. Secondly, it requires informing learners how to address sensitive issues. The main objective in this case is shifting the emphasis from the unpleasant to the neutral and keeping to the norms of politically correct vocabulary as much as possible. For example, instead of dwelling on *the negative attitude of society to AIDS victims* it is desirable to speak about *the enhancement of a better attitude of society to people living with AIDS*.

Teaching political correctness is vital for creating specialists with an all-round development and a thorough knowledge of the language. It will enable learners to sound proper and natural when speaking English. Besides, it will facilitate the establishment of lasting and enduring relationships with diverse inhabitants of our global village.

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