

Linguistic Means of Expressing Political Correctness in English Language

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Abstract

Language is a mirror which reflects the public social consciousness. It describes a nation system of values and helps to express a person's viewpoint. It might be politically correct or incorrect. In this regard, the research questions are "What utterance is politically correct?" and "What is political correctness?" We adhered to the following definition of the term "political correctness": It is used to describe languages, policies, or measures that are intended to avoid offense or disadvantage for members of particular groups in the society. The present research defined the political correctness as a linguistic category and described language means of its expression. Our standpoint is as follows: it is significantly important to teach students to speak politically correct. The research aimed to implement innovative approaches to teach the political correctness in the English classroom. Teaching tips were offered with the aim to teach the political correctness that can be applied at upper-intermediate/advanced levels of students' proficiency in EFL class. Research materials can be recommended for English learners. Findings of research can serve as general recommendations for faculty members and students at universities.

Keywords: EFL class; Linguistic category; Person's viewpoint; Politically correct utterance; Political correctness; Teaching political correctness.



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1. Introduction

Everyone accept our claim that teaching students to speak politically correct is significantly important. Nevertheless, the present study reconsidered this postulate and set the following tasks:

- Overview of the political correctness concept,
- Identifying linguistic means of expressing political correctness,
- Offering copyright teaching tips for teaching political correctness in EFL class.

According to [Antúnez \(2018\)](#) the political correctness phenomenon is associated with the emergence of the idea of cultural pluralism. Political correctness, as a phenomenon in America in the 80s-90s ([Abdrafikova et al., 2015](#)) was started by African native speakers who were dissatisfied with the negative connotation of the word 'black' resulting being replaced by 'African-American' or 'Afro-American' ([Crowther, 2005](#)). The tendency was actively supported by feminists who fought for women rights in the public and political life including the possible linguistic discrimination. Feminists introduced such forms of address as Ms, which is neutral like Mr., and does not indicate the marital status of a woman ([Fahrutdinova et al., 2014](#)). The ideas of political correctness found the strongest support among proponents of the movement for gender equality and they declared English as a sexist language. Since then, linguistic changes and innovations have continuously taken place and generated the appearance of the *gender-neutral language*. *For example, compound words with the component 'man' are substituted for those with the component 'person' (chairman → chairperson), words with the suffix -ess are substituted for neutral ones (stewardess → flight attendant), etc* ([Gerasimenko, 2011](#)).

According to [Katsev \(1988\)](#) to speak politically correct refer to finding new *language* means instead of those that hurt individual feelings and dignity and infringe human rights in terms of race, gender, age, health, social status, etc. ([Mustafina et al., 2017](#)) posits that *euphemisms are perfect language means that express ideas politically correct. His point of view was shared by Novikova et al. (2018) who assumed that euphemisms veil the negative essence of certain phenomena of reality*.

According to the above-mentioned historical facts, we can allege that the political correctness can be considered as a linguistic category (Richards, 2015).

In the present study, we made an attempt not only to identify the political correctness as a linguistic category and describe language means of its expression, but to offer teaching tips with the aim to provide English instructors with various sources for teaching students to sound politically correct while communicating in English that may create the excitement and interest in the English classroom.

2. Research Methods and Materials

In the present study, a few research questions were asked:

- How important is it to identify the political correctness concept?
- What linguistic means of expressing political correctness are used in the English?
- What efficient techniques can be applied for teaching the political correctness in EFL class?

In the development of the research, the following methods were used: the method of semantic analysis, contrastive and comparative methods, and the method of component analysis of lexical units. We thus put forward an assumption that teaching the political correctness is significantly important, otherwise, we risk insulting members of a particular racial, ethnic or other cultural group unintentionally. Objectives of the present research determined the implementation of innovative approaches to teach the political correctness in the English classroom that made the process of acquiring politically correct words (PC words) easier and let students' skills to avoid offending people with inappropriate language to become perfect. The described teaching techniques can serve as recommendations for English teachers. Research materials (newspaper clippings, videos) present true-to-life situations that indicate a politically correct or incorrect behavior of a person and may provoke critical thinking for students. Research materials can be used in EFL class.

3. Results and Discussion

Learning political correct English is important for successful functioning in English-speaking academic and business settings. According to [Stempleski \(2003\)](#) the importance of teaching political correct English to EFL students is no longer argued. The author suggests that political correct English presents contemporary language models; hence, it appeals to both English language learners and teachers.

We offer the following teaching tips that will help students of upper-intermediate to advanced levels to explore this topic.

3.1. Teaching Tip “Lexicographically Correct or Verbally Challenged?”

Levels: Upper-intermediate to advanced levels

Aims: Helping students develop an understanding of using politically correct words in the English

Practice: Politically correct vocabulary units

Class Time: 45 min.

Preparation Time: 15 min.

Resources: A classroom computer with the Internet access. Audiovisual equipment and handouts.

3.2. Rationale

Officials, journalists and others such as university teachers are urgently asked not to use certain words and expressions because they are politically incorrect and might cause offence: Instead, they should use other political correct or PC words. If organizations such as universities have specific rules about words to be avoided in communication and elsewhere, these rules constitute speech codes. This lesson precisely deals with ways how students are become aware of what political correctness is and implement this speech code in real life communication with no effort.

3.3. Procedure

1. Grouping students into five categories each which in a circle.
2. To have students write his/her name at the top of a blank piece of paper.
3. Asking students to look at the board with a list of words and asking them to select and write only those that may seem to be inappropriate (in an offending way).
4. Asking your students to report back.
5. Handing out a copy of text and letting students skim it through and underline all words that were politically incorrect.
6. Checking to see if students found and understood differences.
7. To have students fill in column A with traditional names for different races and nationalities and column B that gives the politically correct version.
8. Asking each student to write any word (politically correct or incorrect) on a card. Collecting cards from students and putting all of them in a box; mixing them up and asking your students to take one correct item.

3.4. Caveats and Options

1. Nearly any text can serve as food for students for further discussions. Variations on this activity are nearly limitless because texts they read or create can be used as a draft for further writing practice.
2. If available, provide the real back story for students: an explanation from the writer about origins of texts.

3.5. Teaching Tip “Political Correctness or Cultural Appropriation?”

Levels: Upper-intermediate to advanced levels

Aims: Investigate the phenomenon of political correctness in the English language via videos

Practice: Politically correct vocabulary units

Class Time: 45 min.

Preparation Time: 20 min.

Resources: A classroom computer with Internet access. Audiovisual equipment and handouts

3.6. Rationale

This activity requires the following skills: oral discussion, critical thinking, group collaboration (brainstorming), and public speaking. Students are encouraged to explore political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of PC coverage in various authentic videos.

3.7. Procedure

1. Make copies of handouts for your class. Make sure a video is available (on YouTube or other media that you can use in the class).
2. Watch the video in class. Hand out scripts and discuss meanings of any politically incorrect words that students have encountered while watching videos.
3. Have students fill in the information that illustrates each of elements of video. Check to see that students understand the illustrated elements.
4. Watch the video again; discuss the vocabulary; identify the setting, characters (antagonist/protagonist), background, conflict, climax, resolution, and theme/thesis.
5. Brainstorm ideas for a personal knotting of the video plot.
6. Students film each other's works using PC words.

3.8. Caveats and Options

1. Depending on the level of the students and time constraints, you should spend several lessons on time order, PC language, organizing a group discussion, writing personal versions of a movie and recording it.
2. For higher level students, more work can be done analyzing video elements in different writings.

Politically correct changes are occurring in English (and in many other languages) as a reflection of ideas of tolerance and inclusion. In order to produce competent English users, we owe it to our students to explore this phenomenon and give them opportunities to become proficient users of tolerant and inclusive terms in particular situations.

3.9. Summary

English performs the role of global language of communication; hence, it has to assume the responsibility to sound political correct, presuppose an adequate understanding of communicants belonging to different national cultures for intercultural communication ([Ter Minasova, 2000](#)), ([Trofimova, 2006](#)), ([Tsehelska, 2006](#)), ([University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2016](#)). It is not surprising that the term “political correctness” as a cultural and linguistic phenomenon emerged in the English-speaking countries.

As a language phenomenon, the political correctness has affected the English empowering it the power of expressing our identities, *affecting* our credibility, identifying the ways in which the *language* can separate us, or bringing *us* together ([Vereshchagin and Kostomarov, 1990](#)). Therefore, it is greatly important to understand that being aware of sensitive topics can help us to avoid using words that may offend or upset people ([Yarmakeev et al., 2016a](#)). It is not less important than acquiring rhetoric rules and general cultural and communicative competences if we need to create a politically correct person.

Teaching tips of the presented study are especially useful for EFL instructors who teach English via original movies. In fact, language learners can understand video texts without any conscious focus on language forms (particularly PC words). Instead, learners focus on the language content and teachers activate their background knowledge to complete tasks.

These teaching tips offer students materials, which they have to actively engage, in order to achieve a goal or complete a task. For instance, teachers aim to stimulate their learners' ability to understand the message; they should confront them with functional tasks in which students are asked to produce and understand PC words. With authentic materials, learners make more rapid progress and can use their new foreign language in real-world circumstances with a reasonable level of efficiency. They are actually able to operate an effective meaning system ([Yarmakeev et al., 2016b](#)), ([Zabotkina, 1989](#)).

4. Conclusion

In the present research, the “political correctness” concept was reconsidered as a cultural-behavioral and linguistic category to ascertain the status of political correctness and its influence on the language. Now, we have got much evidence to state that new realities and forms of communication generate a good number of PC words in the English.

We introduce teaching tips for variety of classes, energize students and make PC words more memorable. We believe that our findings have *practical* implications. Moreover, we affirm that implemented teaching techniques ensure English learners to efficiently comprehend issues.

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