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ZAVRŠNI RAD

Politička korektnost u engleskom jeziku – Kako govornici engleskog kao stranog jezika koriste politički korektan jezik?

Mentor: prof. dr. Merima Osmankadić

Student: Naida Kreštalica

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University of Sarajevo

Faculty of Philosophy

English Department – Translation Program

Sociolinguistics

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Political Correctness in English – How L2 Speakers Use Politically Correct Language?

Student: Naida Kreštalica

Mentor: prof.dr. Merima Osmankadić

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SAŽETAK

Osnovna svrha ovog rada jeste da istraži kako govornici engleskog kao stranog jezika koriste politički korektan jezik u različitim kontekstima, fokusirajući se na rodnu ravnopravnost, rasu, invaliditet i druga društvena pitanja. Studija koristi pristup mješovitih metoda istraživanja, kombinirajući kvantitativne ankete i kvalitativne testove dopunjavanja diskursa (DCT), kako bi procijenila poznavanje politički korektnog jezika učesnika i njihove odgovore na jezik koji nije politički korektan. Rezultati pokazuju značajnu upotrebu politički korektnog jezika među učesnicima, demonstrirajući visok nivo svijesti i uvažavanja njegove uloge u poticanju inkluzivnosti. Učesnici elokventno odgovaraju na slučajeve jezika koji nije politički korektan, ističući važnost uvažene komunikacije. Ovo istraživanje naglašava osnovnu ulogu politički korektnog jezika u promociji inkluzivnosti i poštovanja u raznolikim društvenim i profesionalnim okruženjima, odražavajući stalnu posvećenost kulturnim promjenama i svijesti.

Ključne riječi: politički korektan jezik, inkluzivnost, rodna ravnopravnost, svijest, komunikacija

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this thesis is to analyze the way L2 speakers of English use politically correct language in different contexts, emphasizing gender equality, race, disabilities and other social issues. The research utilizes a mixed methodology approach consisting of quantitative survey and qualitative discourse completion test (DCT) to investigate participants' understanding of PC language and their reactions towards non-PC language. Results demonstrate significant usage of PC language among participants emphasizing high level of awareness and acknowledging its role in promoting inclusivity. Participants eloquently address instances of non-PC language highlighting the importance of respectful communication. Research also underlines the fundamental role of PC language for promoting inclusion as well as respect across diversified social and professional settings. This research underlines the essential role of politically correct language, promoting inclusivity and respect in diverse social and professional settings, reflecting an ongoing dedication to cultural change and awareness.

Keywords: politically correct language, inclusivity, gender equality, awareness, communication

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I. INTRODUCTION

Political correctness (PC) has become a crucial aspect of present-day communication, particularly in multicultural and diverse societies. Historically, the concept of PC emerged as a response to social inequalities and discrimination, aiming to create a more inclusive and respectful language.

This thesis explores the use of politically correct language among L2 speakers of English, analyzing how these speakers navigate PC language in different contexts such as university, workplace, and social interactions. By understanding their usage and attitudes towards PC language, we can understand broader indications for social inclusion and respectful communication.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative survey and qualitative discourse completion test (DCTs). This methodology allows for a comprehensive analysis of participants' familiarity with PC language and their ability to respond to non-PC language effectively. The findings reveal a significant level of awareness and usage of PC language, suggesting that L2 speakers view it as a crucial tool for promoting inclusivity and respect.

Through this research, the aim is to highlight the ongoing importance of PC language in today's diverse society and its role in addressing language-related discrimination. The study also emphasizes the need for continued education and cultural change to enhance understanding and use of PC language, which would contribute to a more inclusive and respectful society.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Political Correctness – General Overview

1.1 Deconstructing Definitions

When discussing political correctness, it's important to acknowledge various definitions of this multifaceted term. Starting off with a broad overview, political correctness is described by Roper (2024) as follows:

“Political correctness (PC), term used to refer to language that seems intended to give the least amount of offense, especially when describing groups identified by external markers such as race, gender, culture, or sexual orientation. The concept has been discussed, disputed, criticized, and satirized by commentators from across the political spectrum. The term has often been used derisively to ridicule the notion that altering language usage can change the public’s perceptions and beliefs as well as influence outcomes.” (para. 1)

This definition serves as an excellent starting point for understanding PC. The definition depicts clear and transparent language, allowing one to navigate the complexities associated with this concept. According to Lea (2010), the term PC is never neutral in its usage. Yet, for someone unfamiliar with the term, it is possible to form a more generalized understanding of what PC entails.

In his book, Lea (2010) offers multiple other definitions to its readers. For example, he offers one definition that summarizes the causes with which PC is commonly associated with.

“Political Correctness refers to matters of inclusive speech, advocacy of nonracist, non-ageist, non-sexist terminology, an insistence on affirmative action policies, avoidance of Eurocentrism as reflected in a ‘traditional’ canon of literature, acceptance of multiculturalism as a valued feature of American society and dismantling hierarchy as controlled by a white male power structure.” (p.12)

If we compare the definitions from Roper C. and Lea J., we can recognize significant differences in language and tone. Roper's definition is notably objective, whereas Lea's definition conveys a more subjective and personal perspective. Therefore, Lea’s statement (2010) that it is not clear from the sentence whether any of the causes are good or bad or what is actually political or correct about being in favor or against PC compliments the abovementioned definition. This instance can also be seen in the following definition.

“Political correctness turns out to be a subunit of the larger transformation of society reflected in the ascendancy of psychological over political terminology. What began as an attempt to politicize psychology (and psychologize politics) has led to the swallowing of each by the other and the emergence of synthesis: therapeutic politics.” (Lea, 2010, p. 13)

In this definition, the author argues that there has been a significant shift in society where psychological concepts and language have been more dominant than traditional political terminology allowing the blending of psychological and political perspectives. PC is not just a concept it represents, in this sense, it is a larger societal transformation. This merging of two concepts has resulted in “therapeutic politics” suggesting that political issues and societal challenges are viewed through psychological lens where concepts like victimhood and dependency are highly emphasized. From empowering individuals, society is potentially fostering a culture where individuals see themselves as victims in need of therapeutic or psychological interventions.

The phrase "politically correct" is believed to have initially been used in a positive sense, but it later acquired more ironic undertones. However, there are varying interpretations of this shift. According to Suhr & Johnson (2003), for example, the term was originally a complimentary expression within the Leninist left, referring to someone who strictly adhered to the party line. Over time, it morphed into the ironic abbreviation "P.C.," used by more cynical leftists to describe those whose excessive love for party conformity was intolerable. The exact shift from a positive to an ironic use of "political correctness" and similar terms is hard to confirm with empirical evidence. However, it is widely accepted that these phrases were initially used within Anglo-American leftist circles as in-group markers before being adopted by others. By the early 1990s in the United States, conservatives appropriated the term to challenge and oppose left-leaning educational curricula and pedagogical methods on university campuses. According to Roper (2024), its usage subsequently declined, becoming primarily a tool for comedians to mock politically charged language.

Critics of "political correctness" boldly oppose the concept itself, viewing it as a form of censorship that restricts freedom of speech and imposes limits on public discourse. They argue that such linguistic restrictions inevitably lead to self-censorship and constrain behavior. Moreover, critics claim that "political correctness" often identifies offensive language where none was intended. On the contrary, supporters argue that labeling something as "politically correct" has been used pejoratively to restrain legitimate efforts to fight hate

speech and minimize language practices that exclude groups identified by external markers. In the end, the debate surrounding political correctness revolves around language, terminology, and whose definitions are accepted as valid. Therefore, it is important to be aware of various definitions and interpretations of those definitions that are imposed on individuals.

1.2 PC Through Discourse Analysis

In their book, Thomas et al. (2004) mentions George Orwell's claim that in our age there is no way of keeping out of politics. All issues are political issues and even most domestic, everyday areas are political. Choosing the appropriate word in order not to hurt someone's feelings is the same as choosing coffee beans from different brands for your everyday morning ritual. There is no such thing as 'objective truth' and all choices are thus political. Chilton & Schäffner (2002) explain that politics can be viewed as cooperation and as practices for resolving conflicts over money, power, and liberty and alike. Politics is viewed as a struggle for power between those who seek to assert it and those who are trying to resist it. As Thomas et al. (2004) say, politics is inevitably connected to power, and enforcing your own political beliefs can be achieved in a number of ways – one of those ways is how language can be used to create and reinforce a certain value system where the focus is on affecting people's behavior, motivation, desires and establishing ideologies presented as common sense.

Thomas et al. (2004) explain that language provides the framework for our thoughts, making it challenging to think beyond this framework once new idea or ideology is introduced. Language can be utilized to construct ideologies that influence how people think. Politicians have historically employed this tactic, skillfully weaving their ideas into the minds of the public to align their thinking with their own. This process not only reinforces political support but also reinforces power, as shaping like-minded individuals strengthens one's political agenda. This emphasizes the original claim that politics equates to power, achieved precisely through the manipulation of ideology, ultimately influencing and controlling thoughts and beliefs.

According to Bugarski (1984), different languages segment and classify the world of human experience in various ways, subjecting it to analysis dictated by the unique internal logic of its structural organization. Using Whorf's words in his book, he cites:

“This leads us to a new principle of relativity, which suggests that the same physical material does not reveal the same picture of the cosmos to all observers unless they share a similar linguistic heritage.” (Bugarski, 1984, p. 142)

This citation shows that framework of each language contains a set of implicit and unconscious assumptions about the nature and existence of things. The same can be viewed through the prism of language in relation to PC. In George Orwell’s novel *Newspeak*, he also mentions the *Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis* which implies that language determines our perception of the world. The hypothesis consists of two main concepts: linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism. Linguistic relativity suggests that the languages of different cultures have unique systems of representation that are not necessarily equivalent to one another. Linguistic determinism argues that a language not only encodes specific perspectives on reality but also influences the thought processes of its speakers. More specifically, Whorf’s view seems to be that language is connected to "unconscious habitual thought" and that there is "at least some causal influence from language categories to non-verbal cognition" (Thomas et al., 2004) Speakers of a language are typically unaware of both the relative nature of their linguistic system and its influence on their thinking.

Thomas et al. quote Orwell to describe the main concept of his novel *Newspeak*:

Orwell wrote: ... Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods... (Thomas et al., 2004, p. 39)

Even though Orwell wrote a fictional novel, its concepts can be applied to the modern day and age because imposing a language with limited meanings such as *Newspeak* prevents people to think outside of that language, i.e., certain words that represent certain concepts are simply removed so differences in opinion cannot occur. This can be understood as a dictatorship in Orwell’s novel; however, this idea can be easily implemented today with the frequent use of politically correct language. Although the PC is not an attempt to control people’s thoughts the way language in Orwell’s novel did, it still represents an attempt to alter people’s perceptions of certain concepts by changing the old labels with the new ones. Because of that, people are limited in their use of language because they fear that society may exclude and ridicule them if they misuse politically correct labels. According to Lea (2010), in the 1980s, conservative thinkers in the United States invested significant efforts into

defining and disparaging the concept of 'political correctness'. Their aim was to transform it into a pejorative term, specifically targeting various political causes advocated by what they perceived as a radical left, often characterized as intolerant extremists. These causes were frequently linked to changes in higher education, including constraints on free speech, the advocacy of multicultural curricula, and initiatives supporting affirmative action.

William (2016) mentions in his book that in October 2015, Professor Frank Furedi wrote in the Daily Mail about what he described as "increasingly totalitarian attitudes" on British university campuses. He criticized the "bullying disguised as tolerance," the fixation on political correctness and identity, the "pretentious, exaggerated language," and the eagerness to label as many people as possible as victims. Furedi warned that this new form of censorship was spreading like a cancer across British universities, imposing increasingly strict restrictions on what could be read or said.

It is further mentioned in the book (William, 2016) that Furedi also noted that the push to create "safe spaces" in universities was leading to the removal of views that some students might find offensive, as well as the banning of individuals who challenge the prevailing ideology. Additionally, "trigger warnings" were being introduced to alert readers that content in books and publications might be considered politically incorrect or distressing.

It is stated that Furedi argued that much of this behavior was, in his view, a form of "childish narcissism," where some students, like "oversized toddlers," sought attention by dramatizing something "unacceptable" in their studies. (William, 2016)

He perceived this behavior as a form of attention-seeking and narcissism, where individuals use a self-diagnosis of vulnerability to highlight their own perceived fragility. By doing so, they publicly align themselves with the concept of "victimhood," which in turn elevates their social standing within certain circles. Essentially, he argued that the real motivation behind this behavior was a desire to feel superior to others, driven by a sense of snobbery rather than genuine concern for social issues.

Subsequently, political correctness became imbedded in public institutions that have coercive powers. In the eyes of William (2016), a person or an institution is politically correct when they represent the interests of the majority and become focused on the worries and issues of minority groups. The major issue that PC created is the 'hyper reality' where everything can have multiple meanings. Instead of trying to aim political action to produce more humane social order, individuals are lost in vague and endless circles of reinterpretation of meanings.

2. How Euphemisms Shaped PC

To thoroughly understand the influence of euphemisms on political correctness, it is crucial to begin by exploring the definition of euphemism. According to Thomas et al., a euphemism is a figure of speech which uses mild, inoffensive language as a means of making something seem more positive than it might otherwise appear. (2004) Or using Anna Monashenko's definition

“Euphemism – euphema (from Greek) – is a restraint from inappropriate words, softened expression –replacement of rough or harsh words and expressions with softer ones.” (2021, p. 151)

Euphemisms are often used when discussing taboo topics like death or sex. For instance, people might say "passing away" instead of "dying" or use "making love" in place of "sexual intercourse." According to Farb (1973) children in English-speaking communities learn from an early age that there are certain words that are considered dirty and instead they use euphemisms that are derivations of Latin or French. New euphemisms are continually created as the words they replace eventually become offensive. If two words sound similar and one of them is taboo, then the other word will become taboo as well. The evolution of language is full of vocabulary shifts that are motivated by avoidance of taboo or socially unacceptable words. (Milroy&Milroy, 1985) The use of euphemisms can make controversial or uncomfortable ideas more acceptable and normalized, making it a valuable tool for politicians, particularly when they need to justify actions or ideas that might otherwise be seen as unacceptable—a practice George Orwell referred to as the "defense of the indefensible." (Thomas et al., 2004) There are numerous examples of euphemisms and we will highlight only a few in this paper. For example, “sanitation worker” instead of “garbage man”, “administrative assistant” instead of “secretary”, “senior citizen” instead of “old person”, “thin on top” instead of “bald”, “affair” instead of “adultery”, “neutralize” instead of “kill”, “coming out” instead of “revealing one’s homosexuality” and many more.

As it was mentioned by Thomas et al. (2004), the use of euphemisms is particularly extensive when military matters are discussed, highlighting examples like "surgically clean strikes" and "clean bombs," which leverage the positive associations of the word "clean." A notable example of euphemism is the term "ethnic cleansing," used by Slobodan Milošević, former president of Serbia between 1989 until 1997, to describe the violent removal of non-Serbian civilians in attempt to redesign Yugoslavia along purely ethnic lines. The term was likely

intended to conceal the brutality of these actions and present them in a less negative light. However, the euphemism's ability to deceive was limited, and NATO intervened with an aerial bombardment to stop the “ethnic cleansing” or in other words, a deliberate and systematic extermination of an ethnic, religious or a cultural group from a specific geographic area. This term gained popularity during the war in former Yugoslavia, where it was used for actions described above; however it is now recognized as a serious crime against humanity, associated with genocide, mass murder and other war crimes, becoming a pejorative and emotive term. As it is mentioned in Thomas et al. (2004), the term has been retrospectively used to describe Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews and Hungary's treatment of the Slovak minority in the late 19th century. Additionally, conservationists have applied the term to the California Fish and Game Department's poisoning of pike, an invasive non-native species.

In diplomatic negotiations, euphemisms are often used in a more subtle and potentially less contentious manner. For example, when a spokesperson refers to a diplomatic meeting as "a free and frank exchange of views," those familiar with diplomatic language might interpret it as a heated argument. Nonetheless, this type of euphemism helps prevent the negotiating parties from becoming deep-seated in their positions. Much of the success in negotiations involves crafting a set of terms that both sides can agree upon.

This brings us to an exploration of the relationship between euphemisms and political correctness (PC), examining whether these concepts are similar or synonymous in their application. Though euphemisms and PC are both linguistic tools that often intersect and are used to address sensitive topics, they serve different purposes and operate in different contexts. The key differences are in their purpose and context. The purpose of euphemism is to soften language to avoid discomfort while PC aims to avoid language that might be seen as discriminatory or offensive, fostering a more inclusive narrative. In terms of context, euphemisms are commonly used in a wide range of everyday situations where people practice politeness and avoid directness. PC, on the contrary, is often associated with social and political contexts where language reflects or influences societal attitudes toward different social groups. Despite these differences, some euphemisms are politically correct as they are designed to replace the language that could be seen as offensive, eventually gaining negative connotations.

3. Political Correctness in Relation to Women

When analyzing sexism in language, it's crucial to recognize that language is not a fixed system, even though it can sometimes appear that way, especially when we focus on written texts. As Mills (2008) suggests, language evolves through ongoing negotiations over meaning, both from the past and in the present. Although some words may seem outdated, they often persist within certain groups of people. As individual users and interpreters of language, we do not possess complete knowledge of every word or meaning within a language. Each person and community of language users may interpret and apply language differently. Therefore, language can be viewed as a collection of meanings, some of which gain legitimacy through their use within formal institutions. However, this does not imply that less commonly accepted usages vanish. In fact, these words endure in texts and individual speech, remaining accessible as a resource for communication and interpretation.

Mills (2008) mentions Deutscher who argued that the way language evolves, involves a complex interplay of decay and renewal. He suggests that languages cannot remain static and that they undergo significant changes over time without leading to a breakdown in communication. Deutscher examines general shifts in language, focusing on aspects such as the use of cases, vowel pronunciation, and pronouns. However, his model of language change can also be applied to discussions about what is considered appropriate within a society as a whole. To make meaningful observations about cultural norms at any given time, we must understand language as a dynamic and developing entity. Deutscher emphasizes that within every language community, there is considerable variation in norms, and changes occur when specific usages within these communities become dominant. Instead of viewing cultures and language groups as uniform in their language use, we should recognize the diversity and variation that exist within cultural groups. Mills (2008) cites Deutscher in her book:

“Language is not a monolithic rigid entity, but a flexible fuzzy system, with an enormous amount of synchronic variation . . . there is variation between the speech of people from different areas, of different ages, of different sexes, different classes, different professions. The same person may even use different forms depending on the circumstances . . . and it is through variation that changes in language proceed, for

what really changes with time is the frequencies of the competing forms.” (p. 125)

Instead of viewing the rigid rules outlined in grammars and dictionaries as accurate reflections of a language, we should recognize that language is far more dynamic. The rules found in these resources are attempts to stabilize something inherently fluid and constantly changing. Grammars and dictionaries provide individuals with a sense that language can be neatly described and categorized, even though this is not entirely accurate. When feminists challenge certain language usages, their goal is not necessarily to ban or eliminate them, as doing so is impossible. As mentioned by Mills (2008), even if sexist words are used less often, they do not disappear; they remain available for use, whether for sexist purposes or for humor. This understanding helps to explain why sexism, as a stereotypical way of representing gender relations along with its associated vocabulary, is viewed by some as outdated and offensive, while others see it as a valid or even humorous portrayal of men and women. People inherit a complex system of conflicting meanings within language, and they must navigate these diverse systems to shape their identities and align themselves with specific groups or communities. Mills (2008) also mentions that some meanings resonate with individuals, prompting them to adopt and embrace these perspectives, while others may be rejected or actively opposed. In this context, sexism becomes a tool or resource that individuals can either affirm or challenge as they construct their own identities. Whether they choose to align with or oppose sexist attitudes, these choices play a role in how they define themselves and their place within society.

Representation in a language can have serious effects on the perception of its speakers. It is evident that what we process and what we produce shapes the world around us. Many feminists have investigated the naming practices of 70s and 80s and concluded that language was man-made and that women were excluded from the process of naming and giving definition to words. Without a name it is difficult to accept the existence of an object, feeling, event, or being. (Mills, 2008)

Altering the terms to accommodate women in a long history of men-related things, you either accept or challenge the status quo. If you change the way things are named in relation to women, you also reflect the change of their social position, or the way women are thought about. Terminology that suggests that male is the norm and female is an exception has a derogatory effect on how women and men are perceived in the society. Exactly in the issue of

naming practice, feminists have faced difficulties that developed into politically correct issues. As Mills (2008) states in her book, political correctness led to a generation that fears hurting fragile egos of those who belong to the minority group. However, on the flipside, political correctness masked all the real debates and problems which cannot surface to make progression in the society.

For most people, PC gives more attention to the effects of language on the minority groups than to the real issues that minority groups face. Mills (2003) explains that media invented absurd terms that no anti-sexist or feminist campaigners have argued should be adopted. The problem is that these absurd terms are listed alongside the terms that feminists and anti-sexist campaigners argue should be adopted. This extremely complex situation, where different notions are confused and where PC is used to discredit campaigns, some feminists argue that imposing reform on language is either impossible or not practical. Furthermore, terms that have been adapted by feminists, such as ‘chair’ instead of ‘chairman’, ‘flight attendant’ instead of ‘air hostess’ etc. (Mills, 2003) have been extremely politicized so that any choice of words will reflect your political orientation in relation to women. PC also creates a range of meanings that are associated with risky humor, triviality, and irony. That is the reason why feminists struggle to avoid being ridiculed. For example, any woman who decides to state her title reveals far more information about herself than a man does. *Ms.* is a relatively new title that was introduced to avoid the terms that reveal your marital status *Mrs. or Miss*. However, it progressed in the direction where it increased inequality among women and choosing not to tell your marital status led people to believe that you are either divorced or a feminist. On the other hand, if you choose to use either *Mrs. or Miss* you show the negation of the newly introduced term and that you’re not a feminist. It is also common for ‘unmarked’ terms to refer to males and ‘marked’ terms to refer to females by adding a suffix.

For example, as Thomas et al. (2004) showed, the term *waiter* is unmarked, while *waitress* is marked, *host* is unmarked, and *hostess* is marked. Another example is the terms that impose demeaning of or sexual connotations towards women, which has been termed *semantic derogation*. (Thomas et al., 2004) Semantic derogation represents terms that are used to put women in an inferior position and make them lose the status compared to the relation of words aiming at men. The terms *master* and *mistress* have completely different connotations. As Thomas et al. (2004) say: ‘He is my master’ usually means ‘he is my boss’ or ‘he has more power than me’. ‘She is my mistress’ is most likely to be interpreted as meaning ‘she is my illicit lover’. (p. 81)

This example shows how the word master didn't gain any sexual reference nor did it lose its status. There are many more examples like this that uncover semantic derogation, such as *sir* and *madam*, *bachelor*, *old maid* etc.

Because of the complex situation that women are put in and the confusion that politically correct terms create, American Psychological Association (APA) published a manual called *Guidelines for nonsexist language in APA journals* (1977) that should offer directions for using nonsexist language, at least in APA journals. Sexism in journal writing can be divided into the conceptually different problems of designation and evaluation. Problems of designation represent problems where the author must be careful in choosing words to guarantee accuracy and freedom from bias. It also represents the ambiguity whether the author means one or both sexes and if the author uses stereotypes. Some of the examples are listed in Figure 1 below:

1. The <i>client</i> is usually the best judge of the value of <i>his</i> counseling.	The <i>client</i> is usually the best judge of the value of counseling.	<i>His</i> deleted.
	<i>Clients</i> are usually the best judges of the value of the counseling they receive.	Changed to plural.
	The best judge of the value of counseling is usually <i>the client</i> .	Rephrased.

Figure 1

Instead of creating new words that would further create confusion and division in the society, *Guidelines for nonsexist language in APA journals* (1977) suggests several options to deal with problematic sentence constructions. In Figure 1 we can see how the word *client* is unmarked and is automatically referred to with the masculine determiner *his*. What APA suggests is that we can either delete the marker *his*, we can change the noun to plural, or we can rephrase the whole sentence. Figure 2 offers different suggestions for specific generic terms:

3. man, mankind	people, humanity, human beings, humankind, human species	In this group of examples, a variety of terms may be substituted.
man's achievements	human achievements, achievements of the human species	
the average man	the average person, people in general	
man a project	staff a project, hire personnel, employ staff	
manpower	work force, personnel, workers	

Figure 2

It is implied that the use of terms that refer to both women and men should not be used with words that contain *man* in its stem. Instead, *Guidelines for nonsexist language in APA journals* (1977) suggested terms that can refer to both sexes with the use of neutral terms such as *people, humanity, humankind* etc.

Problems of evaluation refer to the problems that arose from the irrelevant evaluation of sexes. This means that the terms used are often clichés, or some familiar expressions. The examples can be seen in the Figure 3:

23. men and girls	men and women, women and men	Use parallel terms. Of course, use <i>men and girls</i> if that is literally what is meant.
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Figure 3

It is important to use parallel terms because referring to men and girls only strengthens the view that women are inferior to men, which is not true. Of course, the use of unparalleled terms *men and girls* is acceptable when it has a literal meaning. Another example is when the use of specific terms shows the stereotype imposed on women:

24. The client's husband lets her teach part-time.	The client teaches part-time.	The author of this example intended to communicate the working status of the woman but inadvertently revealed a stereotype about husband-wife relationships; see Example 11 above.
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Figure 4

Not only does PC language in relation to women create awkwardness, confusion, and hostility, it also creates obscurity and difficulties in scientific communication. According to APA's task force (1977), an indication of sex should be present when one sex is discussed. Since they showed how the generic use of *he* is inaccurate, and the constant use of *he and she* can be annoying, with careful rephrasing and replacement of words, the term *he* can often be avoided.

In her book, Mills (2008) mentions some examples that capture political correctness in relation to women. She mentions the advertisement that appeared in a women's magazine in 2005 where there is a picture of a smiling woman store manager and next to her there is a statement that says: 'My team didn't want a female manager, just a good one.' (Mills, 2008, p. 122) This statement embraces several issues that should be discussed. At first glance, it

seems that the company promotes equal opportunities and people with the same values and that they are not interested in gender, however, this statement encapsulates a text which is sexist indirectly rather than directly. The text can be interpreted as implying the situation where a competent manager stands in contrast to a female manager. Subsequently, the message that the advertisement sends refers indirectly to the companies that promote women not according to their abilities but on the imperatives of political correctness. Overall, political correctness has a complex relationship with sexism and with anti-sexist campaigns by feminists. All kinds of these campaigns have been regarded as agitating and as an obstacle to further communication.

Sexism is not merely about how individuals use language, but rather involves a complex negotiation between what an individual perceives as appropriate within a specific context or community and the societal routines and resources at their disposal. (Mills, 2008)

These norms are shaped and either reinforced or challenged by influential institutions such as the media, government, and educational systems. The language considered suitable for certain contexts and institutions may carry inherent gender biases. For instance, Mills (2008) mentions Holmes and Stubbe in her book, who illustrate that some workplaces are gendered as either more masculine or feminine. Workplaces that are considered more feminine tend to be less formal, with a greater blending of social, family, and work life, while masculine environments are associated more with police forces. In these gendered environments, the norms and expectations around communication are shaped by the dominant masculine atmosphere, affecting what individuals feel they can or should say. This dynamic plays a significant role in determining the speech patterns and language choices that are considered acceptable or expected within such settings. This significantly influences how individuals assess whether their language is appropriate. The expression of sexist views is often based on the assumption that the environment is a masculinized one, where such statements are likely to be accepted or considered normal. Consequently, as Mills (2008) states, the acceptance of sexist language depends on the belief that the context supports or tolerates such attitudes.

Due to united efforts by many institutions to eliminate or at least diminish overt sexism, especially within professional settings, there has been a noticeable decline in explicitly sexist language in the public-facing materials of organizations. For example, mission statements and official documents intended for broad public consumption generally avoid overtly sexist

content. This shift doesn't necessarily mean that sexism has disappeared in informal interactions, but within the sphere of public discourse, overt sexism has become stigmatized.

Mills (2008) also states that it is important to note that in the realm of media – certain newspapers, television, and radio shows – sexism remains prevalent, though it has evolved under the influence of feminist movements and responses from men to feminism. For instance, British men's magazines like *GQ*, *Loaded*, and *Viz* often display sexist attitudes, but they do so through a lens of humor and irony. These publications tend to reinforce the notion that men and women are fundamentally different, and the discriminatory remarks made about women are often framed as reflections of this so-called 'natural' difference, with women frequently depicted as mere sexual objects.

Mills (2008) in her book also mentions a similar pattern of ironic sexism that was evident in various advertisements across the UK, where products were marketed using stereotypical masculine themes. For example, TV commercials for *Burger King* played on the trope with a song about the 'double meat whopper,' proudly declaring, "I am man." (Mills, 2008) Likewise, McCoy's crisps are branded as "man crisps." These ads are characterized by a level of exaggeration that suggests they are not meant to be taken seriously. The exaggerated nature of these commercials and the ironic portrayal of gender roles seem to stem from, as cited in Mills:

“What Benwell (2006) identifies as a crisis in masculinity, which can be likened to a regression into adolescent humor or 'schoolboy' antics.” (2008)

Mills (2008) continues to suggest that Benwell also highlights how representations of masculinity in men's magazines have shifted in response to Second Wave feminism. She discusses the emergence of the 'new lad' ideology, which arose as a backlash against the 'new man'—a figure characterized by increased sensitivity and compassion. In contrast, the 'new lad' represents an attempt to reclaim the power that some perceived as lost due to the concessions made to feminism. This 'new lad' persona is marked by a return to traditional sexist values, emphasizing exclusive male fellowship and even homophobia, as a way of reasserting a dominant form of masculinity.

Mills (2008) further mentions that there should be the caution against viewing “new laddism” as a backlash against feminism. Instead, she suggests it should be understood as a more complex reaction to worries about men being perceived as increasingly feminized. This perspective highlights that “new laddism” is not just a direct countermeasure to feminist

advances but also a way to address deeper concerns about shifting gender roles and expectations.

Despite this broader view, as cited by Mills (2008), Benwell acknowledges that some men's magazines still bear overtly hostile attitudes towards feminism and women. These publications do not just engage in playful or ironic sexism – they openly confront and criticize feminist ideals and gender equality. This indicates that while some media representations of sexism might appear to be light-hearted or humorous, others are actively antagonistic and reinforce traditional gender biases.

The concept of 'indirect sexism' refers to the use of humor and irony to express sexist ideas while challenging the more blatant forms of sexism. This type of sexism maintains the underlying sexist attitudes but presents them in a way that makes them more difficult to confront and critique. Rather than changing the essence of sexism, irony and humor alter the manner in which these sexist views are perceived and engaged with. Mills (2008) also cites Benwell that the portrayal of masculinity in men's magazines often follows cyclical patterns, recycling past representations rather than evolving in response to contemporary gender dynamics.

On platforms like British radio shows such as *Chris Moyles* and *Scott Mills on Radio 1*, which are directed to a younger audience, both overt and indirect sexism are commonly displayed. Similarly, television programs like *Top Gear* feature male presenters who exhibit a “laddish” persona, addressing a young male viewership with a blend of overt and nuanced sexist content. These media formats maintain traditional gender stereotypes while adapting them to modern contexts.

Despite the persistence of sexism in media and culture, societal shifts and feminist efforts have made significant impacts on public perceptions of acceptable language. Women now have institutional support to challenge sexist language and representations. As overt sexism is increasingly seen as outdated, it has been pushed underground, making way for indirect forms of sexism. As mentioned by Mills (2008), these indirect forms often use irony, humor, innuendo, or disclaimers to obscure their intent. For example, a person might preface a sexist comment with, "I don't want to be sexist or politically incorrect, but..." This technique allows for the expression of sexist ideas while avoiding direct accusations of intent.

Moreover, the complexity of language around sexism has evolved, with women themselves sometimes using previously sexist terms in ironic or empowering ways. For instance, the term “girl” who originally referred only to young females, has been adopted to describe adult women in contexts like “girls’ night out”. The phrase “girl power”, popularized by the *Spice Girls*, is used to convey empowerment for women. Additionally, the term “girlie”, initially associated with soft porn or trivial femininity, has shifted in its usage and connotations over time. This evolution reflects the dynamic nature of language and its role in both perpetuating and challenging gender stereotypes.

4. PC And The Media

The media has become the most pervasive phenomenon in our culture. It refers to the press, radio, television broadcasting and internet. Press mediation of our knowledge can offer insights into how the analysis of language in media influences the representation of individuals. (Thomas et al., 2004) Media is the powerful place for production and motion of social meanings, in other words, it decides the significance of the things that are happening in the world, society, culture or social groups. Media is, indeed, a powerful force in our society deciding what counts as news, who’s going to be on television today and what is most important for linguists, it decides how the stories are told and what the structure is in which people appear and talk. However, we cannot say that media is all-powerful because people choose what to watch, listen to or read. The perfect example of such influence can be examined through the event surrounding the death of the Princess of Wales in August 1997. A new set of laws was passed in Britain that restricted the rights of paparazzi to take intrusive photos. However, the public was always ready to buy newspapers and watch programs that featured reports regarding her death and that is why media continued to provide what public had asked for, and what sells their product. (Thomas et al., 2004) We should observe media as a complex institution which is characterized by a set of processes, practices and conventions that are developed within a social or cultural context. According to Thomas et al., since the early 1970s, linguists have been interested in the relationship of how stories get told and what the consequences are of the ways these stories are told. (2004)

In terms of PC and the media, we can examine how mass media is necessary for the dominance of political correctness. This defines the modern discourse – it embodies and

imposes the mode of thinking which enables political correctness. (Charlton, 2011) There is a tendency to represent people and certain situations in predictable and similar ways that usually result in linguistic choices that become established in our culture as the norm. Once something has been presented in a particular way or as the standard, it becomes difficult to talk outside that representation, which is the opportunity for political correctness to step in. However, the way something is portrayed can outweigh the content or information itself, which creates ambiguity, confusion and misrepresentation of things that might be of greater importance. That is why Charlton (2011) says in his book that what is current in media is definitive and therefore sin can be made into virtue, propaganda into truth, ugliness into beauty and vice versa. Therefore, with the appearance of political correctness in media, in recent years, there has been the move to use non-sexist language which further encouraged symmetry in the representation of men and women that was discussed in previous chapters of this paper. The same expectations were applied to other social categories where language had to be modified to be appropriate for specific types of programs which later resulted in political correctness that masked more serious issues of certain topics.

4.1 Discourse of Political Correctness in British Newspapers

The best way to picture the occurrence of PC in media is through the interpretation of articles concerning discourse of political correctness. For this instance, we will consider British newspapers. Political correctness is known for masking ‘real’ debates and conflicts that must be allowed to surface to progress towards more egalitarian society. (Suhr& Johnson, 2003) There has been a struggle which portrayed the inability of separating the concept of PC discourse between the data that contains PC-related terms and the discourse that has been labeled as politically correct. However, labeling discourses as politically correct proved to be an example of PC itself. In that sense, contributors to those texts have decided to go for the term ‘discourses of “political correctness” since they wanted to clarify both senses of discourses in relation to PC. Political correctness was originally used ironically to provoke and make fun of politicians who used to politicize or over-politicize issues that happened to be outside of traditional domain of politics. As Fairclough (2003) says:

‘We might see the controversy around “political correctness” (‘PC’) as a political controversy in which both those who are labeled “PC” and those who label them “PC” are engaged in a

politics which is focused upon representations, values, and identities – in short, a “cultural politics”. (p. 17)

We must mention identity politics which is a form of cultural politics that is concerned with struggles with representation of discriminated social groups that is usually represented through controversies about speech codes and guidelines containing anti-discriminatory principles. Identity politics, according to Suhr and Johnson (2003), are political groupings based on race/ethnicity, gender, sexual preference etc. The politization of culture in this sense has been known, in academic circles, as culture wars – the identity politics have destroyed the sense that people once had for larger polity, which for conservatives is the end of tradition, for liberals the end of civility, and for the Left, the end of mass politics.

What we will briefly mention in this chapter, is how the use of PC-related terms declined in the British newspapers in the period from 1994 and 1999. As Johnson et al. suggest, in the article by Nagle from 2000, trends in the use of neologisms have been explored, such as adverbial phrases that incorporated words such as ‘challenged’, uses of ‘-centric’ and ‘-ism/-ist’, as well as reconstruction of noun phrases – for example, people with disabilities as opposed to disabled. (2003) This doesn’t only help with the factual effects that PC has on language usage, but it also creates methodologically awkward situations where speakers must specify what counts and what doesn’t count linguistically as PC. Academic writings have been associated as the traditional reference for verbal hygiene that contains political correctness in its practices. Besides academics and their writings, the media has played an important role when it comes to the coinage and shaping of PC-related terms. We will focus on three newspapers that are frequently classified from right to left-wing: The Times, The Independent and The Guardian. In their research, Johnson et al. (2003) opted to restrict the time frame to three distinct periods: the entirety of 1994, the entirety of 1999, and a third period from mid-1996 to mid-1997. Once the newspapers were selected and the time frames were defined, the next step involved electronically searching for the following five terms: ‘political correctness’, ‘political incorrectness’, ‘politically correct’, ‘politically incorrect’, and ‘PC’. For each term, they saved both the occurrences of the term itself and the articles in which they were found as electronic text files. Then, they had to revisit the initial question: “How can analyzing chosen ‘PC’ corpus, guided by essential keywords, highlight the decline in ‘PC’-related terms from 1994 to 1999?” (Johnson et al., 2003)

The analysis, based on selected corpus keywords, suggests a connection between the use of 'PC' terms in three newspapers and their framing of debates around Blair and the Labour Party during this period. According to Johnson et al. (2003), The Times, owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International, notably reduced its use of 'PC' terms. Initially aligned with the Conservatives in 1994, it shifted its stance towards endorsing Blair's New Labour by 1997, which correlated with a decline in 'PC' terms. The Guardian also saw a decline in 'PC' terms, portraying 'political correctness' initially as a Labour-associated issue under attack from the Conservatives. By 1999, however, it began using 'PC' terms to critique Labour's perceived departure from socialist ideals. In contrast, Johnson et al. (2003) mentions The Independent's use of 'PC' terms that decreased from 1994 to 1997 but increased by about 25% from 1997 to 1999. This suggests a more politically neutral position, potentially drawing on diverse interpretations of 'political correctness' from the other two newspapers. This quantitative analysis highlights evolving newspaper discourse surrounding 'political correctness' and its association with political shifts during the late 1990s.

Overall, we can conclude that all three newspapers have experienced a decline in the use of PC-related terms over the five-year period in question. We also witnessed interesting changes in the ways terms were used according to the political parties – the Labor Party. What we can also conclude is that the PC-related terms were used as general irony as means of introducing the division between reality and rhetoric. In the words of Johnson et al. (2003) the crucial purpose of using PC terms is still on the critique of the Labor Party and broadly left-liberal or now, center-left agenda.

III. METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how L2 or second language¹ speakers of English use politically correct language in various contexts, their responses to non-politically correct language, and their attitudes towards its importance in diverse social settings. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute insights into language behavior among L2 speakers. This paper will use a mixed-methods research design to investigate the use of politically correct language among L2 speakers of English department at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo. The participants consist of 10 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the English Department at the Faculty of Philosophy. This sample size is appropriate for qualitative and quantitative research, allowing for in-depth exploration and detailed analysis of individual perspectives and experiences related to politically correct language use. It is also interesting to emphasize that the age bracket of participants spans from 20 to 28 years old. See Figure 5 below:

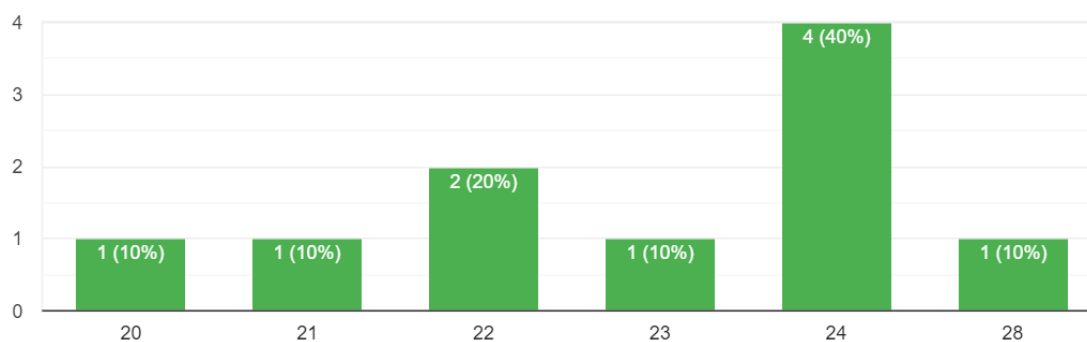


Figure 5

This aspect enriches the research by enabling an exploration of how different generations perceive politically correct language. This could potentially allow for an investigation into whether curricula have evolved over time in teaching methods related to PC. However, we will not focus on that aspect in this research. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate the duration of their English-learning journey, with responses ranging from 12 to 28 years, as shown in Figure 6. This indicates that participants have been learning English from a very early age and have continued throughout their entire education, including university, where they have chosen English as their field of study.

¹ L2 or second language - a language that is learned in addition to the language a person first learned as a young child.

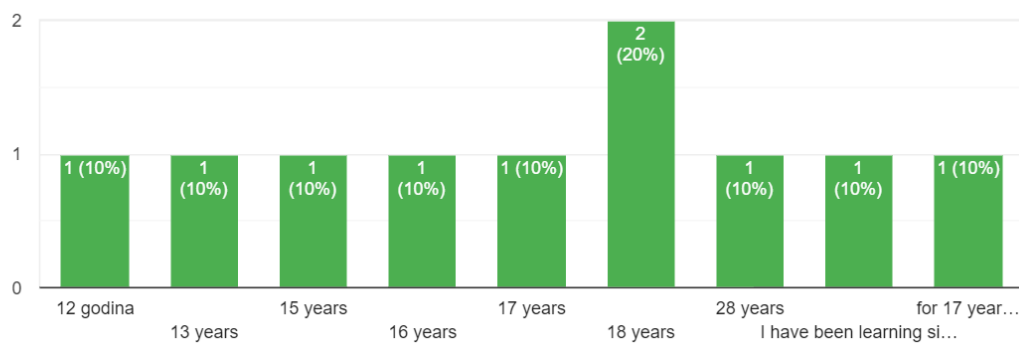


Figure 6

Research questions that helped in the research process serve as a roadmap for organizing this study. There are three research questions imposed in this paper:

1. To what extent do L2 speakers of English use politically correct language in various contexts such as academic, workplace, and social interactions?
2. How do L2 speakers of English respond to instances of inappropriate or non-politically correct language use in their communication environments?
3. What are the attitudes and awareness levels of L2 speakers of English regarding the importance of politically correct language in today's diverse society?

Data will be collected through a structured Google Forms questionnaire which will be delivered electronically to capture quantitative data on the frequency of politically correct language use and participants' attitudes. As Milroy and Gordon mention, written questionnaires are effective for surveying a broad audience efficiently, but they do not facilitate detailed exploration of language use among specific individuals or communities (2003). Therefore, the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) will also be used as a data collection method. A DCT will be used to elicit participants' responses to hypothetical situations involving politically correct language use. Participants will be presented with scenarios and asked to complete how they would respond or what language they would use in those situations. Quantitative data from the questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the frequency and distribution of responses. Qualitative data from the DCT will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in participants' responses regarding politically correct language use. This study is tied to ethical guidelines ensuring voluntary participation, consent, and confidentiality of participants' responses.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Quantitative Data

The results of this research will be divided into two sections. The first section will present quantitative data, including statistical results and commentary on the percentages and numbers of participants selecting various answers. The second section will contain qualitative data, demonstrating the DCT prompts along with the general responses obtained from these prompts.

The first question posed to participants was, "How familiar are you with the concept of politically correct language?" As illustrated in *Figure 7*, the majority of participants (70%) indicated that they are very familiar with this concept, which translates to 7 out of 10 participants having prior knowledge of politically correct language. Additionally, 10% of participants reported being somewhat familiar with the concept, while the remaining 20% admitted to having no familiarity with it at all.

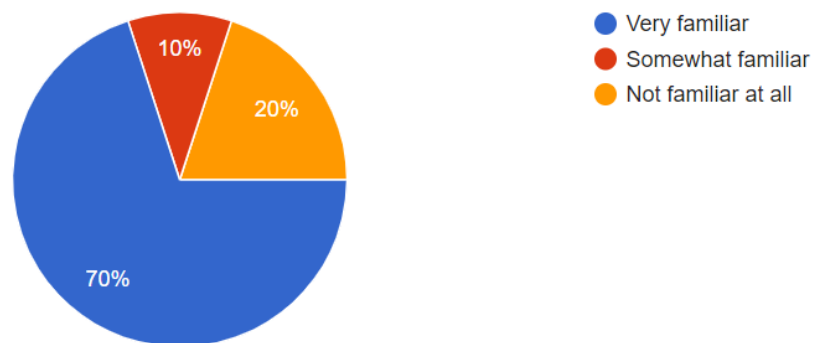


Figure 7

The second question that the group was asked is, "Have you received any formal education or training on politically correct language?" Surprisingly, 80% of participants have responded with "No", which translates to 8 participants, while the remaining 20% responded with "Yes". See *Figure 8* below.

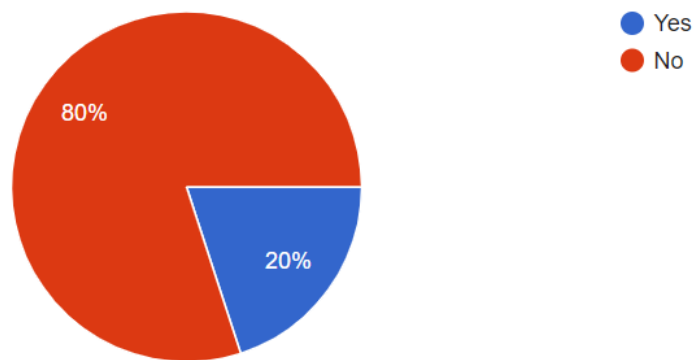


Figure 8

The third question, “Do you believe that using politically correct language is important in today's diverse society?” evoked various interesting responses. Starting off with the lowest percentage, 20% of participants responded with “Strongly agree”, while 40% “Agree” and the rest of 40% responded with “Neutral” as seen in *Figure 9*. This interesting response will help us in further discussion of the topic.

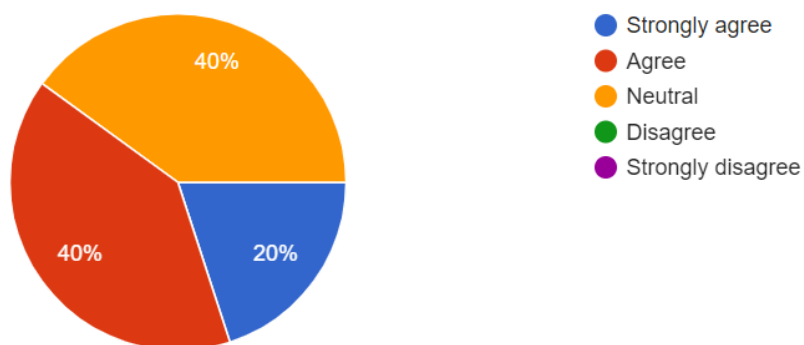


Figure 9

When the next question was asked, “Do you believe that using politically correct language can contribute to a more inclusive society?”, 70% of participants – which translates to 7 participants answered with “Yes”, 10% with “No”, and 20% with “Unsure”. See *Figure 10* below:

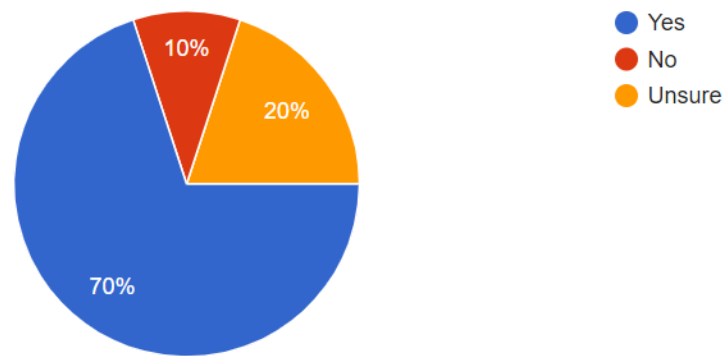


Figure 10

This interesting statistics show how in the previous question, the portion of participants acknowledged the importance of politically correct language while a considerable amount of participants remained neutral, potentially reflecting uncertainty or ambivalence about its significance. However, the question that followed suggests that, despite limited formal education, a large majority of participants perceive a connection between politically correct language and inclusivity. This highlights an inherent understanding or intuitive recognition of the politically correct language, even in the absence of formal education. The neutral stance of 40% in the second question may indicate a need for more education and awareness or it could suggest that portion of participants is not an advocate of PC.

The last question concerned with statistics is, “To what extent do you think the media influences people's use of politically correct language?” According to *Figure 11*, half of the participants (50%) believe that the media significantly influences the use of politically correct language. Meanwhile, 40% think the media has a somewhat influential role, and the remaining 10% believe it has no influence at all.

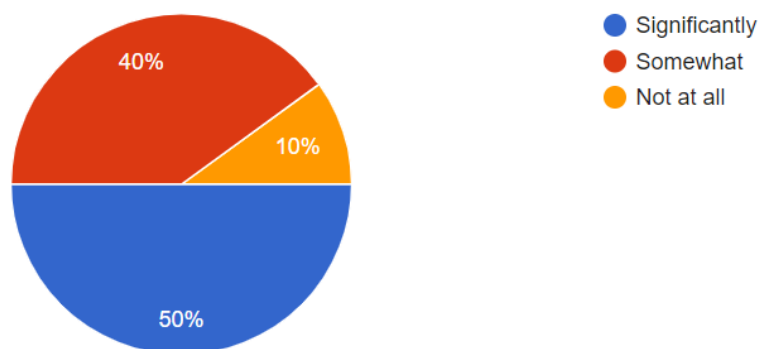


Figure 11

The fact that 50% of participants believe the media has a significant impact suggests a strong awareness of the media's role in shaping societal norms and language use. The 40% who see the media as somewhat influential may recognize its role but perhaps view other factors as equally or more important. The 10% who think the media has no influence might either be skeptical of the media's power or place greater emphasis on sociocultural influences.

2. Qualitative Data

The second section of this research will present qualitative data. This section will investigate the experiences and perceptions of the participants, providing a deeper understanding of how L2 speakers of English use politically correct language. The qualitative data will be derived from the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) responses.

The DCT prompts will be detailed, explaining the context and expectations for each scenario. Following this, a thematic analysis of the responses will be conducted, highlighting common themes, patterns, and variations in the participants' use of politically correct language

To begin, we will briefly discuss the responses to two open-ended questions answered by participants before moving on to the DCT section of the questionnaire.

The first question was, “Have you ever changed your language use based on what you've seen or heard in the media regarding politically correct language? If yes, please provide an example.”

After analyzing the open-ended responses regarding participants' awareness of PC language, several key themes emerged. Many participants demonstrated a conscious effort to use respectful and inclusive language, particularly in terms related to gender and race. Several participants highlighted their preference for using terms like “person with disability” over “disabled person”. This reflects a growing awareness of the importance of language sensitivity in promoting inclusivity and respect. However, some participants noted challenges in understanding evolving language norms, particularly in contexts where outdated or potentially offensive terms may still be prevalent like “handicapped”, “Eskimo”, “colored” etc.

Selected responses from participants are included in the following section:

„Most examples would relate to the use of adjectives and nouns to describe people of color, e.g. termination of use of the adjective 'colored' or 'black/brown/yellow people' and so on. However, the most recent example would include the use of correct noun to describe people with disabilities. Until recently, term 'handicapped' was used as the most prominent term in relation to disabled people. However, this term recently was marked as politically as politically incorrect and offensive.“

„Yes. Using terms that are associated with people from LGBT community.“

„I learned that ‘a person with a disability’ is more politically correct than saying ‘a disabled person’. Also I’ve learned about the job titles that are regarded as sexist, for example it is more politically correct to say ‘a firefighter’ rather than ‘a fireman’“

„Yes, the use of the word eskimo (not correct, derogatory)“

„Using they/them when the gender of the person is unknown.“

„Yes. No matter the nation, patriarchy is deeply rooted in the linguistic structures of all languages which causes a gender bias. I try to observe these and many other veiled expressions and root them out of my speech. But obviously , gender bias is not the only prejudice prevalent in daily speech.“

Other responses were „Sometimes“ or „No“, „Not particularly.“

The second open-ended question was, “Have you personally experienced or observed instances of discrimination or bias towards others based on their language use? If yes, please describe the situation.”

The responses illustrate varied perspectives on discrimination and bias related to language use, ranging from workplace challenges and social media controversies to personal experiences of gender bias and resistance to inclusive language practices. They highlight the complexity of addressing language-related discrimination and the ongoing need for education, awareness, and cultural change.

Several participants provided insightful reflections on their experiences and observations regarding discrimination or bias related to language use. One respondent portrayed experiences in the workplace where a male manager used derogatory language towards women and made misogynistic jokes. This behavior was noted as common in the Balkans, reflecting broader cultural norms that tolerate gender-based discrimination. Another participant highlighted common discrimination based on language use in their surroundings, particularly in a country perceived as lagging behind in diversity and inclusion efforts. They noted a reduction in discriminatory language use in their current workplace, attributed to the presence of international organizations and a more educated workforce. Another respondent shared observations from social media, where instances of using incorrect pronouns for individuals identifying with non-binary gender identities sparked controversy and backlash. This example highlighted ongoing debates and misunderstandings surrounding the use of politically correct language, revealing differing perspectives on gender identity acceptance.

One participant described personal experiences of gender bias, where they were unfairly labeled and criticized for not conforming to stereotypical gender expectations. This led to feelings of insecurity and emotional distress, highlighting the impact of language-related discrimination on personal well-being. Several participants mentioned instances where individuals trying to learn and use gender-sensitive or inclusive language were mocked or criticized. This reflects societal resistance or intolerance towards language adaptations that promote inclusivity.

The following section depicts the participants' responses:

“Yes, in workplace - manager of male sex using derogatory terms for women and making misogynistic jokes. This type of behavior among men is common in the Balkans.”

“Since we live in the country that is a few steps behind with all the current situations regarding inclusion and diversity, I believe that on daily basis you can notice discrimination based on the language use. However, this goes back to the surroundings in general and type of people you most often communicate with. For the last couple of months, the amount of discrimination based on language use, I have been noticing, has been reduced due to the fact that the workplace I am currently at includes different international organizations and people that are up to date with current trends and are educated on the mere definition of discrimination. The concept of discrimination on the language use, in my opinion, can mostly be related to uneducated people who do not realize the offensiveness of what they are saying or educated people who purposely use such language to offend others, which, again, only speaks of their lack of education.”

“I have never personally experienced instances of discrimination, but I've seen it in on social media where someone will identify as using they/them pronouns and then someone would address that person by a wrong pronoun and then everyone would be mad at that person and say that we need to respect people's pronouns. This is the only case of politically correct language (if it counts) that I find completely ridiculous. You are either a he or a she and nothing in between...”

“I have experience with the already mentioned gender bias. I was called "cold-hearted" and "not lady like" just because I didn't have a reaction to certain events that people expected of me. These remarks made me unsure of myself and caused a wave of panic and depression that lasted for a while.”

“People getting annoyed when someone (especially women) insists on using gender sensitive language in B/C/S (example doktor-doktorica, people sometimes use masculine nouns for women)”

Moving to the DCT results, participants were presented with two prompts. The first prompt was as follows:

Prompt 1

Imagine you are attending a university seminar on gender equality. The topic of discussion is whether affirmative action policies are effective in addressing gender disparities in the workplace. During the seminar, a classmate makes the following statement:

"I don't understand why we need affirmative action for women in the workplace. They should just work harder like everyone else. Giving them special treatment only reinforces the idea that they're not capable on their own."

How would you respond to your classmate's statement?

The responses reflect a range of viewpoints on affirmative action and gender equality, highlighting diverse attitudes towards gender roles and workplace dynamics. Several responses argue in favor of affirmative action as means to address systematic gender discrimination in the workplace. They emphasize the need for inclusivity and challenge the notion that women need to "work harder" to overcome existing disparities. Some responses acknowledge gender differences but differ in their interpretation. Other suggest understanding and accommodating these differences as a path to equality, while one response argues for adapting workplaces to accommodate women's biological and societal roles. Another response brings in historical context to argue against gender discrimination, advocating for equality based on human dignity rather than gender distinctions. Also, there is another response that stands out by agreeing with the classmate's critique of affirmative action, viewing gender distinctions in business as inherently discriminatory and advocating for equal capabilities across genders.

For more clarity, participants' responses are depicted below:

“I strongly disagree with my classmate since he is not qualified to speak up for women. Understanding the perspective of women can only truly come from women themselves. Therefore, women should not be required to work harder, as they already exert tremendous

effort to attain the same social status as men. Despite being ten times more assertive and capable, women are often paid less solely because of their gender. Additionally, beyond their professional duties, women frequently carry the burden of household responsibilities. We should all strive to be more empathetic and deepen our understanding of social issues.”

“I would say that use of affirmative action for women in the workplace is not related to reinforcing that they are not capable and that this statement only proves as an example of bias towards women, whether conscious or unconscious. This use of affirmative action can only provide positive working place and surrounding for women in the sense that it could serve, even unintentionally, as a trigger for breaking barriers and helping women feel more included in general, and especially at workplaces that are considered to be only for 'men'.”

“I would say that I disagree and that women have been discriminated in the workplace because they are paid less than men and face sexism on daily basis.”

“I would laugh and say that women work harder than anybody else.”

“It does not question their ability; it only displays proper manners and consideration for others.”

“It is necessary to understand the differences in the lives of men and women all around the world. Men that come to work are not expected to take care of their family outside of work, even if it the logical way of being a part of a family/community. Considering all of these differences and understanding the discrepancy in the way of living is a step to creating a more equal environment for everyone.”

“What you are saying isn't right. You should look it in different way. In the past women couldn't even work at all and were given a very small wage. Why put men above women? We are all human beings and we shouldn't be separated by gender, color or ethnicity. Women are capable of doing certain jobs as well as men or even better.”

“Women and men are not the same, therefore can't be treated the same. Women are a lot more likely to have obligations outside work, such as motherhood, taking care of the household etc. Besides that, their hormonal cycles are completely different, so the workplace should adapt to those cycles. Humans should adapt to nature and not the other way around.”

“I agree. The distinction of gender/sex is itself discriminatory in business terms. Any gender should be able to complete any job on average, albeit one might be more capable than the other on higher levels.”

Prompt 2

Imagine you are in a team meeting at work, discussing a project with your colleagues. During the discussion, one of your colleagues makes the following statement:

"I don't think we should take input from him, he's just a Faggot."

How would you address your colleague's use of inappropriate language?

Many responses demonstrated an immediate and assertive approach to addressing the colleague's use of offensive language. They emphasize the need to confront the behavior directly and assert workplace standards of respect and inclusivity. Another response reflects a passive approach, choosing to disengage rather than confront the behavior directly. This response highlights potential discomfort or uncertainty in addressing sensitive workplace issues. Several other responses advocated for educating the colleague about the impact of their language and emphasize maintaining professionalism and respect in workplace communication. They suggest varying degrees of intervention, from direct confrontation to procedural reporting. Some responses advocated for reporting the incident to HR or supervisors, citing the severity of discrimination, hate speech, and harassment in the workplace. They highlight the importance of enforcing consequences for inappropriate behavior to uphold workplace standards.

Participants' responses are captured for better understanding of the topic:

“You are entitled to your opinion, but it's important to recognize that you do not have the right to offend someone, particularly based on their sexual orientation.”

“I would ask him why he thinks him being homosexual provides as a valid criteria for choosing whether he should be included in the work or not or why he thinks he is competent to judge on his working skills based on his homosexuality. Then I would either report this use of term, especially since it is widely known how offensive this term is and would suggest to avoid using such terms or, if that is too much to ask, to avoid working with that person since he would most definitely offend him since he has no moral compass on what he should say or avoid saying.”

“I would tell him that he’s rude and disrespectful and that he shouldn’t be using this language.”

“I would probably say nothing and not speak to them ever again.”

“He is not nice colleague.”

“It is improper to use insulting terms of that type anywhere, learn respect of others.”

“I would address the unprofessional behaviour, highlighting that such language is absolutely unacceptable, and later ask them to apologise. Additionally, I would report them for discrimination, hate speech and harassment. Such actions would become more widespread when tolerated.”

“Capability of his shouldn’t be compared to who he loves. It doesn’t even have any connections to his job. He is the same as us or even has greater ideas for our project. You can’t judge someone on that base but on the base of knowledge and his practice in certain area. Do not enter into his personal life and to call him that offensive name is also not permissible. What would you do if someone calls you a foul, would you feel nice? Please stop using bad language and judge someone by that criteria. If you don’t stop and apologize now, you are not going to be a part of our team.”

“The f-slur is something that should not be heard anywhere, ever, let alone the workplace. No one should be discriminated on the basis of their sexuality, race, religion, etc. I wouldn’t even engage in the conversation with this person, I would just report them to the HR.”

“This isn't the kind of environment where any derogatory terms should be used. Business is business and there is a set standard of language which should be used at the workplace. You can say whatever you want in your own home, but expect that there are consequences if you say whatever you want outside your home.”

V. DISCUSSION

Based on the results gathered from the questionnaire and DCT, we will now discuss and merge these findings with the research questions posed in the Methodology section of this paper. Starting off with the first research question “To what extent do L2 speakers of English use politically correct language in various contexts such as academic, workplace, and social interactions?”, our findings indicate that participants use politically correct language to a significant extent across various contexts. This conclusion emerges primarily from the qualitative approach of the research, as participants' reactions and detailed responses to given situations reveal their tendencies. Also, from quantitative approach we conclude that the majority of participants are very familiar with the concept and think that the PC can contribute to a more inclusive society.

The second research question, “How do L2 speakers of English respond to instances of inappropriate or non-politically correct language use in their communication environments?” is addressed through both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The results indicate that participants respond eloquently to instances of non-politically correct language. Moreover, the boldness and confidence in their responses suggest that they feel comfortable advocating for others' rights. For example, one of the participants in their answers responded: “This isn't the kind of environment where any derogatory terms should be used. Business is business and there is a set standard of language which should be used at the workplace. You can say whatever you want in your own home, but expect that there are consequences if you say whatever you want outside your home.”

Finally, the third research question that wraps up our paper is, “What are the attitudes and awareness levels of L2 speakers of English regarding the importance of politically correct language in today's diverse society?” Similarly, the findings indicate that participants are aware of the importance of politically correct language in today's diverse society. Their responses highlight the complexity of addressing language-related discrimination and highlight the continuing need for education, awareness, and cultural change.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis highlights the historical significance and ongoing importance of politically correct (PC) language regarding gender equality, race, disabilities, and other social issues.

Our findings indicate that participants use PC language significantly across various contexts, demonstrating a high level of familiarity with the concept. This familiarity suggests that PC language is viewed as a tool for nurturing a more inclusive society. Furthermore, the participants responded eloquently and confidently to instances of non-PC language, showing a strong commitment to maintaining respectful communication. The study also reveals that participants are extremely aware of the importance of PC language in today's diverse society. Overall, this research illustrates that L2 speakers of English not only understand and use PC language effectively but also recognize its important role in promoting inclusivity and respect in various social and professional settings.

Building on the findings of this thesis, future studies should observe how the use and perception of politically correct (PC) language among L2 speakers evolve over time, particularly as societal norms and cultural contexts continue to shift. Additionally, expanding the scope of the research to include a more diverse demographic of L2 speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds could provide deeper insights into nuances of PC language.

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VIII. APPENDIX

Research on Political Correctness in English – How L2 Speakers Use Politically Correct Language?

Hello there!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire, which will contribute significantly to my progress toward earning my Master's degree. Your valuable input is greatly appreciated, and completing the questionnaire should require less than 10 minutes of your time.

*Sincerely,
Naida*

Enter your age

How long have you been learning English as a second language?

1. How familiar are you with the concept of politically correct language?

Very familiar
Somewhat familiar
Not familiar at all

2. Have you received any formal education or training on politically correct language?

Yes
No

3. Do you believe that using politically correct language is important in today's diverse society?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

4. Do you believe that using politically correct language can contribute to a more inclusive society?

Yes
No
Unsure

5. To what extent do you think the media influences people's use of politically correct language?

Significantly
Somewhat
Not at all

6. Have you ever changed your language use based on what you've seen or heard in the media regarding politically correct language? If yes, please provide an example.

7. Have you personally experienced or observed instances of discrimination or bias towards others based on their language use? If yes, please describe the situation.

Discourse Completion Test – Prompts

Each of these prompts aims to generate responses that reflect how L2 speakers of English navigate the use of politically correct language in different contexts. Participants' responses can provide insights into their awareness of politically correct language, their attitudes toward its use, and the strategies they employ to address instances of politically incorrect language in academic, workplace, and social settings.

1. Prompt:

Imagine you are attending a university seminar on gender equality. The topic of discussion is whether affirmative action policies are effective in addressing gender disparities in the workplace. During the seminar, a classmate makes the following statement:

"I don't understand why we need affirmative action for women in the workplace. They should just work harder like everyone else. Giving them special treatment only reinforces the idea that they're not capable on their own."

How would you respond to your classmate's statement?

2. Prompt:

Imagine you are in a team meeting at work, discussing a project with your colleagues. During the discussion, one of your colleagues makes the following statement:

"I don't think we should take input from him, he's just a Faggot."

How would you address your colleague's use of inappropriate language?