

## LINGUISTIC MEANS OF EXPRESSING POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: FROM GENDER TO SOCIAL STATUS

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*This study investigates the phenomenon of political correctness in contemporary language through the analysis of James Finn Garner's "Politically Correct Bedtime Stories". The research examines how political correctness functions as both a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon, particularly in literary adaptation. The research reveals that gender discrimination, social status discrimination, and themes of death and war are the most prevalent topics requiring politically correct language. The analysis demonstrates that political correctness operates primarily through various linguistic mechanisms, including paraphrasing, metaphor, metonymy, and terminological substitution, each serving specific functions in creating more inclusive language patterns. The findings indicate that political correctness has evolved from its origins in the USA to a complex phenomenon affecting multiple spheres of life, including education, science, religion, politics, and culture. The research highlights the role of the Sapir – Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity in understanding how language shapes thought and behaviour, particularly in creating tolerant communicative spaces. The study examines how different linguistic means, such as euphemisation and paraphrasing, contribute to forming politically correct expressions and their impact on communication effectiveness. The research methodology combines qualitative analysis of linguistic transformations with thematic categorisation, allowing for a systematic examination of how political correctness manifests in literary adaptation. The study demonstrates that while political correctness serves important social functions in addressing discrimination and promoting inclusivity, it can sometimes reach extremes, extending to phenomena and situations where its application might seem excessive. This observation raises important questions about the balance between linguistic sensitivity and effective communication. The findings contribute to understanding how language evolution reflects and shapes social attitudes toward discrimination, prejudice, and cultural sensitivity.*

**Key words:** political correctness, linguistic euphemisms, dysphemisms, literary adaptation, gender discrimination, social discrimination, linguistic mechanisms.

### **Лелет Ірина. Мовні засоби вираження політкоректності: від гендера до соціального статусу**

*Дослідження присвячене вивченню феномену політичної коректності в сучасній мові через аналіз «Політично коректних казок на ніч» Джеймса Фінна Гарнера. У дослідженні розглядається, як політкоректність функціонує як лінгвістичне та соціокультурне явище, зокрема в літературній адаптації. Дослідження показує, що гендерна дискримінація, дискримінація за соціальним статусом, а також теми смерті та війни є найпоширенішими темами, які потребують політкоректної мови. Аналіз демонструє, що політкоректність діє насамперед через різні мовні механізми, зокрема перефразування, метафору, метонімію та термінологічну заміну, кожен із яких виконує власну функцію у створенні інклюзивних мовних моделей. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що політична коректність, яка зародилася у Сполучених Штатах Америки, перетворилася на складне явище, що впливає на різні сфери життя, зокрема й на освіту, науку, релігію, політику та культуру. Дослідження висвітлює роль гіпотези лінгвістичної відносності Сапіра – Уорфа в розумінні того, як мова формує мислення і поведінку, зокрема у створенні толерантного комунікативного простору. У дослідженні розглядається, як різні мовні засоби, як-от евфемізація та перефразування, сприяють формуванню політично коректних висловлювань, їхній вплив на ефективність комунікації. Методологія дослідження поєднує якісний аналіз лінгвістичних трансформацій із тематичною категоризацією, що дозволяє систематично вивчати, як політична коректність проявляється в літературній адаптації. Дослідження демонструє, що хоча політкоректність виконує важливі соціальні функції в боротьбі з дискримінацією та сприяє інклюзивності, вона іноді впадає у крайнощі, поширюється на явища та ситуації, де її застосування може здаватися надмірним. Це спостереження порушує важливі*

*питання про баланс між мовною чутливістю та ефективною комунікацією. Результати дослідження сприяють розумінню того, як еволюція мови відображає і формує суспільне ставлення до дискримінації, упереджень і культурної чутливості.*

**Ключові слова:** політична коректність, мовні евфемізми, дисфемізми, літературна адаптація, гендерна дискримінація, соціальна дискримінація, мовні механізми.

**Introduction.** Political correctness has emerged as a significant phenomenon in contemporary society, originating in the United States and evolving into a comprehensive system that regulates behaviour across various spheres of human interaction. This linguistic and social phenomenon reflects broader cultural changes and societal attitudes toward discrimination, human rights, and social justice. Studying political correctness in language provides valuable insights into how societies address and attempt to rectify various forms of discrimination through linguistic means.

Nowadays, political correctness is attracting more and more attention. This phenomenon originates in the USA, where, over the years, it has become a well-coordinated mechanism regulating people's behaviour in various spheres and situations. Considering the democratic culture and exceptional attention to the observance of human rights in the West, we can say that political correctness is not just a linguistic phenomenon but also a way of life that prescribes certain rules of behaviour in society and language. Political correctness affects many spheres – education, science, religion, politics, and culture; its influence is significant in the media, literature and everyday life.

Modern linguists pay much attention to the changes that occur under the influence of social, cultural, political, economic and other factors. Language today is a constantly changing organism that absorbs everything in the surrounding reality. It reflects the culture, mentality, traditions of the country and people, time and epoch. Language, responsive to the processes and phenomena occurring in society, is very connected with it and can tell a lot about it. As an example of such a connection, changes in the picture of the world, and consequently in the language of English-speaking society, which occurred under the influence of such a phenomenon as political correctness, can serve as an example.

**The aim of the study** is to examine the functioning and manifestation of political correctness in language through the analysis of James Finn Garner's "Politically Correct Bedtime Stories" collection, with a particular focus on the trans-

lation and implementation of politically correct vocabulary.

The subject of the study is the phenomenon of political correctness in contemporary language and its manifestation in literary texts, specifically in the context of fairy tale adaptations.

The object of study is the linguistic means and mechanisms of expressing political correctness in J.F. Garner's "Politically Correct Bedtime Stories", including euphemisms, dysphemisms, and disclaimers.

The tasks of the research are to analyse the theoretical foundations of political correctness as a linguistic and social phenomenon, to identify and classify types of politically correct vocabulary in the selected literary work, to examine the mechanisms and techniques of creating politically correct expressions, to investigate the thematic classification of politically correct units, to evaluate the effectiveness of different linguistic means in expressing political correctness.

**Discussion.** To define political correctness, researchers emphasise its social and ideological prerequisites. Hughes (2010) characterises political correctness as "a complex, rapidly changing and diverse phenomenon", highlighting its dynamic nature and resistance to simple definition [1, p. 3]. For example, in their work "Are You Politically Correct?" F. Beckwith and M. Bauman give the following definition: "a network of interconnected, though not always interdependent, ideological views that question the foundations of university education: traditional and the foundations of university education: the traditional curriculum, views on the objectivity of knowledge, prioritising cultural, gender, class and racial differences" [2, p. 9]. In the following definition, the authors of the sociological dictionary guide, G. Lawson and D. Garrod, talk about political correctness as a concept that "in the eyes of its opponents is more mythical than a real phenomenon, which is expressed in the desire to exclude any manifestation of discrimination in any way" [3, p. 9].

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines political correctness as language, behaviour, and attitudes that are carefully chosen

so that they do not offend or insult anyone – used especially when you think someone is too careful in what they say or how they behave [4]. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary provides the following definition: "Political correctness is the principle of avoiding in language and behaviour what is likely to offend certain groups of people (offend particular groups of people (the principle of avoiding language and behaviour that may offend particular groups of people))" [5].

**Methodology.** In the research paper, we decided to turn to James Finn Garner's "Politically Correct Bedtime Stories" collection to examine how political correctness functions and manifests in language. This book consists of 13 well-known children's tales from around the world, which the author has rewritten with political correctness in mind. The existence of such a book already shows that political correctness is reflected in almost all spheres of life, and the popularity of this collection is about the growing interest in the phenomenon in question. In his tales, J.F. Garner sarcastically describes a politically correct society and sometimes goes so deep into the subject that it should be noted that he does it intentionally – that we no longer believe in the sincerity of such a society. Political correctness loses its original essence and extends to phenomena, events, objects and people for no particular reason, thus reaching an extreme.

In addition, we have the task of examining the translation of the politically correct vocabulary identified in the collection and analysing how this translation has been achieved. In total, we selected 119 examples of politically correct euphemisms, 13 examples of dysphemisms, and 3 examples of disclaimers, i.e., the author's reservations about the coincidental nature of coincidences that are not intended to offend or insult anyone.

**Results.** Having analysed all the selected examples, we have identified the topics to which the identified politically correct units can be attributed. We relied on the thematic classification of previously discussed euphemisms during the analysis. In J.F. Garner's tales, we found thirteen themes, the most popular of which are gender discrimination, discrimination by social status, and the theme of death and war. The other themes we have identified include racial discrimination, age discrimination, raising the prestige of certain professions, discrimination based on

appearance, intellectual ability, health, covering up inhumane state policies and antisocial behaviour, neutralising physical disadvantages that cause unpleasant sensations or rejection, as well as a theme that includes examples of protecting the environment and the animal world.

The basis of linguistic political correctness is the Sapir – Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which establishes a connection between forms of language, culture and thinking. In the researchers' hypothesis, it is also essential to highlight the concept of "linguistic determinism", according to which thinking is impossible without language, and language is a necessary condition by which, in turn, our thinking is formed. Knowing that some words and verbal constructions influence people's behaviour in a certain way, the supporters of the hypothesis concluded that linguistic determinism through special norms of speech etiquette can create such a communicative space in which the tolerant linguistic behaviour of its participants will be observed. Consequently, we can conclude that all those language changes caused by political correctness are oriented towards changing human consciousness concerning groups falling under different kinds of discrimination.

The most frequent manifestation of political correctness is found at the lexical level. The main means of realisation of the studied phenomenon at this linguistic level are euphemisms, the study of which we consider an important step in this research. Equalising women's and men's rights continues and is gaining momentum. Discrimination based on gender gave rise to the feminist movement, which was at the origin of the phenomenon under study – political correctness, and today demands careful attention to the female sex. Unfortunately, along with the development of the equality movement, the number of cases when political correctness goes to extremes, appearing in the most unexpected and unthinkable situations (*fairy godperson* instead of fairy godmother, *queendom* instead of kingdom, *pre-wommon* instead of girl) is growing.

Gender discrimination is followed by a significant number of examples of discrimination by social status, which the declining standard of living may explain. This situation causes unpleasant feelings. Therefore, this topic should be avoided, and euphemisms should not be used to indicate an unfavourable financial situation. In addition, a low standard of living may indi-



cate the failure of the State's domestic policy, and words and expressions referring to social status are euphemised or silenced (*economically disadvantaged*, *economically marginalised* instead of *poor*, *powerless station in life* instead of *poverty*).

Finally, the theme of *war and death* includes examples of two interrelated phenomena in J.F. Garner's tales that are often parallel. In lexical units belonging to this theme, the connotation of a word or expression also changes from negative to neutral or more positive. If we talk about the phenomenon of death, it continues to worry people in Western society, causing unpleasant associations and feelings (*my absence* instead of *death*, *to see them go* instead of *die*). References to war and aggression can also cause unpleasant associations and feelings in people, which leads to their euphemistic substitution or avoidance. In addition, the popularity of words and expressions related to this subject can be explained by the current instability in the world and the growing tension between countries. Mass media tends to be rather reserved when reporting on events taking place around the world. Besides, there is a tendency to deliver news from the position of one's own country. Hence, we can conclude that not all events can be directly named. Euphemisms, in this case, reduce the negative connotation and fulfil the role of mitigating the communicative effect, preventing the appearance of feelings of anxiety and fear in the listener or reader (*had been eliminated*, *to ensure the non-viability* instead of *to kill*, *vicious display of testosterone* instead of *fight or war*, *to liberate their homeland* instead of *to fight*, *combatants* instead of *warriors or soldiers*). Different linguistic means are used to soften a word or statement's effect on the audience [6; 7].

The most productive way of forming euphemisms is *paraphrasing*. This method often describes a phenomenon with other words that do not carry a negative connotation and thus do not cause negative feelings. The essence remains the same, but the effect on the reader/listener changes. Thus, for example, in the topic of gender discrimination, we can note the following example formed by the periphrase – *belief in the absolute legitimacy of the monarch and the inherent superiority of males*. In essence, this is a definition of such phenomena as chauvinism and authoritarianism. Another example of paraphrasing, but in this case combined with a change in

the form of the word, is *prewommon*, which is a word with broader semantics and replaces the non-politically correct word *girl*. Here, in the topic of gender discrimination, we find the following example: instead of the word *fairy* in the sense of “*fairy, fairy woman*”, which is associated only with the female gender, the paraphrase individual *deity proxy* is used, which helps to avoid non-political correctness to both genders.

Another frequent technique of euphemising speech is replacing the gendered part *man*, which occurs in many words in the sense of “*person*”, which, in turn, is also a paraphrase. For example, *lumberman* was replaced by *woodsperson*.

In the theme of age discrimination, paraphrasing is also used as the main way of language expression, and to avoid the word *old* in the story, the periphrase *chronologically gifted woman* was used, and instead of the word *young* (*immature*), the periphrase – *the least chronologically accomplished*. Both periphrases are based on the use of the adverb *chronologically* with additions that define the vector of age definition – upward and downward, respectively. The author also managed to avoid the un-politically incorrect word *old* by using a euphemism, such as *mature adult*, and *the role of a wise and nurturing matriarch* replaced *grandmother* in the story [8].

The next theme of discrimination based on *health* is fully represented by euphemisms formed by paraphrasing, among them examples relating to height: specially abled and differently statured instead of an undersized, *vertically challenged man*, *a man of non-standard height* instead of *short man*, as well as *enjoyed an advantage in size* instead of *tall*. Here, we pay special attention to the euphemism, which is as optically challenged as a bat. In its original form, this euphemism is a phraseological expression *as blind as a bat*. Thus, in addition to paraphrasing the un-politically incorrect word *blind*, here we also see such a technique as the destruction of a phraseological unit.

Many words relating to the theme of discrimination by social status are also formed by paraphrasing. Thus, the words *poor* and *poverty* and some others that denote or indicate poor material status in J.F. Garner's tales find expression in the following euphemisms: *economically disadvantaged*, *lack of material accomplishment*, *economically marginalised*, *powerless station in life*.

Within the theme of discrimination based on appearance, one should not openly talk about both beautiful appearance and unattractive appearance. For this purpose, the author also used paraphrasing to form euphemisms. To avoid offending anyone, the following substitutions were used instead of the word *beautiful*: *was not at all unpleasant to look at*, *greater-than-average physical attractiveness*. The author paraphrased the word *ugly* using hyperbole to preserve the original explicitness, thus forming a euphemism differently *visaged enough to stop a clock*. In the following context, *“big nose you have – only relatively, of course, and certainly attractive in its own way”*, the expression *certainly attractive in its way* is also a euphemism replacing the word *unbeautiful or ugly*, with which the big nose mentioned in the context is associated [8].

Quite a lot of examples formed by paraphrasing can be observed among euphemisms, as a rule, referring to physical defects that cause unpleasant feelings and rejection, for example, *decorum-impaired*, *dirt-accomplished*, *odour-enhanced*, replacing *ugly*, *dirty* and *smelly* [8].

The most popular way of conveying euphemisation in the language on the topic of death and war is again paraphrasing, so instead of the word *defeated*, the author used such periphrases as *mobility nonpossessor*, *had been eliminated*, *immobile*, and the word *fight* was replaced by *socially dysfunctional*. The euphemism began to display very unsisterly hostility, used instead of a *bully*.

We observe some more examples of softening of words denoting death by paraphrasing, so, for example, instead of *die* in fairy tales we meet such expressions as *rendered nonviable*, *ensure the nonviability*, *sleep forever* [8].

Another topic, a considerable part of examples formed by paraphrasing, is discrimination on *the level of intellectual abilities*. The following euphemisms, formed to replace the word *stupid*, which can hurt feelings and dignity, are attributed to it: *wisdom-challenged*, *her diminutive brain working overtime*, *you look too simple to be able to make these connections*, *the man seemed to be lacking in coherence*.

The next most popular way of linguistic expression of political correctness is metaphor. For example, the author replaced the word *poor* with the metaphor of *living outside the bounds of normal society*, which creates an image of a

certain healthy, “normal” society where people with above-average earnings live.

The author also uses the metaphor to denote words relating to the theme of death, which is subject to mitigation. Among the examples from fairy tales, we should note the metaphors to see them go and my absence instead of death, which creates a sense of absence of something or removal without return.

Another metaphor revealed in fairy tales, *the vicious display of testosterone*, used instead of *fight*, is created with partial application of metonymy, as *testosterone* is a male hormone, hence the image of a fight, during which, as a rule, men show aggression and strength. As a substitute for the word *war*, military operations or arms, the author uses such a neutrally coloured metaphor as *gunboat tactics*. The image of a military sea vessel with artillery weapons leads us to the idea of military operations, and the tactics of such a vessel can be equated to military tactics, i.e., to war.

The author also uses metaphor when covering the topic of discrimination based on intellectual ability. Here we meet two examples opposite to each other: instead of the word *stupid*, the author uses the euphemism *a large if cerebrally constrained duke*, creating the image of a person with a constrained, compressed hemisphere of the brain, and instead of the word *clever* to strengthen the effect, he uses the euphemism *thinking too much with the left side of your brain*, emphasising the overactive work of the left hemisphere of the human brain, which is responsible for analytical thinking and linguistic abilities [8].

As a linguistic expression of political correctness, the word combination *testosterone-heavy idea*, which denotes the ideas of men, is an example of metonymy. Since *testosterone* is the main male sex hormone, metonymic transfer on the principle of part-whole takes place here. The following example of metonymy we meet in the word combination *throwing a fancy dress ball*, where *fancy dress* replaces the adjective *lavish*, which, when describing an event such as a *ball*, is associated with lavish, expensive clothes and costumes of its visitors. Another example from fairy tales – *linear, Western-style thinking* instead of *constrained*, metonymic transfer occurs due to the ingrained opinion about *narrow-minded Western thinking*, which does not allow us to think broader and further.

In the following example – *colourist thinking*, we also observe metonymy, as the colour of a person's skin is taken as a basis, influencing a special attitude toward people with different skin colours. In the euphemism of *sizeism*, height is such a factor leading to prejudice. In the last two examples, a certain characteristic of a person is taken as a basis for metonymic substitution.

It is worth noting the productivity of such a way of euphemising speech as a replacement for a term. Here, the examples selected in the tales are also few, but with their help, it becomes especially clear how political correctness functions in the language, distracting from the true essence of the statement. For example, instead of the word *soldiers*, the author uses the term *combatants*, which neutralises the negative connotation of the original word due to its occupation. In the following example, *to liberate their homeland*, used instead of *to expel*, the connotation changes from negative to positive. The semantic load of the expression also changes, and the reader gets a different perception of the situation – the fairy tale hero now does not plan to invade someone else's land. Instead, he liberates it with good intentions. In the example, *the economic system that had marginalised him*, we also see the term *to marginalise* used instead of the word *impoverish* or the phrase *to reduce poverty* and cover up the true unfavourable situation in the economic sphere [8].

We can find active application in using synonyms as a linguistic expression of political correctness. Among the examples we found, we can single out synonyms with weaker connotations than the original word or expression – abusing alcohol instead of alcoholism, the diminutive man instead of little man, as well as synonyms with broader semantics in comparison with the original lexical units – with expansionist ideas instead of invading.

The other ways of linguistic expression of political correctness account for an insignificant number of examples. Only three examples among the highlighted ones are formed by this method of transfer from species to species: liberated some of the lettuce is used instead of the negatively coloured word *thieve*, unpaid labourer instead of the word *slave*

containing negative connotation. In the case of the following example – *dispossessed and marginalised peasantry*, the transfer is observed between adjectives; instead of *poor*, the author uses the less frequently used *dispossessed*. The following examples from fairy tales are formed by *antonomasia*: *Freudian imaginary* – a euphemism based on a proper name associated with something gloomy and very difficult to understand; *Don't try it, Napoleon* – an example from the theme of discrimination on the basis of appearance, formed due to Napoleon's famous distinctive feature – short stature. Euphemisms formed in this way fulfil their function of reducing negative connotations and only indirectly give an idea of the essence of the word or expression.

The following ways of expressing political correctness are represented by the single examples we selected in J.F. Garner's book. The less negatively expressed euphemism *untruth* was formed by *meiosis* to replace the word *lie*. Another example is the word *baby*, which has no gender specification, and with its use, the euphemistic effect is achieved through generalisation. The author manages to downplay the impact on the reader by using *litotes* in the example, *leaving the duke temporarily inactive*, which was used instead of *defeated or broken* [8].

**Conclusions.** The analysis of political correctness through the lens of literary adaptation reveals its pervasive influence on contemporary language and communication. The research demonstrates that political correctness operates through various linguistic mechanisms, primarily serving to mitigate discrimination and create more inclusive forms of expression. However, the study also highlights potential extremes where political correctness might extend beyond its original purpose. The findings suggest that while political correctness serves important social functions in addressing discrimination and promoting inclusivity, its implementation requires careful consideration to maintain effective communication while achieving its social goals. Future research might benefit from examining how political correctness continues to evolve in response to changing social dynamics and cultural sensitivities.

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