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Oksana Nekhaienko

V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, o.v.nekhaenko@karazin.ua

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*Oksana Nekhaienko*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5201-8200>

Kharkiv National University, Kharkiv, Ukraine

Department of Political Sociology V.N. Karazin

e-mail: [o.v.nekhaenko@karazin.ua](mailto:o.v.nekhaenko@karazin.ua)

## **Patricia Hill Collins' concepts of intersectionality and Stephen Lukes' concepts of power in the sociological understanding of political correctness**

**Abstract.** The article actualizes the issue of political correctness and the need to develop tools for its further study. Political correctness is considered in the context of gender studies and power relations. The concept of attitudes towards political correctness is revealed, and an attempt is also made to reveal the mechanism of the formation of linguistic attitudes in the mass consciousness through the prism of the concepts of Stephen Lukes and Patricia Hill Collins. The historical and theoretical foundations of the formation of intersectionality are also considered. Intersectionality is focused on the study of hierarchical differences between individuals and groups, depending on the complex intersections of their position in society, determined by many parameters. Respectively, the intersectional approach to the analysis of power and language allows us to solve a number of methodological difficulties associated with the combination of macro and micro levels, which makes possible the further empirical analysis of political correctness directly as a social phenomenon, while taking it out of the linguistic sphere. Political correctness is studied as a formal embodiment of intersectionality, taking into account all the features of cross-identity in linguistic practices. The use of the intersectional method makes it possible to reveal political correctness not only as speech prescriptions, but as a multi-component phenomenon that must be considered in close connection with various kinds of discrimination. The role of power, as the main element, in the mechanisms of interiorization of attitudes towards political correctness is revealed. We highlight the role of symbolic power in ensuring voluntary consent, which is the basis for political

correctness and ensures its relatively stable nature. The possibility of using discourse analysis as one of the main methods of studying political correctness is substantiated.

**Keywords:** political correctness, discrimination, power, intersectionality, discourse.

During recent decades, a special emphasis among linguists and sociologists has been given to the issue of so-called political correctness.<sup>1</sup> Originating in the United States in the struggle for the rights of Afro-Americans and subsequently picked up by feminists, the process of spreading political correctness every year encompasses more and more spheres of public life and goes far beyond the boundaries of American culture. At the same time, the concepts regarding the functioning of political correctness as a social phenomenon, if considered in sociological science, are rather superficial, and not independent, but are more related to other social phenomena and processes (Ionin, 2012; Ostrouh, 1998; Lakoff, 1975). The same applies to the mechanisms of assimilating attitudes towards political correctness and studying its possible social effects, which, although less pronounced in Ukrainian society, can be easily recorded in American and European societies. Political correctness, while not being an institution as such, acquires an institutional character: for example, in American universities, “language codes” are created that are designed to normalize language interaction at universities and on campuses, and non-compliance entails administrative sanctions, suspension from teaching, or even dismissal. This influence of political correctness on social reality has long remained unnoticed, but in our opinion, this problem is socially significant and requires further scientific understanding.

Moreover, the relevance is largely due to the need to determine the status of political correctness in the (de) formation of public consciousness. It is important to note that when we speak about political correctness, we are not speaking about vulgarisms and the need to adhere to language tact or the avoidance of statements that offend many people. Political correctness permits the use of such words. The words condemned by political correctness include the whole groups of words and meanings that affect gender, racial, and ethnic themes. The words “negro”, “colored”, “Indians”, “gypsies” are already habitually withdrawn from the lexicon; but they are followed by those words that until quite recently did not seem offensive to anyone: “poor”, “indigent”, “sick”, “paralyzed”, “beautiful”, “smart”, “healthy”, “foreigner”, “emigrant”, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> More details about the phenomenon of political correctness O. Nekhaienko (2018).

The sociological appeal to the problem of political correctness, firstly, is due to the fact that the niche of the sociological study of this phenomenon remains empty against the background of the growing interest that political correctness arouses among foreign and domestic linguists, philosophers and culturologists. Secondly, the problem of political correctness can be attributed to the most pressing problems that are being developed by Western socio-political thought. This is explained by the fact that it is the idea of linguistic correctness that underlies the implementation of the policy of pluralism and solidarity, which dominates the political orientations of the states of the conventional West; this applies both to national states and determines the features of the functioning of institutions within the international community. This fact is already confirmed at the level of the highest legislative authority. For example, in the founding documents of the European Union as a general principle, non-discrimination and a tolerant attitude towards a person and a citizen, as well as the principle of equal opportunities are enshrined. The proclaimed principles were actually manifested in the form of political correctness, while the question remains: is the implementation of the above principles purely formal.

Taking into account the fact that Ukraine is now on its way to European integration, we are faced with the need to accept and cultivate European values, one of which is political correctness as a manifestation of tolerance. There is a need to study political correctness as a tool for shaping the agenda in European society.

Thus, the need to reflect in sociological science the most important social processes taking place in a modern multi-ethnic liberal democratic society is directly related to the phenomenon of political correctness: we are speaking, first of all, about the liberalization of society and the proclamation of the values of tolerance as the European integration guidelines for Ukraine. However, despite the existence of the need to study political correctness, so far there is no toolkit with the help of which such a study would be possible.

Accordingly, the purpose of this article is the theoretical analysis of the concept of intersectional power as one of the possible tools for studying political correctness.

Political correctness is intended to indicate value parameters, criteria for assessing certain political phenomena, events, processes, thereby helping to prevent social contradictions and conflicts, as well as ensuring the ideological and value consensus that is needed for the smooth functioning of the social system. It is important to find out how political correctness is capable of influencing public relations, and to determine (or at least justify hypotheses) the consequences of this influence on society.

It is necessary to outline the possible vectors of the empirical analysis of the phenomenon of political correctness. For this, it is proposed to consider attitudes towards political correctness, which are formed with the help of language and can affect the formation and deformation of mass consciousness, and it is they that are the focus of our attention in this article.

By “attitudes” we mean such

a social quality of a person, which expresses their readiness for a certain social activity and actions in a certain sphere of reality in accordance with their value orientations, as well as with socially accepted methods of behaviour prescribed to them as a member of a certain group or society” (*Sociologicheskij slovar' IAC “SOCIUM”*).

This special “vision” underlies the selective activity of a person, and their behaviour. It regulates conscious and unconscious forms of activity in all spheres: motivational, emotional, social. Attitudes are based on a person’s life experience, they create both huge benefits and huge limitations.

A person prepared for a certain action has the ability to carry it out more quickly and accurately, that is, more efficiently than an unprepared person. However, the installation may be triggered by mistake and as a result, may not correspond to the real circumstances.

The concept of attitudes is closer to psychology, and in this regard, difficulties arise in theoretical analysis in the sociological field. As a theoretical basis, several concepts are proposed that can sociologically explain the mechanism of the formation of attitudes, and how their stability is ensured. To analyze the formation of attitudes towards political correctness, it is proposed to consider them through the prism of ‘the concept of power’ by Stephen Lukes, as well as from the point of view of intersectionality, which can act as a methodological basis. This article is a revision of these concepts in order to derive a voluminous theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of political correctness.

The need to turn to an intersectional approach and gender studies is dictated by the fact that they lie at the origins of the formation of political correctness; a retrospective approach will allow us to explore the phenomenon in more detail.

After the Second World War, under the pressure of liberal ideas and the destruction of the systems of colonialism and totalitarianism, a theory of minorities was formed that pays attention to precisely those identities that have been repressed for a long time, it is at this time that such a concept as “black identity” appears. The concept was actively developed by Patricia Hill Collins, whose work primarily deals with issues related to feminism and gender in the African American community. P. Collins first established herself in 1990 with *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). The book is widely known for laying the foundations for racial, class, and gender studies, and for developing the concept of intersectionality.

The concept of intersectionality arose in the 1970–1980s. The first study of the intersectional approach was carried out by Kimberly Crenshaw, *Mapping Boundaries: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Non-White Women* (Crenshaw, 1994), where she looked at the issues of non-white women experiencing domestic violence. Crenshaw stated that “In the context of violence

against women, ignoring differences is a fundamental problem because the violence experienced by women is often defined by other dimensions of their identities, such as race or class..." (Crenshaw, 1994). Both the work of activists to politicize women's experiences, and that of activists in the fight against racism to politicize the experiences of people of colour, ignores other discrimination. Although racism and sexism regularly intersect at the level of everyday life, they ignore each other in feminist and anti-racist practices.

This thought served as a powerful impetus for the development of intersectionality as a separate approach, which gradually began to go beyond purely gender studies. The main idea was that different forms of oppression existing in society are not only closely related to each other and can sometimes condition each other, but also intersect everywhere (Collins, 2000). It was the first comprehensive attempt to address discrimination, claiming the status of an idea that unites all minority rights movements. The intersectional approach focuses on the study of hierarchical differences between individuals and groups, depending on the complex intersections of their position in society, defined by many parameters (from gender to class and ethnicity). P. Collins devoted the first series of her studies to the dominant representations of masculinity and femininity in American society. As part of this research, she introduced the term a "matrix of domination" (sometimes "matrix of power"), which denotes a historically specific complex system of power relations in society. Each dominance matrix is characterized by two parameters.

First, it is characterized by its own mode of intersectionality, that is, a special combination of intersecting systems of oppression (for example, based on race, class, gender, sexuality, civil status and age).

Secondly, the specifics of the matrix have different effects on different levels of the system – interpersonal, organizational, structural (Collins, 2000).

Collins shows how the domination matrix creates controlling patterns of masculinity and femininity. The sociologist identifies such patterns, and further studies their representation in the media, where combinations of positions in racial, gender and class structures of power distribution are presented in different ways.

All representations of femininity that P. Collins explores are brought out through the intersectional analysis of media products and are actualized in the symbolic context of American society, where collective memory readily mobilizes the knowledge of the mechanisms of racism, sexism and class exploitation. Feminist studies and political projects strive not only to deconstruct such representations, but also to promote the subversion (undermining) of the power structures that generate them (Collins, 2000).

Accordingly, P. Collins proposes a solution: "in order to challenge the power structures from within, to eliminate cracks in the system, you need to learn to speak convincingly in several languages of power" (Collins, 2000). In fact, she insists on the need to create a language that will allow the establishment of an order that is more beneficial for the minority.

P. Collins sees the main problem is in the domination of “white knowledge” and the ignorance of the experience of black women. This experience, according to the author, can be understood only when the researcher (and society) begins to think in similar categories. And the way of thinking can be changed through language correctness. What P.H. Collins describes can be called a battle for the right to be nominated. Various groups and their fractions are involved in a symbolic struggle to impose their own definition and understanding of the social world, which is most consistent with their specific interests and goals. P. Bourdieu noted that they can wage this struggle either directly, through symbolic conflicts in everyday life, or “by proxy”, that is, through a struggle in which specialists of symbolic production (full-time producers) are already entering (Bourdieu, 2007). The goal of these specialists is to have a monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence, and to provide the authorities with the opportunity to impose arbitrary (convenient) means for the cognition and expression of social reality. And here, in an indirect way, we come to the problem of the constructive potential of political correctness as a way to combat discrimination. In fact, P. Collins came close to the question of the relationship between identity and linguistic norms, but this idea was poorly developed by her.

And in this sense, the works of Robin Lakoff may be interesting, in whose works the main subject of consideration is the socio-cultural aspects of the speech behaviour of the representatives of different genders. The study of the features of the speech behaviour of women and men began quite a long time ago: already in the second half of the 20th century, various theories appeared regarding the gender aspects of language and speaking. Studying the features of female speech behaviour, Robin Lakoff came to the conclusion that this behaviour is characterized by insecurity, less aggressiveness (certainly, compared to male behaviour), with a women expressing more humanity and focusing on her communication partner (Lakoff, 1975). This is expressed in indecisive intonation, the frequent use of euphemisms, introductory expressions.

Feminism has significantly influenced the creation and development of gender linguistics. Supporters of the movement introduced the concept of “sexist language”, which meant the linguistic manifestation of the traditionally subordinate position of women in society. Proponents of this approach sought to exclude “sexist” words and expressions from everyday life, suggesting instead lexical units devoid of discriminative connotations, and emphasis on the equality of women in modern society.

The development of an intersectional approach has provoked the expansion of the boundaries of feminist vocabulary. And here it becomes necessary to speak not only about the need to avoid “sexism”, but also “racism”, “ageism” and other -isms that arise in modern language (primarily in English). Originally born around the race-class-gender triad, Collins later extended intersectionality to social dimensions at different levels, such as nation, disability, sexuality, age and ethnicity.

Intersectionality is not so much a model as it is a lens through which race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. should be viewed as mutually constitutive processes (in other words, these categories do not exist independently of each other; they strengthen each other) and social relations, which materially manifest themselves in different ways in everyday life. For the theory of intersectionality, social positions are not separate categories, but overlapping, complex, interacting, and often contradictory configurations. It was – and often remains – centred on identity. According to the logic of the intersectional approach, all people are subject to politically incorrect behaviour and statements, but there are groups that are more vulnerable than others, which is explained by a set of specific characteristics (for example, Afro-American representatives of the LGBT community). At the same time, the intersectional approach claims the status of a universal (general) theory of identity, which indirectly addresses the issues of dominance and the distribution of power in society (primarily symbolic), while power itself is not included in the sphere of interests of the supporters of the intersectional approach.

It is useful to highlight the activist and academic (or scientific) dimensions of intersectionality. From an activist point of view, there is no better scenario for minorities than joining their attempts with close and friendly forces, which are also discriminated against on any grounds. However, this association has many “pitfalls” and is not only unable to satisfy the interests of all participants, but itself is built on internal inequality and leads to inequality. For example, intersectional feminists are opposed by TERF – Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist. This movement denies the right of transgender women to be called directly women; accordingly, this implies the impossibility of visiting “only female spaces” by trans women. The TERF ideology contains the idea that society is divided into men – oppressors and women – oppressed; they also reject the concept of gender identities, believing that the bearer of male genitals a priori remains a man, and, accordingly, the role of the oppressor is still preserved. The movement is represented by the leader of feminist literature, Chimamanda Adichie, the BBC’s Four Women’s Hours host Jenny Murray, and one of the most important feminists of the 20th century, Germaine Greer. Intersectional, trans-inclusive feminists reproach them for oppressing transgender women by denying access to health services, women’s self-help groups and women’s restrooms. That said, in this case, it is more important for the author to mention the contradictions that arise in the activist component of intersectionality.

The example of trans-exclusive radical feminists as a conflict between minority movements is not unique. The adherents of intersectionalism are forced to find a certain balance between misogyny and Islamophobia (taking into account the attitude of Islam towards women), between homophobia and ageism (regarding the minimum age for transgender transition). Thus, intersectionalists are forced to partially close their eyes to their own doctrine, to justify discriminatory actions and the actions of some people and sharply condemn others for the same.

Essentially, intersectionalism obliges activists to limit themselves and their views and prevents them from being completely loyal to their groups.

Our task was to consider specifically the academic level of application, since it is important to deal with the vision of how exactly social relations develop and social positions are formed within the framework of an intersectional approach.

Considering discrimination and power relations in one bundle is necessary, since the phenomenon of discrimination itself implies that certain people, social groups or classes, have limited opportunities in the process of redistributing symbolic power. Discrimination actually leads to the exclusion and rejection of people, deprivation of their social rights, while the privileged group often has quite tangible and easily traceable material benefits from the existence of discrimination. Overcoming discrimination, in this case, is the only way to be included in the struggle for power. In this regard, there is a need for a more detailed consideration of the phenomenon of power. Naturally, one cannot ignore the political dimension of power relations, but we mainly suggest focusing on symbolic power. Despite the fact that the notion of “symbolic power” did not appear in S. Lukes’s categorical apparatus, his approach is close to ours in that his views are based on the understanding of power, which is based on a conflict of interests.

The power relation arises only when there is a conflict between the subject and the object and the subject acts against the interests (desires, preferences, intentions, goals) of the object. The key is that the subject’s action is most effective when it is carried out in a latent form. This latent nature makes the influence of the bearer of power the most effective. By applying the logic of Stephen Lukes to the analysis of political correctness, we can draw conclusions about the possible mechanisms (impact) of action.

Stephen Lukes’ work *Power: A Radical View...* (2005) was part of a debate that became particularly acute in the 1970s in the United States, after the main socio-philosophical postulates of that time were actively criticized. However, what is for us interesting in the context of this topic is Lukes’ idea of voluntary consent. The author largely refers to Foucault, who developed the idea that the one who is placed in the field of visibility and knows about it, takes responsibility for enforcing power; allows them to play spontaneously on themselves; he absorbs an attitude of power in which both roles play simultaneously; he becomes the beginning of his own submission (Fuko, 1999). And in this case, for the analysis of political correctness, with some reservations, the idea can be accepted that such a person is “the one who is placed in the field of the visibility of the authorities, but does not fully realize the power of its influence on himself.” Accordingly, the less political correctness is perceived as a directive norm, the more significant its constructive potential – and the more attitudes towards political correctness deform consciousness and identity. For us, the use of such an approach in relation to political correctness will help to clearly explain how political correctness arises and how its rather stable nature can be explained.

One gender researcher, Sandra Bartky, uses Foucault's idea to analyze one aspect of the current subordination of women. She believes that it is women who practice this discipline in relation to their own body and against it. For example, a woman who checks her makeup several times a day to find out if the powder has crumbled and if the paint has flowed from her eyelashes, who is afraid that the wind or rain will ruin her hair, etc. turns, like the prisoner in the Panopticon, into a supervising subject, immersed in tireless self-observation. This self-observation is a form of submission to patriarchy (Bartky, 1990). Political correctness has a similar mechanism, but in this case, we are speaking about the independent regulation of language and thoughts. But at the same time, in addition to tireless self-observation, the role of social control is great, which in some cases can also spill over into normative acts (speech codes).

S. Lukes uses Foucault's ideas to show that they are beginning to explore subtle forms of voluntary consent, by which people are drawn into broader patterns of normative control. While people themselves often act as "supervising" themselves, considering themselves, sometimes falsely, free in their power, making their own choices, pursuing their own interests, rationally perceiving arguments and coming to independent conclusions.

Arising as a reaction to the polemic between radical and Marxist feminism and ripening from the "theory of two systems", the intersectional approach gained popularity in the 70s and 90s, proposing to understand the phenomenon of oppression as a set of intersecting types of discrimination – mutually conditioned and complementary to human oppression in society. At the same time, a person is understood as a field for the intersection of these types of discrimination, since at the same time he has a number of identities – such as class, race, age, work ability, gender, sexuality, civil status, etc. All these identities can become a pretext for oppression if they do not fully coincide with the imperative normativity of the existing socio-political discourse. This means that absolutely any person can be discriminated against on one or more grounds, which implies the senselessness of searching for the most significant type of social oppression.

On the other hand, most people with symbolic power can also engage in discriminatory practices based on their respective privileged positions. The struggle for power is escalating, but at the same time the distribution of roles in society does not change, intersectionality arises as an attempt to overcome discrimination. One of the main theses of the supporters of the intersectional approach is the idea of observing linguistic norms that will ensure the overcoming of discrimination at the symbolic level.

Political correctness is one of the cornerstones on which modern liberal ideology rests, according to which people are divided into two types: bearers of privileges; and those suppressed on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental health, physical capabilities, etc. The overriding task of the liberal community is to create an inclusive society free from oppression and

that provides equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens, regardless of their characteristics, either personal or physical. Since this requires the elimination of even the smallest prejudices against repressed groups – censorship of speech, actions and thoughts have become an integral part of the project of “social justice”.

We propose a methodological approach and method by which political correctness can be studied. The intersectional method makes it possible to study political correctness not only as speech prescriptions, but as a complex multi-component phenomenon that must be considered in close connection with various kinds of discrimination.

The relationship with the concept of power and language makes it possible to trace how a different social value system is formed. According to F. Frank, language can be used as a weapon by certain groups of people who have the strength and power to legitimize their value system. Thus, language forms the personality of a person: a native speaker; through the vision of the world, mentality, attitude towards people and much more imposed on him by, and embedded in, the language; that is, through the culture of the people who use this language as a means of communication (Frank, 1989).

Discourse analysis is the most appropriate method to accomplish the set tasks. Firstly, discourse analysis as the main method will allow us to reveal the mechanisms of the formation of politically correct thinking, in other words, we will be able to observe how attitudes to political correctness are fixed at the everyday level, since in this case, political correctness is viewed as a social practice closely related to the concept of power, which is exercised through voluntary consent. Furthermore, in the focus of attention of researchers is directly the process of forming attitudes towards political correctness and those discursive techniques that can be used in this case. And, secondly, discourse analysis will allow researchers to overcome the limitations associated with considering political correctness exclusively as a linguistic phenomenon, as it was perceived for a long time. Thus, these points open up new perspectives in the study of political correctness directly.

Intersectionality claims the status of a general theory of identity, acting as a research concept that reveals differences within categories, identifying people living at the “crossroads of identities” and ignored by the established, traditional practice of law. It breaks down the dichotomies of anti-discrimination law – “Subject” and “Other” – and shifts the focus of the law from difference to dominance, revealing the “dominance matrix” (McKinnon, 2007).

At the same time, the intersectional approach is not adequate for every society; sometimes it requires significant adaptations. For example, in Ukrainian society, the intersectional approach is used more often in the feminist sense, which contradicts the foundations of intersectionality, since it cannot be reduced to any one aspect. The Ukrainian “dominance matrix” has some peculiarities. This is due to the fact that discrimination based on race is extremely rare, they have a point character. At the same time, inequalities based on linguistic affiliation and political orientations are more

relevant, this fact is recorded in the discourse analysis of the Ukrainian media and the statements of Ukrainian politicians (more on this topic can be found in the works of Oksana Nekhaienko, Daria Yashkina (2019) *Educational Reform in Ukraine's Election Discourse*).

In the course of the study, group nominations were recorded, which had a clear emotional colouring. In this case, the analysis did not aim to focus on the discovery of linguistic units of political correctness. That said, even at a preliminary stage, it can be assumed that such a juxtaposition of different groups can also be regarded as a certain element of political (in)correctness.

Political correctness acts as a formal embodiment of intersectionality, since it tries to take into account all the features of intersectional identities in linguistic practices, which is especially actualized against the background of the need to form a liberal democratic society, and representatives of academic intersectionality insist on this. At the same time, the principles that govern political correctness as a conditional tool of the intersectional approach remain unclear. Another kind of contradiction arises: that of how the idea of political correctness in liberal democracies is consistent with the other basic constitutional right of freedom of speech. The revealed contradictions can be developed in more detail within the framework of a separate research work. In this case, we focus on the fact that intersectionality provides a theoretical basis for studying political correctness as designed to relieve social tensions that arise in a multi-component society. As noted above, this tension is embodied primarily at the level of linguistic practices, and, accordingly, the main task of the researcher is to reveal the discursive features of the politically correct (and politically incorrect) "language game".

Coming to the issue of power helps us to reveal possible mechanisms for the functioning of political correctness. For example, it can be its appearance in a "ready-made" form in a society where there was no historical context for its consistent emergence; or how attitudes toward political correctness are assimilated, internalized by various social groups and whether there is a place in these processes for social resistance. Based on the concept of S. Lukes, we accept that power belongs to those who form the understanding of which actions and decisions are correct and which are not. The decisive role in relation to subordination is played out by the picture of the world formed in society (one must obey specific attitudes, people or groups). This approach makes it possible to highlight the main indicators for the further practical study of political correctness, and eventually move from theoretical to empirical consideration.

The design of indicators should take into account the already mentioned historical context, in which the norms of political correctness are formed, the main social groups that act as the "conductors" of these norms, and the main channels of transmission, as well as the presence or absence of resistance. The concept of intersectional power in combination with discourse analysis in the study of political correctness makes it possible to strengthen the connection between

theoretical and practical knowledge and brings the studied phenomenon out of the linguistic sphere into the sociological one. Thus, this toolkit will enable researchers not only to outline the main directions for the empirical analysis of political correctness, but also to clarify the basic theoretical premises.

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