A Study of the Use of Politically Correct Language on the Campus of A U. S. Midwestern University

Hsien-Chuan Lin

Department of Foreign Languages, Fooyin University of Technology

Abstract

Political correctness (PC) is an influential movement that started in the 1980s. It started with a few voices but grew in popularity until it became an unwritten law in society. This paper is intended as an investigation of the use of politically correct language in students' daily life and their perception of the PC phenomenon at a U.S. Midwestern university.

In this study, there are 21 participants (14 native speakers of English and 7 non-natives) who were familiar with the concept of political correctness. The purpose of this study is to examine the following research questions:

1. Is there any difference in the use of PC language between native speakers of English and nonnative speakers?
2. Do gender, age, race/ethnicity play an important role in using PC language?
3. What types of euphemism are most frequently used, in what kinds of situations? How about the least frequently used ones?
4. What opinions will the participants have about the influence of PC on other people, the language, and the society in general? Is PC a temporal phenomenon or will it continue to develop in the future?

Some results are obtained from the data analysis. First of all, native speakers of English use PC words less than nonnative speakers, which was mainly caused by the white participants having used the least PC among all racial groups. Second, gender, age, and race/ethnicity are social variables that exert great influence on the use of PC language. Females use PC more frequently than males; the young generation shows greater use than the older; and Whites use PC less than other ethnic groups. Third, the most frequently used PC words are associated with race/ethnicity and taboo while the least used types are not related to any specific racial group. Finally, most participants believe that PC is not a temporal phenomenon but will continue to develop and grow.

Key words: politically correct language PC phenomenon speech codes
        cultural literacy cultural sensitivity

Political correctness (PC) is an influential movement that started in the 1980s. Originally, its purpose was to make a change in undergraduate curricula at Stanford University, to institute campus speech codes aiming to control hate speech at the University of Michigan and the University of Wisconsin, and to emphasize the role of minorities in history and culture (Calhoun, 2001). The movement eventually became a widely accepted acknowledgement that people should avoid words, expressions, and behavior that may hurt any minorities. It started with a few voices but grew in popularity until it became an unwritten law in society.

The major theme of PC is to tolerate a diversity of cultures, races, genders, ideologies, religions, and alternate lifestyles (homosexuality or cohabitation). This was gradually expanded to include the whole agenda of liberalism, such as environmentalism, animal rights, and quest of rights. Political correctness implies the presence of a sufficient power to enforce compliance with whatever is politically correct. The ultimate objective is to make any person or any behavior contrary to PC forbidden by law so that people who transgress will be punished by the government (Calhoun, 2001).

This paper is intended as an investigation of the use of politically correct language in students' daily life and their perception of the PC phenomenon at a U.S. Midwestern university.

Introduction

People are deeply influenced by the social and cultural environment under which they acquire language and cultural literacy that gradually shape their personal and group identity. In a sense, "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun…" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). The webs Geertz indicated are cultures. As a common agreement among supporters (Andrew, 1996; Fairclough, 2003; Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert & Leap, 2000), PC language use is closely related to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: linguistic determinism (our thinking is determined by language) and linguistic relativism (people who speak different languages perceive and think about the world quite differently). Political correctness is a term used to describe language or behavior that is claimed to be calculated to provide a minimum of offense, particularly to the racial, cultural, or other identity groups being described. Politically correct language is closely associated with the issues of racism, sexism, and discrimination against the aged, minorities, and so on.

At the first glimpse, it appears that the position of political correctness is against the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis because the argument of political correctness is an attempt of language reforms by insisting on good manners and polite speech (by using euphemisms) to avoid offence. Upon a second thought, we will find that political correctness is derived from a modified version (the weak form) of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis with the argument that language and culture influence each other (the kind of language we use is influenced by the way we see the world and vice versa) instead of the strong form (linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity). For political correctness advocates, a transformation of political and social reality can be achieved by transforming the language we use. The goal for employing politically correct language is to bring people's unconscious biases into awareness, allowing them to make a more informed choice about their language and be aware of things different people might find offensive in our everyday speech.

In spite of the fact that most people will pay attention to what they say and how they behave in public by using PC language, it is interesting to explore their immanent thoughts about this controversial issue. A university's student body is often composed of diverse ethnic groups from different parts of the world. How do their languages and cultural backgrounds reflect their

attitudes toward political correctness? Are there any similarities between American students and international students in using PC language? How do international students acquire PC language related to the years they have spent on learning English as a second language? The purpose of this study is to examine the following research questions:

1. Is there any difference in the use of PC language between native speakers of English and nonnative speakers?
2. Do gender, age, race/ethnicity play an important role in using PC language?
3. What types of euphemism are most frequently used, in what kinds of situations? How about the least frequently used ones?
4. What opinions will the participants have about the influence of PC on other people, the language, and the society in general? Is PC a temporal phenomenon or will it continue to develop in the future?

Literature Review

In "Cultural sensitivity and political correctness: the linguistic problem of naming," Edna Andrews (1996) focuses her attention on the popular view of how naming should be used publicly and in other social contexts. She works on the areas of gender (woman vs. girl), race (African American vs. Black), disabilities (hearing-impaired vs. deaf), and ethnicity (Asian vs. Oriental). The conclusion she draws from her study is that culturally sensitive naming is determined by concept and word taboos, but the interpreter imposes the meaning of a name. It is also concluded that "political correctness is now an issue because of the evolution of micro speech communities from powerful sociocultural movements & reflects the dynamic interplay of linguistic signs within changing social contexts" (Andrews, 1996, p. 389).

This study is based on semiotic and sociolinguistic theory to examine political correctness and cultural sensitivity but does not touch on people's language use in daily life. My research explores the actual language attitudes toward PC among students on the campus of a U. S. Midwestern university and their perspectives on the areas mentioned above.

Another study conducted by Margaret A. Villanueva (1996) examines the social consequences of racial slurs in the student press and concludes that what cannot presently be accomplished through the courts for the issue of racial slurs in higher education at public universities may be achieved by community action and peer pressure. Although Villanueva's article discusses students' language attitudes, it is limited to students who work in the student press office and recites opinions directly from editorials instead of the students themselves by using a questionnaire or interview.

In "The limits of PC discourse: Linking language use to social practice," Marlia E. Banning aims to analyze the limits that "the discourse of political correctness places on those classrooms that are designed to examine critically contemporary issues of popular culture and the public sphere," and ultimately she is concerned with "the impact of the discourse on composition classrooms dealing with questions of social justice and public debate…" (Banning, 2004, p. 192). She arrived at the conclusion that studying the discourse on political correctness in composition classrooms could help students cultivate critical thinking abilities on social issues (Banning, 2004). In spite of the fact that Banning examined students' perspectives of PC influence on social issues in their writing, she did not provide any raw data from the students' writing to come to the conclusion.

In general, these three studies are only partially and not closely related to the present study whose significance lies in an attempt to understand the actual PC language use in the daily life, not to concentrate on rationale, theoretical framework, or philosophy of PC. The selective attention of the present study will be placed on the possible prevalence of differences between native speakers and nonnative speakers of English, males and females, and people of different generations and races in the issue of PC use and how people look at the PC phenomenon.

Methods

This section is going to describe the participants, the data collection instruments, the data analysis process, and possible limitations. The participants of this study were 21 students from the classes of Ling 415 and EAHE 587, with 14 native speakers of English (6 males and 8 females) and 7 nonnative speakers of English (all females). The students from both classes were familiar with the topic of PC because most of them were education-related majors in graduate programs. As far as background knowledge of PC is concerned, they are more representative than other students in the fields, such as in engineering, mathematics, or applied physics. The participants' age distribution can be categorized into four types: 20-30 years old (10 participants), 31-40 (7), 41-50 (2), and 51-60 (2). There were four racial/ethnic groups: White (11 participants), Asian (4), Latino (2), and others (mixed races) (4).

The major instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire consisting of two parts—30 multiple-choice test items and 3 open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The first part was made up of 12 different types of PC words used in diverse social situations, with two or more choices as well as one space for "your own version." The types of PC words include age, gender, race/ethnicity, physical/mental challenge, taboo, economic status, occupation, car, prisoner, drunk, biology companion, and class of airline service. Not every type of PC words was presented in an orderly sequence to prevent the respondents from guessing the real aim of the experimental procedure as suggested by W. E. Lambert (1967). The second part of the survey aimed at eliciting the participants' opinions about the phenomenon of politically correct language.

A questionnaire was used to figure out the frequency of each type of PC words used by native and nonnative speakers of English, males and females, and different age and race groups. In addition, the most and the least frequently used types were computed to understand the participants' PC sensitivity. Any test item responded to with one or more PC words was counted as a desirable answer. As for the three open-ended questions in the second part, a transcription (see Appendix B) was made as raw data to generate themes or patterns.

Limitations of this research design include that first, there was no equal distribution in numbers of age groups, gender, race/ethnicity, and native and nonnative speakers of English. The number of participants may have influenced the results of the comparison of the types. Second, this research design did not include other data forms, such as documents, observations, and interviews for the purpose of triangulation to increase the validity of the findings. Finally, the sample of 21 students was too small for generalization.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study reveal that native speakers of English, especially Whites, have quite different language attitudes toward PC if compared with nonnative speakers. We can find from Table 1 and 2 that there are differences between these two groups in using PC words. First of all, the frequency of PC language used by native speakers of English is 38.81% while the

frequency used by nonnative speakers is 42.86%. The major reason for this phenomenon is that the average PC words used by Whites are 10.67 out of 30 test items. The low use frequency may imply that White participants do not feel the necessity of using PC language. This kind of language attitude is borne out by the opinions elicited from the open-ended questions. Examples can be found in the following responses:

1. "However, it can also constrain conversation and socializing due to a fear of accidentally using the wrong word and thereby insulting" (Respondent E, white male).
2. "I think it has a lot of influence on how people speak but not how they think" (Respondent G, white female).
3. "It makes people afraid to interact with anyone from another group, as well resentful toward them" (Respondent I, white female).
4. "Also one can talk in terms of PC—but the heart may not follow. Institutionally, PC is often empty words that sound less offensive but really don't change deeply held beliefs and attitudes" (Respondent L, white female).
5. "Don't like it. Public speech is more careful" (respondent M, a male white).

It is interesting to note that the frequency of PC words used by Respondents I and M is low (8/30 and 7/30 respectively), which reflects their strong dislike of this language phenomenon.

Table 1
Politically correct language choice of native speakers of English

Informant	Age	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Social situations (PC words used)												
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
A	20-30	F	Latino	0/1	3/5	3/3	3/6	2/2	0/3	1/4	1/1	0/1	1/1	0/2	0/1	14/30
B	20-30	F	Others	0/1	2/5	3/3	2/6	1/2	1/3	0/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	9/30
C	20-30	M	Others	1/1	2/5	3/3	2/6	2/2	1/3	1/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	12/30
D	20-30	F	Others	1/1	3/5	3/3	5/6	2/2	1/3	2/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	1/2	0/1	8/30
E	20-30	M	White	1/1	2/5	3/3	3/6	2/2	1/3	1/4	1/1	1/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	15/30
F	20-30	F	White	0/1	2/5	3/3	2/6	2/2	0/3	0/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	9/30
G	20-30	F	White	1/1	2/5	2/3	3/6	1/2	2/3	2/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	13/30
H	31-40	M	White	0/1	2/5	3/3	2/6	0/2	0/3	0/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	7/30
I	31-40	M	White	1/1	2/5	1/3	0/6	2/2	1/3	1/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	8/30
J	31-40	F	Latino	1/1	2/5	3/3	3/6	1/2	1/3	2/4	1/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	14/30
K	31-40	F	White	0/1	2/5	3/3	3/6	2/2	0/3	0/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	10/30
L	31-40	F	White	1/1	2/5	3/3	2/6	2/2	2/3	0/4	1/1	1/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	14/30
M	51-60	M	White	1/1	1/5	1/3	1/6	0/2	1/3	2/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	7/30
N	51-60	M	White	1/1	3/5	3/3	4/6	2/2	1/3	0/4	1/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	15/30
Proportion of PC words used in each survey question				9/14	30/70	37/42	35/84	21/28	12/42	12/56	5/14	2/14	1/14	1/28	0/14	

No. of informants = 14   No. of survey questions = 30
The survey questions are divided into 12 categories and each category consists of one question or more as indicated by the item number in bracket as follows:

1 = age related PC words: (1)

2 = gender: (21), (23), (24), (25), and (28)

3 = race/ethnicity: (6), (7), and (9)

4 = physical/mental challenge: (11), (12), (13), (14), (15), and (30)

5 = taboo: (19) and (22)

6 = economic status: (2), (16), and (17)

7 = occupation: (3), (4), (5), and (8)

8 = car: (10)

9 = prisoner: (18)

10 = drunk: (20)

11 = biology companion: (26) and (27)

12 = class of airline service: (29)

Table 2
Politically correct language choice of nonnative speakers of English

Informant	Age	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Social situations (PC words used)												
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
a	20-30	F	White	0/1	2/5	1/3	0/6	1/2	0/3	0/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	4/30
b	20-30	F	Asian	0/1	2/5	3/3	2/6	2/2	1/3	1/4	1/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	12/30
c	41-50	F	Asian	1/1	3/5	3/3	4/6	2/2	1/3	3/4	1/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	18/30
d	31-40	F	White	1/1	3/5	3/3	1/6	2/2	1/3	0/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	1/1	12/30
e	20-30	F	Others	0/1	3/5	3/3	2/6	1/2	1/3	2/4	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	12/30
f	41-50	F	Asian	1/1	3/5	3/3	5/6	2/2	2/3	3/4	1/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	20/30
g	31-40	F	Asian	0/1	2/5	2/3	3/6	2/2	2/3	0/4	1/1	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	12/30
Proportion of PC words used in each survey question				3/7	18/35	18/21	17/42	12/14	8/21	9/28	4/7	0/7	0/7	0/14	0/7	

No. of informants = 7   No. of survey questions = 30
The survey questions are divided into 12 categories and each category consists of one question or more as indicated by the item number in bracket as follows:

1 = age related PC words: (1)
2 = gender: (21), (23), (24), (25), and (28)
3 = race/ethnicity: (6), (7), and (9)
4 = physical/mental challenge: (11), (12), (13), (14), (15), and (30)
5 = taboo: (19) and (22)
6 = economic status: (2), (16), and (17)

7 = occupation: (3), (4), (5), and (8)
8 = car: (10)
9 = prisoner: (18)
10 = drunk: (20)
11 = biology companion: (26) and (27)
12 = class of airline service: (29)

Next, the tendency of using PC language in the native speaker group decreases along with the increase in age, while the situation of the nonnative speaker group is opposite as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Average PC words used by Age groups

Age group	Type of English speakers	Average PC words used
20-30	Native	12.57
	Nonnative	9.33
31-40	Native	10.60
	Nonnative	12.00
51-60	Native	11.00
41-50	Nonnative	19.00

The finding that older age groups of native speakers of English become conservative in language use while younger groups show greater use is in line with the results of Labov's study (Mesthrie, et al., 2000). It is worthy to note that in the age group of 51-60, Respondent N is an exception to this case because he is a multicultural educator and an expert in the field of Native American study. The high frequency of his using PC words (15/30) leads to the average frequency of this age group being a little higher than that of the age group of 31-40 (11.00> 10.60). The opposite situation (increase of use frequency in proportion to age increase) in nonnative speakers of English can be illustrated by the theory of second cultural learning. According to H. D. Brown, second language acquisition is closely linked to second cultural learning. "The act of learning to think in another language may require a considerable degree of mastery of that language" (Brown, 2000, p. 200), and it takes time for learners to really master another language and its culture.

As for the second research question, the results show that gender, age, and race/ethnicity are influential social variables in PC language use. Females use more PC than males (see Table 4), disregarding the group (native or nonnative speakers).

Table 4
Average PC words used by participants of different gender

Gender	Type of English speakers	Average PC words used
Male	Native	10.5
	Nonnative	(no participants)
Female	Native	12.5
	Nonnative	12.86

The result shows that the frequency of females using PC words is almost equal in native and nonnative groups (12.5 and 12.86 respectively) while that of the native-speaking male group is lower (10.5). This finding is similar to that of Janet Holmes who purports that "women's utterances show evidence of concern for the feelings of the people they are talking to more often and more explicitly than men's do" (Holmes, 1995, p. 6). Euphemism is a major characteristic of

PC words used to be inoffensive to minorities in public speech. It is closely related to the politeness theory (saving face). This finding also corroborates Coates' suggestion that female talk is highly cooperative for the sake of politeness (cited in Mesthrie et al., 2000).

The result of age influence confirms that the older age group is conservative while the younger age group is innovative. It is also interesting to note that race/ethnicity is another influential social variable for using PC. As a whole, White participants in both groups use less PC than other races (see Table 5).

Table 5
Average PC words used by participants of different races/ethnicities

Ethnicities	Type of English speakers	Average PC words used
White	Native	10.67
	Nonnative	8.00
Others	Native	13.00
	Nonnative	12.00
Latino	Native	14.00
Asian	Nonnative	15.50

The reason for the low frequency of PC used in the White native speaker group has been stated above. As for two White participants in the nonnative group, their opinions, elicited from open-ended questions, are listed as follows:

1. "It is too much" (Respondent **a**, white female)
2. "It is a highly exaggerated issue. It seems that in U.S. [sic] it is more protests [sic] than in other countries (Americans like to make a mountain out of a molehill). Terms of respect can be neutral, not otherwise. It seems that in the U.S. people are oversensitive and it makes them be offended by terms that otherwise would be politically correct" (Respondent **d**, white female)

It is worthy to note that Respondent **a** only got 4 out of 30 test items in using PC, and she even refused to answer the second question in the questionnaire, leaving it blank. The statement "It is too much" indicates that she did not like the PC phenomenon. Respondent **d** believed that PC is a social phenomenon born out of American's oversensitivity to terms in language use. Language changes, and with it the terms used, and the political motivations for the modifications. Overall, both respondents did not realize that they enjoyed two types of privileges: "unearned advantage" and "conferred dominance" restricted to the white group (Johnson, 2000, pp. 22-23). It is their ethnicity that protected them from experiencing racism, and they did not sense the power they had simply out of their group identity. Like other white participants in the native speaker group, both respondents did not feel any urgency and necessity for PC language use.

In the matter of the most and the least frequently used PC types, the results reveal that "taboo" and "race/ethnicity" are most frequently used and "prisoner," "drunk," "biology companion," and "class of airline service" are least used (see Table 6 and 7).

Table 6
Most frequently used PC word categories

PC word categories	Type of English speakers	Frequency
Race/Ethnicity	Native	88.10% (37/42)
	Nonnative	85.71% (18/21)
Taboo	Native	75.00% (21/28)
	Nonnative	85.71% (12/14)

Table 7
Least frequently used PC word categories

PC word categories	Type of English speakers	Frequency
Prisoner	Native	14.29% (2/14)
	Nonnative	0% (0/7)
Drunk	Native	7.14% (1/14)
	Nonnative	0% (0/7)
Biology companion	Native	3.57% (1/28)
	Nonnative	0% (0/7)
Class of airline service	Native	0% (0/14)
	Nonnative	14.29% (1/7)

The finding that PC words about race/ethnicity and taboo are used most often largely matches the observation that sensitivity toward race and ethnicity issues is reflected in language changes that have been motivated by political correctness. Participants in the native and nonnative speaker groups pay attention to using terms such as "African American" and "Native American" in public speech (88.10% and 85.71 % respectively). They also use euphemisms when the topic of taboo is mentioned. In general, the feelings caused by taboo words are those of vulgarity, crudeness, and harshness (Pen, 2005). When these words are expressed indirectly, the impressions they make on the listener are implicit, elegant, and polite. There are some taboo topics such as death, funeral, sex, defecation, and urination. In this study, only death and excretion were included in the survey. Participants in both groups used "pass away," "kick the bucket," "answer the final call," and other indirect expressions to refer to "death." Similarly, they use "go to the restroom," "freshen up," "go to the bathroom," and "go potty" to refer to the natural demand of body functions.

On the other hand, the participants in both groups do not use euphemisms a lot to describe "prisoner," "drunk," "biology companion," and "class of airline service." These least frequently used terms have no direct association with any race or group and therefore are not taken seriously by people. Neither will people care about whether to call a "pet" an "animal companion" and "house plant" a "botanical companion," nor about whether to call a class of airline service "first class," "deluxe," or "premium class."

The following results were found with regard to language and society as investigated according to the fourth research question. First of all, of the 21 participants, there are 8 who believe that PC influence is positive; 4 partially positive; 4 negative; 3 partially negative; and 2 undecided. In other words, about 57.14 % of the participants support PC language use. Next,

there are 12 participants who believe the PC phenomenon will continue to develop in the future; 6 participants, continue under some conditions; 1 participant; temporal; and 2 participants, undecided. As a whole, 85.71 % participants believe that PC is not a temporal social phenomenon but a movement that will go on in the future. Finally, like in the heated debates on the topic of PC in journal articles, media, and social gatherings, there are supporters and adversaries in the two opposite camps. One supporter argues that "it forces people to re-analyze their thoughts process, i.e. the words that we allow to come out of our mouths," and "If groups are experiencing their concern about 'label' toward them, then things should be changed to accommodate them" (Participant A). Similarly, Participant K holds that "[s]peaking PC allows people to identify themselves with liberal ideas," and "[i]t reflects how people think." Another respondent maintains that, "However, in the long run I believe the sensitivity and respect will win out in practice since many terms are, or will, change" (Participant N).

As a sharp contrast, one adversary lists the possible constraints of PC language, such as "it obscures people's true feelings," and "it has a lot of influence on how people speak but not how they think" (Participant G). In the same vein, another participant contends that "it can also constrain conversation and socializing due to a fear of accidentally using the wrong word and thereby insulting" (Participant E). Participant L even goes a step further to argue that "PC is temporary and changes often. Also one can talk in terms of PC—but the heart may not follow. Institutionally, PC is often empty words that sound less offensive but really don't change deeply held beliefs and attitudes." But more than other adversaries, Participant M frankly states that he "[does] not like it," and that 'public speech is more careful" to highlight his negative perception about PC.

Generally speaking, the supporters believe that using PC means to have consideration and sensitivity to others, and changes in language use often lead to changes in attitudes and beliefs. For the adversaries, PC strangles free speech, having bad effects upon critical thinking and academic freedom and doing nothing to get rid of ill-will. Indeed, political correctness has been equated with 'thought police' and a 'new McCarthyism' (Calhoun, 2001, p. 1338).

Conclusion

This study shows that native speakers of English use PC words less than nonnative speakers, which was mainly caused by the white participants having used the least PC among all racial groups. This finding is matched with the fact that most advocates of the PC movement are minorities (African Americans, Latinos, homosexuals, lesbians, women, the physically and mentally impaired, and the fat). We can find momentum in social changes, such as the Civil Rights movement, the women's rights movement, the gay and lesbian liberation movement, the animal liberation movement, public attention to the culturally disesteemed status of Native Americans, various ethnics minorities, and the physically and mentally disabled (Calhoun, 2001). All these social changes create a favorable milieu for political correctness to appear.

Next, gender, age, and race/ethnicity are social variables that exert great influence on the use of PC language. Females use PC more frequently than males; the young generation shows greater use than the older; and Whites use PC less than other ethnic groups.

Thirdly, the most frequently used PC words are associated with race/ethnicity and taboo while the least used types such as "prisoner," "drunk," "biology companion," and "class of airline service" are not related to any specific racial group. This finding reveals that the PC movement, as expected, aims at creating equality and respect for minority groups instead of merely finding euphemisms.

Finally, most participants believe that PC is not a temporal phenomenon but will continue to develop and grow. As for the influence of PC on language, people, and society in general, the participants tend to have two opposite opinions—one is positive and the other is negative. This finding is congruent with previous research.

Recommendations

The following suggestions can be made for future studies. Firstly, observations and interviews are needed for triangulation to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. Secondly, the participants should be more evenly distributed in matters of number, age, gender, and ethnic group, and educational level. For example, further studies could investigate the perceptions and uses of PC of the general public in contrast to those of professors and students at a university. Finally, there were only 21 participants in this study, and the sample size should be increased to gain representative and generalizable data.

References

Andrews, E. (1996). Cultural sensitivity and political correctness: The linguistic problem of naming. *American Speech, 71*(4), 389-404.

Banning, M. E. (2004). The limits of PC discourse: Linking language use to social practice. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, *4*(2), 191-214.

Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.

Calhoun, C. (2001). Political correctness. In Lawrence & Charlotte Becker (eds.) *The Encyclopedia of Ethics* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge. 1337-1340.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays.* New York: Basic Books.

Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, Men, and Politeness.* Harlow, Essex: Longman.

Johnson, A.(2001). *Privilege, Power, and Difference.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Lambert, W. E. (1967). A social psychology of bilingualism. *Journal of Social Issues, 23*(2), 91-109.

Mesthrie, R., Swann, J., Deumert, A. & Leap, W. L. (2000). *Introducing Sociolinguistics.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Pen, Y. (2005). An analysis of euphemism in English from the politeness principle of pragmatics. *Journal of Wenzhou Vocational and Technical College, 2*. Retrieved November 6, 2007, from http://www.126w.cn/biyelunwen/yingyubiye/123.html.

Villanueva, M. A. (1996). Ethnic slurs or free speech? Politics of representation in a student newspaper. *Anthropology & Educational Quarterly, 27*(2), 168-185.

Appendix A

This survey is created for the study of the use of euphemisms in politically correct language. Please fill it out. Thank you very much for your help.

Please fill out the general information

1. You are a native speaker of English _____ or nonnative speaker of English_____.
2. Your age: 20- 30 _____ ; 31- 40 _____; 41- 50 _____; 51- 60 _____
3. Sex: male _____; female _____
4. Race/ethnicity: White _____; Black _____; Latino _____; Asian _____; others _____

Please fill out the form on the page below. Under each number, choose and mark with an "X" the term you use most often in your daily life. You may choose one or two variations or include your own version.

1.

elderly man	
mature man	
senior citizen	
seasoned man	
a golden ager	
Your own version:	

2.

poor	
economically disadvantaged	
economically marginalized	
low-income	
differently advantaged	
Your own version:	

3.

car washer	
vehicle appearance specialist	
Your own version:	

4.

hairdresser	
hairstylist	
Your own variant:	

5.

garbage collector	
sanitation engineer	
Your own version:	

6.

black	
African-American	
people of color	
Your own version:	

7.

Indian	
Indigenous person	
Native American	
Your own version:	

8.

Waiter/waitress	
server	
Your own version:	

9.

Oriental	
Asian	
Your own version:	

10.

small car	
compact car	
Your own version:	

11.

handicapped	
disabled	
differently-abled	
physically challenged	
Your own version:	

12.

retarded children	
late developers	
chronic underachievers	
less prepared individuals	
Your own version:	

13.

short person	
vertically challenged person	
vertically constrained person	
Your own version:	

14.

fat person	
big-boned person	
differently sized person	
larger-than-average citizen	
Your own version:	

15.

blind	
optically challenged	
visually inconvenienced	
Your own version:	

16.

slums	
substandard housing	
Your own version:	

17.

unemployed	
involuntarily leisured	
occupationally dispossessed	
temporarily outplaced	
Your own version:	

18.

prisoner	
client of the correctional system	
guest in a correctional institution	
Your own version:	

19.

go to toilet	
go to w.c.	
go to the pot	
Your own version:	

20.

drunk	
sobriety deprived	
person of stupor	
person of differing sobriety	
Your own version:	

21.

chairman	
chairperson	
chair	
Your own version:	

22.

die	
pass away	
kick the bucket	
answer the final call	
go to meet one's maker	
return to dust	
Your own version:	

23.

freshman	
freshperson	
frosh	
Your own version:	

24.

history	
herstory	
hystery	
Your own version:	

25.

woman	
girl	
female	
person of gender	
Your own version:	

26.

pet	
animal companion	
Your own version:	

27.

house plant	
botanical companion	
Your own version:	

28.

flight attendant	
stewardess/steward	
flight crew	
air hostess	
Your own version:	

29.

first class	
deluxe	
premium class	
Your own version:	

30.

ugly	
cosmetically different	
plain-looking	
Your own version:	

1. What is your opinion of the phenomenon of Political Correctness?
Answer:
2. What influence do you think it has or may have on the people, the language and the society in general?
Answer:
3. Is it a temporary phenomenon or will it continue to develop in the future?
Answer:

(Revised from Kosharik, V. (April 2006). Political correctness. Retrieved November 5, 2007, from http://www.yoshkar.com/survey/questPC.doc).

Appendix B: Transcription of the three open-ended questions

1. What is your opinion of the phenomenon of Political Correctness?
2. What influence do you think it has or may have on the people, the language, and the society in general?
3. Is it a temporary phenomenon or will it continue to develop in the future?

I. Native speakers of English

A: 1. In some cases regarding issues such as race/ethnicity, I feel that it is important. If groups are experiencing their concern about "labels" toward them, then things should be changed to accommodate them.
    2. I think that it forces people to re-analyze their thought process i.e. the words that we allow to come out of our mouths. American society and its perspectives are filled with stereotypes, prejudices, and racism.
    3. The fact that we are more "conscious" of our surroundings will keep the phenomenon alive for a while, but all things are cyclical so eventually it will die down and then re-spark interest.

B. No answers are provided.

C. 1. Unavoidable but we must persevere.
    2. Immeasurable influence
    3. Will continue until it overtakes us.

D. No answers are provided.

E. 1. I think that it's roots of awareness of others and large issues is [sic] a cause. However, it seems that lately it has been taken to force.
   2. I think it is partially could because it leads to social awareness. However, it can also constrain conversation and socializing due to a fear of accidentally using the wrong word and thereby insulting.
   3. I do not believe it to be only temporal, but think it will morph [sic] in form or trial off in importance.

F. 1. I think it should be used for example with the Indian question. I refuse to call Native American Indians because Indians are from India most because of two reasons my beliefs and I am Native American descendent.
   2. Media has influence but also family beliefs. History also has influence.
   3. It most likely will continue to develop. Everything keeps changing.

G. 1. I think it is important for social relations, but I think it obscures people's true feelings.

2. I think it has a lot of influence on how people speak but not how they think. People don't reflect enough on why these terms are important.

3. It will develop as our culture evolves.

H. 1. It depends on the situation—it's important to respect others and we must realize though we can never be 100% respectful.

2. I think for the most part it has developed 2 divisions—those who strike to see PC to respect others and those who believe they're disrespected as a result of being expected to use it.

3. Will continue.

I. 1. It is part of a right-wing conspiracy to make liberals look stupid.

2. It makes people afraid to interact with anyone from another group, as well a resentful toward them.

3. Continue.

J. 1. It can be crash but I think it's generally good.

2. I think it makes some people think about what they say, but I think other people just get frustrated and start making fun of people even more.

3. I think it will continue.

K. 1. Speaking PC allows people to identify themselves with liberal ideas.

2. It reflects how people think.

3. It will continue to develop & grow.

L. 1. A "label" is a label! Whenever a label is placed upon a group of people, it carries connotation—positive & negative. Who coins the label? A member of the group or someone else?

2. Limited. I think it depends upon the "age of exposure". College students are influenced but less than children.

3. PC is temporary and changes often. Also one can talk in terms of PC—but the heart may not follow. Institutionally, PC is often empty words that sound less offensive but really don't change deeply held beliefs and attitudes (conscious or otherwise).

M. 1. Do not like it

2. Public speech is more careful.

3. It will continue.

N. 1. What started as a movement to use terms based on respect and sensitivity has become a battleground in the culture wars.

2. Because of the culture wars it is too often discounted as a weakness seen in liberals. However, in the long run I believe the sensitivity and respect will win out in practice since many terms are, or will, change [sic].

3. It will continue to develop in the future.

II. Nonnative speakers of English

a. 1. It is too much.
   2. Blank
   3. Continue to develop and will become worse.

b. 1. It's good. Be considerate of other people's feelings.
   2. Still differentiate people into different groups.
   3. It will continue to exist, I think.

c. 1. Language is socially constructed. You might not agree with the phenomenon but you know it's in some way inevitable.
   2. It arouses people's awareness of the language used.
   3. Some of them may continue or gain new light but some of them may just disappear. It all depends on the social context where the language is used.

d. 1. It is a highly exaggerated issue. It seems that in the U.S. it is more protests than in other countries (Americans like to make a mountain out of a molehill). Terms of respect can be neutral, not otherwise. It seems that in the U.S. people are oversensitive and it makes them be offended by terms that otherwise would be politically correct.
   2. It makes the language change. One term starts to have different definitions, so it's politically incorrect. Then they ban this term. In consequence, it becomes out of use or gets a new meaning.
   3. It will continue. New terms and new idea develop every day. There will always be someone who will think of certain terms to be not politically correct. (It's hard to socialize everybody).

e. 1. It has something to do. However, it is not that practical.
   2. On one hand, it can bring peace. On the other hand, it might also create conflict.
   3. It can develop if some modifications could be done.

f. 1. It might be taken as an index of language (the use of the political correct expressions) and the face/face needs of your listeners.
   2. To make people be more conscious about the appropriateness of language using.
   3. I'm very optimistic it will continue in the future.

g. 1. Sometimes it's appropriate.
   2. People are nervous to speak their mind for fear of being politically incorrect.
   3. Will continue to develop in the future.