

10. More on controlling that “hold” button. Being intended to make a caller wait on hold, for any reason, it is necessary to let them know how long they will have to wait. At the best case it is better to promise to call at a specific time and keep it without fail.

Learning some of the conventions of the language of telephoning, strategies for communicating, training how to sequence a conversation as well as raising learners’ cross-cultural awareness will allow the students to overcome the difficulties and develop their ability to hold efficient telephone conversations.

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Understanding the Politically Correct Language

Political correctness has reshaped the English language significantly over the last several decades. It touched upon the English grammar, vocabulary and communicative strategies sweeping out anything that could hint at gender, racial, social or any other discrimination. More importantly political correctness has become a linguistic norm in the English language and has changed the linguistic worldview of the speakers. This issue incorporates many interesting aspects studied by scholars of Linguistics, Culture Studies and Political Sciences (among the most interesting are works by Anna Wierzbicka and Svetlana Ter-Minasova). Professor Ter-Minasova, for instance, connects the development of political correctness as cultural, behavioral and linguistic tendency with the interest to personal inner world, rights and needs in Western philosophy.

Since we are interested in teaching modern English language and providing students with relevant communication strategies, we should bear in mind the gap between Russian and English/American linguistic worldviews. The norms of usage of gender-, race-, etc. marked semantic elements of the English language should be explained and neutral vocabulary for talking about sensitive issues should be provided. We came across with the necessity of introducing politically correct semantic variants when studying the topic of medicine with first-year Literature Studies majors of the Higher School of Economics, Moscow. Such euphemisms as “condition” instead of “disease”, “people with disabilities”, “people with special needs” or “physically/mentally disadvantaged people” instead of “disabled” or even “invalids” were introduced.

One of the main benefits in paying attention to political correctness in the English language is more profound reflection on one’s own language and

word usage. We decided to support this cultural and linguistic awareness by studying and imitating James Finn Garner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* (Garner 1994). In the introduction to this highly ironical collection the author explains his urge "to rethink these "classic" stories so they reflect more enlightened times" (Garner 1994, p.ix). According to the author the original stories "certainly served their purpose – to entrench the patriarchy, to estrange people from their own natural impulses, to demonize "evil" and to "reward" an "objective" "good" (Garner 1994, p. ix). Still J.F. Garner warns his readers against his own possible faults: "If, through omission or commission, I have inadvertently displayed any sexist, racist, culturalist, nationalist, regionalist, ageist, lookist, ableist, sizeist, speciesist, intellectualist, socioeconomicist, ethno-centrist, phallocentrist, heteropatriarchalist, or other type of bias as yet unnamed, I apologize and encourage your suggestions for rectification" (Garner 1994, p. x).

The stories themselves provide the non-native speakers of English with a rare opportunity to see the linguistic transformations in action or even exaggerated to absurdity by application to well-known plots with archetypal characters. Here is a typical example: "Grandma, what big teeth you have!" The wolf said, "I am happy with who I am and what I am," and leaped out of bed. He grabbed Red Riding Hood in his claws, intent on devouring her. Red Riding Hood screamed, not out of alarm at the wolf's apparent tendency toward cross-dressing, but because of his willful invasion of her personal space" (Garner 1994, p.3-4). Another example opens the story of Rumpelstiltskin: "Long ago in a kingdom far away, there lived a miller who was very economically disadvantaged" (Garner 1994, p. 13).

After reading and analyzing these stories the students wrote their own stories working in groups of three or four. Both the process of work and the result were exciting and fruitful. The next step was to render some Russian fairy tales into politically correct ones. This type of work promoted student's creativity and increased their cultural awareness.

References

1. Garner, James Finn. *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*. – Macmillan Publishing Company. – NY, 1994.