

POLITENESS AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: IDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Concepts and terminology are our tools and habitual mode for thinking about the world, forming groups and group identities and thereby also acting politically. Thus, a system of order is established and stabilised which, alongside its factual significance in economics and politics, is furthermore reflected in the order of discourse (Foucault 1970 - 1974 Hayer), above all by means of exclusion mechanisms.

Discourse may appear to be a nonentity - that which is forbidden reveals only all too soon its link to desire and power.

The exclusions which the system of order creates are, according to Foucault, boundaries laid down

- (a) due to prohibition, that is to say making something taboo,
- (b) as a result of reason and madness and
- (c) resulting from 'right and wrong'

These boundaries become all too soon a mechanism, and finally no member of a society is even aware of the mental possibilities beyond these boundaries. We live in a world where, on the one hand, 'globalisation', 'optimisation', 'profit', etc. play a vital role; individuals are torn away from the diversity of the world with generalising terms such as 'peace', 'democracy', 'welfare for all', as was the case during the days of colonisation under the name of Christianity or Islam. Once again the world is being 'globalised'. On the other hand, the prevalence of wars, poverty, racism and 'new' ethnocentrism remains unchanged. But whoever uses these terms, determines the discourse, determines how one sees the world and 'human affairs' and instrumentalises the discourse precisely by means of boundaries/parameters laid down relative to his desire for power and profit. And sometimes the 'he' may be a 'she'.

This is why I would like to look at the terms 'politeness' and 'political correctness' and their ideological implications. The small word 'and' is here a word with multiple meanings, yet it has additive (you and me = we), integrative (father and mother) and separating semantic characteristics (here the first and there the third world) in addition to other meanings and pragmatic functions. Hence, one must ask oneself what politeness and

political correctness have to do with one another, and in particular in accordance with the theme of the IPrA conference 1998: from the perspective of their ideology.

My answer, my theory is that there is a clear link between politeness and political correctness because both are constituents of society, because both govern communal life in every society and because we are hardly aware of them with their ideological, historical and cultural implications in our everyday life.

From my point of view, 'ideology' is a system of constraining perspectives, it emphasises a particular aspect of the 'world' and communal life. Political Correctness is a good example of how a specific bundle of perspectives should be replaced or at least partly altered by another. Well known are the attempts by various groups to change the way of looking at race, women, minorities and problem groups by means of ruling or steering language use (e.g. cripple, disabled person, person with different abilities'). Whereby it was and most surely is the case today that these movements stem from idealism and moral values.

These groups operate, as Foucault did, with linguistic parameters in order to gain power over social discourse. Their ideology is that of moral improvement, socio-economic emancipation and the founding of conceptual euphemisms. These groups believe in the tool of language because they believe in language determinism, though unrealistically, not realising that they are not dealing with the system of language but with the ever changing system of language use! Language can only determine thought for a short period of time, after which the thinking process again becomes independent possibly with backlash effect. But naturally this is the pragmatic grasp for power in discourse. From such a perspective of Political Correctness, two things become clear:

1) Whenever social and/or economic changes have acquired a particular degree of significance, then one can witness phenomena like Political Correctness, which with their 'newspeak' - in memory of George Orwell's novel - try to create a new order for the world and stabilise it. All too well known and by now trivially disputed examples are the language rules regarding feminism and the gender debate, even though they blossom mostly in democratic societies and not in the state of "1984".

2) It becomes clear that the ideology behind Political Correctness is becoming more and more integrated into everyday life and then so internalised that -at least partially - we become unaware of it in our everyday life. Phenomena like Political Correctness become clear during transition periods, later the sense and knowledge of the ideology vanishes. This is a totally normal socio-cultural process - unless one takes on the battle of the concepts early enough...

On the other hand the central pragmatic concept of politeness is to be examined whether and what it might have to do with ideology. Politeness is based above all on the Gricean Cooperative Principle that involves partners in negotiation, discussion or oral exchange of any other type feeling certain that they won't 'lose face'. In other words, not 'politeness' as it was seen in the 18th and 19th century as a 'sign of good breeding and high social

status' (R.J.Watts 1992:44), but as 'developed in societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction' (Lakoff 1975:64), or as a 'result of a conversational contract entered into by the participants in an effort to maintain socio-communicative verbal interaction conflict free' (Fraser and M'Nolen 1981:96). It is important to point out with Brown and Levinson (1987:1) that politeness allows communication to take place between potentially aggressive partners. Finally R.J. Watts points out to what extent politeness is an equally stabilising factor as it is an ephemeral factor. Politeness affects social acceptance or exclusion by means of language rules.

'Rules of linguistic politeness are always regulative and ephemeral. They do not help to constitute the social group, but regulate membership and appropriate behaviour within it.' (Watts 1992:48) So politeness is quite clearly part of private and public everyday culture. It is part of business conduct and has naturally always been part of diplomacy. Watts goes so far as to no longer speak of 'politeness', but to call that concept 'politic behaviour' (Watts 1992:50)

Politeness is usually half-conscious and that is also the case with the Gricean maxim 'be cooperative', which in itself is ideological. Politeness is not only the attempt to exclude friction, but it also concerns those who create or insist on friction. However, it is friction, it is imperfection that brings forward thought and emotion, art and philosophy and – last but not least – respectful partnerships; a too soon gained harmony hinders from necessary developments.

The result of our *and*-link between Political Correctness and Politeness is that politeness integrates political correctness in the long term and in the process partly reshapes and distorts it. Because politeness is a tool in itself; it is not courtesy, as I would like to point out by looking at a closely synonymous word. Politeness stems from 'to polish' and means 'polishedness', which refers to another word in this semantic field, 'urbanity'. And urbanity means a mentality and a behaviour which one ought to have in the URBS of ROMA, the centre of an empire.

We are left with the following questions: what happens if one sees things "politically incorrect"? If one observes that the relation between men and women seems to have turned to a narrow minded book keeping since claims of feminism have been trivialised? If one is sceptical of globalism? If one sees the implementation of peace as the established order of the mighty? Even 'democracy' is seen worldwide as open to interpretation. Of course, 'polite strategies' are implemented so that one can pursue 'correct policies'.

To put it in a nutshell: is the statement "We've made mistakes" politically correct or merely opportune? Should this statement be classified under politeness, just because its effect should be to prevent the frictions caused during political handling to cause the deal itself to fail? Is this statement the last means to save face? In the end, is this statement ideological because, by accepting mistakes, it does not question the basic intentions?

However, these questions can only be answered if one simultaneously asks: who is speaking where - and for whom? - Again it is those who possess the power to determine discourse who provide the answer. Therefore it is unavoidable to realize that all these questions and problems refer to peer groups with whose interests and intentions one negotiates, which lastly decide for the individual and just seem to relieve him of his

responsibility.

This is by no means good. Therefore I put the question of the ability to deal tactfully to them, and I do this for only two reasons: Tact is only possible in very personal and individual, concrete situations, and tact is based on personal responsibility towards others, towards our fellow men. Tact is a “matter of behaving in an interpersonally supportive way. It involves empathising with others, and not saying or doing things that threaten them, offend them, or injure their feelings.” (Janney and Arndt 1992: 23). Ideology, politeness and political correctness do not achieve this, or possibly not sufficiently.

Dramas condense views, and they turn the paradigms of a society in a concrete context. Therefore a glance on a short scene out of Max Frisch’s ‘Andorra’ (p. 28/29) may illustrate the hidden dangers connected with the terms of politeness and political correctness. In this scene where private and public lives meet, where the differences between politeness and courtesy become apparent and where above all one can sense the impending radical change or transition into a new form of P.C.

- Mother Is it serious, Professor?
- Doctor Dear lady, when a man has been around the world as I have he knows the meaning of the word home. This is my place, title or no title, this is where my roots are.
Andi coughs
How long has he been coughing?
- Andri Since you lit your cigar.
- Doctor Andorra is a small country, but a free country. Where else will you find that nowadays? No fatherland in the world has a more beautiful name, and no people in the world is so free. - Open your mouth, my friend, open your mouth! Let ’s have another look at that throat.
The Doctor looks into Andri ’s throat again, then he takes out the spoon.
A bit inflamed.
- Andri Me?
- Doctor Headache?
- Andri No
- Doctor Insomnia?
- Andri Sometimes.
- Doctor Aha.
- Andri But not because of that
The Doctor pushes the spoon down his throat again.
- Doctor Tongue down.
- Andri Aaaaaaaa-Aaaaaaaaandorra.
- Doctor That’s right, my friend, that’s how it must ring out, so that every Jew sinks into the ground when he hears the name of our fatherland.
Andri winces.
Don’t swallow the spoon!
- Mother Andri ...
- Andri *has stood up.*
- Doctor Well, there’s nothing much to worry about, a slight inflammation, he’ll soon get over it, a pill before every meal -
- Andri Why - should every Jew - sink into the ground?

- Doctor Where did I put them?
The Doctor rummages in his little bag.
 You ask that, my young friend, because you haven't been out into the world. I know Jews. Wherever you go you find them already there, knowing everything better, and you, simple Andorran that you are, can pack up and go. That's the way it is. The worst thing about Jews is their ambition. In every country in the world they occupy all the university chairs, I know that from experience, and there's nothing left for us but our homeland. Mark you, I've nothing against Jews. I'm not in favour of atrocities. I saved the lives of Jews, although I can't stand the sight of them. And what thanks did I get? You can't change them. They occupy all the university chairs in the world. You can't change them.
The Doctor holds out the pills.
 Here are your pills.
Andri doesn't take them but goes.
 What's the matter with him all of a sudden?
- Mother Andri! Andri!
- Doctor Simply turning on his heel and going ...
- Mother You shouldn't have said that about Jews, Professor.
- Doctor Why not!
- Mother Andri is a Jew.
- Doctor What!
Enter the Teacher, carrying exercise books.
- Teacher What's the matter?
- Mother Nothing, don't excite yourself, nothing at all.
- Doctor I wasn't to know that -
- Teacher Know what?
- Doctor How is it that your son is a Jew?
- Teacher *says nothing.*
- Doctor I must say, simply turning on his heel and going. I gave him medical treatment, even chatted with him, I explained to him what a virus is -
- Teacher I have work to do.
Silence.
- Mother Andri is our foster-son.
- Teacher Goodbye.
- Doctor Goodbye.
The Doctor takes his hat and bag.
 I'm going.
The Doctor goes.
- Teacher What happened this time?
- Mother Don't excite yourself!
- Teacher How did he get in here?
- Mother He's the new medical officer.
Enter the Doctor again.
- Doctor Let him take the pills just the same.
The Doctor takes off his hat.
 I'm sorry about what happened.
The Doctor puts on his hat again.
 What did I say ... just because I said ... I was joking, of course, they can't take a joke, I can see that. Did anyone ever meet a Jew who could take a joke? Anyway I

never did ... all I said was: I know Jews. I suppose one is still allowed to speak the truth in Andorra ...

Teacher *says nothing.*

Doctor Where did I put my hat?

Teacher goes up to the Doctor, takes his hat from his head, opens the door and throws out the hat.

There's your hat.

The Doctor goes.

Mother I told you not to excite yourself. He'll never forgive you for that. You quarrel with everybody and that doesn't make things easier for Andri.

MaxFrisch, Andorra

translated by Michael Bullock, Frankfurt 1961

From the beginning it is clear that the doctor is not capable of acting neither politely nor tactfully. His bluntness is illustrated when he lights his cigar (line 3-5) and when he trivialises his tactless remarks concerning Jews in front of Andri (line 75-80). At the same time he frees himself of his responsibility by means of sheer politeness, which his mother had already implemented earlier when she addressed the doctor with the title of 'Professor', although she was also courteously making him aware of his mistake. Precisely at this point we can observe the distinction between politeness and courtesy and hence, the extremely uncourteous teacher's behaviour has a pleasantly alleviating effect for the spectator/reader. His behaviour illustrates the need for friction because this is the only means by which the newly implemented political correctness of 'Andorra' could or rather should be confronted. It becomes brutally clear right from the beginning, listening to the doctor prattle on (line 7-9) and naturally from his lengthy prejudiced statement, which must upset Andri.

All these references, here to Nazi-Germany, must not be lost in a world whose forever more refined polite and political mechanisms are leading to forever more perfect use of power. Individual and public tact, together with the courage to contradict, must stand up against ephemeral political correctnesses. Political correctness is, despite its initially idealistic aims, not cooperative. Politeness is in danger of being instrumentalised. However, tact, to a deeply human extent, is cooperative.

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