Feminist Linguistic Theories and "Political Correctness"

Modifying the Discourse on Women?

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Abstract. This article proposes a historical perspective looking at the beginnings of feminist linguistics during the liberation movements and its link with the "politically correct" movement. Initially a mostly ironical left-wing expression, it was used by the right notably to denounce the attempt by this movement to reform the language used to describe racial, ethnic and sexual minorities. This attempt at linguistic reform rested on a theoretical approach to language use, with borrowings from feminist linguistic theories. This led to an association being made between feminist linguistic reforms and "political correctness", thereby impacting the changes brought to the discourse about women.

Keywords: feminist linguistic theories, political correctness, language, discourse, sexism

Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a debate over what came to be known as the "politically correct" movement [1] erupted in the United States first and then in Britain. It focused notably on the linguistic reforms associated with this movement. These reforms aimed at eradicating all forms of discrimination in language use in particular through the adoption of speech codes and anti-harassment guidelines, so as to modify the discourse about racial and ethnic minorities but also women, and thereby bring about social change by transforming social attitudes. However, these attempts at a linguistic reform were viewed as a threat to freedom of speech by its detractors who used the phrase "political correctness" to denounce the imposition of a form of "linguistic correctness". Conversely, their use of the phrase "political correctness" was widely viewed as an attack on the progress made by minorities as a result of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. It was notably considered as a backlash against feminism and the anti-sexist linguistic reforms which were adopted as a result of feminists' activism.

In this article, we will thus first retrace the origins and development of feminist linguistic theories and of "political correctness" respectively, so as to then analyze the link between them and finally the impact "political correctness" has had on these theories. In other words, by going through what three feminist linguists, Deborah Cameron and Sara Mills in Britain and Robin Talmach Lakoff in the United States, have written in connection with this issue, we will question whether "political correctness" has benefited feminist linguistic theories or, on the contrary, backfired on them and on any progress made by feminists on the linguistic front.

Genealogy of feminist linguistic theories and of "political correctness"

Feminist linguistic theories were developed in the subfield of language and gender studies [2] created in the mid-1970s stemming from the feminist movements launched in the United States and Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a consequence, this subfield in linguistics was political in essence, in that it aimed, just like the wider movements, at changing the relations between men and women. It endeavored to do so notably by analyzing how and why these relations were constructed according to a framework of difference which systematically asserted women's inferiority to men, this analysis and the linguistic reform that it called for having, in British feminist linguist Deborah Cameron's words, "[the] political utility for raising consciousness, denouncing sexism and empowering women" (1992: 125).

Feminists became interested in language, and in particular in the issue of sexist language, as a result of a preoccupation with the way women were represented notably in the media and in advertising. Language being a medium of representation, feminists started doing research on it and developing a theoretical framework (Cameron 1992). It is the American feminist linguist Robin Tolmach Lakoff who gave the initial impulse to the development of the feminist study of language and gender in her book *Language and Woman's Place* (1975) [3]. Indeed, she posited the existence of a "women's language" whose effect is to submerge

> a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand, and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it; and, when a woman is being discussed, by treating her as an object — sexual or otherwise — but never a serious person with individual views. (Lakoff 2004: 42)

According to her, the outcome was the exclusion of women from positions of power based notably on what was perceived to be the inadequacy of their linguistic behavior (Lakoff 2004).

While acknowledging the founding nature of Lakoff's book, feminist linguists have since criticized its approach, associating it with what has been called "a deficit model", because it highlighted the way in which women's use of language demonstrated their powerlessness and weakness, thus implying a deficiency in their way of speaking in comparison to men.

Another groundbreaking work published in 1980 in Britain, *Man Made Language* by Australian feminist critic and literary theorist Dale Spender, analyzed the way men as the dominant group had influenced discourse. Using the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis [4] on the link between language and reality, it asserted that as a consequence men had had the power to shape reality from their perspective. The dominance of men thus explained why sexism pervaded the English language. This inaugurated the "dominance model" approach in language and gender studies, which Deborah Cameron defines as suggesting "that women's ways of speaking are less the result of their gender *per se* than of their subordinate position relative to men: the key variable is power" (2005: 14).

A final approach which developed in language and gender studies is the "difference model", which has notably been associated with the American

feminist linguist Deborah Tannen and which "suggests that women's ways of speaking reflect the social and linguistic norms of the specifically female subcultures in which most [women] spend [their] formative years" (Cameron 2005: 15). Hence, there also existed a male subculture.

Both the dominance and difference approaches were at the core of a debate within feminist circles in the 1980s: some criticized the former for its deterministic view of the relationship between language and reality and for its essentialism, i.e. its tendency to view women's oppression by men as being similar, thus making generalizations (Mills 2008); others reproached the latter for "failing to acknowledge the extent to which power relations are *constitutive* of gender differentiation as we know it" (Cameron 2006: 76).

In the 1990s, many feminist linguistic researchers started moving away from the "dominance-difference" dichotomy and towards an analysis of diversity among women and of how gender is something which is fluid rather than static [5], that is, in Cameron's words, "the idea of gender as something people 'do' or 'perform' as opposed to something they 'have'" (2005: 17).

This shift in focus coincided with the eruption of a debate over what came to be known as the "politically correct" movement, first in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s and then in Britain. Before being associated with a movement, "political correctness" was an expression whose origins are rather obscure. If most would agree that it was originally a left-wing expression which was used by different movements based on Marxist ideas, in particular in the ranks of the Communist Party, people disagree on the period when it was first employed. According to some, it was at the beginning of the 20th century, while others argue that it was in the 1930s under the Stalinian regime or in the 1940s, and finally for others still it was at the beginning of the 1960s through Mao Tse Tung's *Little Red Book* which had much success among members of the New Left and of the Black Power movement [6]. In fact, the movement which emerged on elite American campuses in the mid-1980s and was given this name, is a direct outcome and a continuation of the social movements which shook the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, former members of the New Left having made their way into different positions in American universities (as professors, deans, administrators or presidents).

Initially used by the left in a straightforward way, that is to qualify the right or correct ideological stance, in the early 1970s the phrase "political correctness" started to be used in an ironic way to denounce a strict adherence to the Communist Party line. The expression seems to have then lost its currency in written form at least, as it was next apparently used in connection with the women's liberation movement and was employed by feminists during a conference entitled "The Scholar and the Feminist IX: Towards a Politics of Sexuality" which was organized at Barnard College on April 24th 1982. One of the goals of this conference was to debate whether there was a "politically correct" sexual practice (Perry). Having entered the academic world as a subject of study, it was used to signify the opinions that left-wing professors and students had not only about feminism but also about minority rights and a multicultural education [7]. These opinions were going to be at the core of a movement on American elite campuses which aimed at ending the exclusion of racial, ethnic and sexual minorities (women and gays) [8] from university curricula, the student and

teaching bodies or their marginalization therein. This movement was given the label of "political correctness" by conservatives, who thus denounced the intolerance they associated with it [9]. It is one particular aspect, namely the attempt at reforming the language used to refer to minorities to rid it of racist, sexist or homophobic connotations, which was notably the target of conservatives' criticism, and the debate continued from the late 1980s till the mid-1990s in the United States.

A theoretical interconnection

It is through this attempt at a linguistic reform that a link between "political correctness" and feminist linguistic theories was established. Feminists were the first to develop a thorough analysis of how language discriminated against women, first by rendering them invisible with the use of generic terms associated with the masculine sex, then by depreciating the value of everything associated with the feminine sex. Modifying the discourse [10] which downgraded women and thus perpetuated their unequal status in society became "a key concern for feminist theorists and activists, trying to change the way that women were represented in advertisements, newspapers and magazines, and also the way that they were named and addressed in texts and in interaction" (Mills 2008: 1). In their attempt to eradicate sexist language, feminists first focused their attention on mainstream dictionaries, criticizing them for failing to identify as offensive the sexist words they contained, devised dictionaries of sexist language and gave advice on words which were to be avoided, calling for the adoption of non-sexist language guidelines (Mills 2008).

Those associated with "political correctness" used the theoretical framework behind these demands for linguistic reforms to elaborate part of their theoretical approach to language use. The link established between language, reality and power [11] within the feminist analysis of language and the sexism it embodies has been particularly important. Thus, in her book *Man Made Language* (1980), Dale Spender argues that

> Given that language is such an influential force in shaping our world, it is obvious that those who have the power to make the symbols and their meanings are in a privileged and highly advantageous position. They have, at least, the potential to order the world to suit their own ends, the potential to construct a language, a reality, a body of knowledge in which they are the central figures, the potential to legitimate their own primacy, and to create a system of beliefs which is beyond challenge (so that their superiority is "natural" and "objectively" tested) The group which has the power to ordain the structure of language, thought, and reality has the potential to create a world in which they are the central figures, while those who are not of their group are peripheral and therefore may be exploited. In the patriarchal order this potential has been realized. Males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought, and reality. Historically it has been the structures, the categories, and the meanings which have been invented by males — though not of course by *all* males — and they have been validated by reference to other males. In this process women have played little or no part. (97)

Dale Spender's argument that language is the medium through which reality is constructed and as manmade, it is one of the means that men have used to

maintain their hegemony, has found its way into the "politically correct" ideology. More precisely the latter has been inspired by the issue of naming [12] that has been tackled notably by feminist linguists. Indeed, feminist linguists have theorized that those who have the power to name things or people are in a position to influence reality. As a result of women having no power, specifically feminine experiences have no name (Spender). This idea has been formalized through the use of the term "phallogocentrism" [13] which

> describe[s] how patriarchal assumptions are so deeply embedded in existing languages that women (those denied access to the symbolic and real power of the phallus) have no independent existence that can be expressed in language. Phallogocentric language excludes women from the category of the universal, so that "man" is synonymous with "human". (Childers and Hentzi: 225)

This exclusion or invisibility led feminists to create a vocabulary which took their experience into account and endeavored to eradicate all forms of sexist usage. This was done first by closely examining dictionaries [14] and what they authorize so as to demonstrate how the latter, "functioning as linguistic legislators, perpetuate the stereotypes and prejudices of their editors, who traditionally have been men" (Frank and Treichler: 5), and thus contribute to shaping the discourse about women (Treichler). This then led to the creation of alternative dictionaries such as *A Feminist Dictionary* (1985) [15] edited by Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, and the drafting of guidelines for nonsexist usage which were adopted notably by professional associations [16], scholarly journals, and publishers. These guidelines focused in particular on the exclusion or invisibility of women through the use of male-specific words as generics (i.e. the pronoun *he* and the noun *man*), as well as through gender-marked compounds (i.e. *chairman*), and offered alternatives (i.e. the use of *he or she,* or *she or he*) as well as coined new terms (i.e. *chairperson*). Some of the words associated with "political correctness" have actually been borrowed from the new vocabulary created by feminists (i.e. *herstory*, *womyn* or *wimmin*) [17]. The creation of such words, some of which have found their way into dictionaries such as the *Cambridge English Dictionary* or the *Oxford English Dictionary*, was part of "a more general feminist linguistic strategy designed to raise consciousness about the ubiquitousness of the male presence in language [...] [by] replacing occurrences of obviously male-gendered terms such as *man* and *he* with their feminine or generic counterparts" (Treichler and Frank: 199).

However, those associated with "political correctness" have not limited themselves to borrowing feminist coinages or to creating specifically "politically correct" terms embodying a respectful stance towards not only women but minorities in general. They have also called for a monitoring of what can or cannot be said about sexual, racial and ethnic minorities through the adoption of speech codes [18] on university campuses where members of these minorities had been the target of discriminatory comments or of hate speech [19] from the 1980s onward. The idea behind these codes was that by eradicating all the discursive practices which could create a hostile environment [20] for these groups, it would be possible to ensure a true equality on campuses, and this would later have an impact on the wider society as well.

It is this attempt at a prescriptive linguistic reform, notably through the implementation of speech codes, which was at the core of the debate over the "politically correct" movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the United States. A debate over "political correctness" also took place in Britain in the early 1990s, but as pointed out by Geoffrey Hughes in his book *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture* (2010), it was less intense, "less of an exclusively academic affair" and "much of the initial commentary was ironic, focusing on the curious verbal innovations, rather than the ideologies behind them" (69).

Impact of the debate over "political correctness" on feminist linguistic reforms

Just as there is a theoretical link between feminism and "political correctness", the two are connected in this debate. Indeed, Deborah Cameron, for instance, views this debate as a backlash against feminism, and more particularly against the feminist linguistic reforms concerning sexist language which met with opposition early on (2006). She draws a parallel between feminists trying to free the English language from sexist connotations in the 1970s and the "traditionalists who claimed to be liberating language use from the authoritarianism of feminists and other radicals" (2006: 4) in the 1990s. Thus the terms of the debate have been reversed: if feminists could be said to have held the high ground with some of their proposals to make language gender neutral or gender inclusive with arguments stressing civility, accuracy and fairness (Cameron 2012), such is not the case with those associated with "political correctness".

The confusion that surrounds "political correctness", its origins and its meaning is symptomatic. From the beginning, the terms of the debate have been framed from the point of view of those who denounce "political correctness", people associated with the right appropriating the term "political correctness" and turning it against those who support linguistic reforms and multicultural education, as the Republican President George H. W. Bush did in a speech he delivered during the University of Michigan Commencement Ceremony on May 4 1991:

> Ironically, on the 200th anniversary of our Bill of Rights, we find free speech under assault throughout the United States, including on some college campuses. The notion of political correctness has ignited controversy across the land. And although the movement arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred, it replaces old prejudice with new ones. It declares certain topics off-limits, certain expression off-limits, even certain gestures off-limits. What began as a crusade for civility has soured into a cause of conflict and even censorship. (Excerpts: 32)

By doing so, he contributed not only to giving "political correctness" a national dimension, as his speech was commented upon in the media [21], but also to confirming the threat to free speech that it was seen as representing. Thus by associating, in his turn, the reforms demanded by racial, ethnic and sexual minorities, notably those related to the language used to refer to them, with

"political correctness", a phrase with a negative connotation as it led to "censorship", he downplayed the good intentions behind these reforms. Indeed, for President Bush, they were doing something similar to what they were trying to eradicate, and paradoxically, they were "crushing diversity in the name of diversity" (32).

As " 'PC' now has such negative connotations for so many people", Deborah Cameron thus points out "that the mere invocation of the phrase can move those so labeled to elaborate disclaimers, or reduce them to silence" (2012: 123). Some even go as far as denying that such a movement exists [22]. However, she along with Robin Lakoff acknowledges that the term originated on the left, while Sara Mills argues that the term "political correctness" was coined by the media to "refer to campaigns by feminists, ethnic minority activists and disability rights activists" (Mills and Mullany: 159). However, in *Language and Sexism* (2008)*,* she seems to acknowledge that the term was used, but with a different meaning, by feminists, although she adds in a footnote that whether feminists had developed the term "political correctness" is questionable.

Robin Lakoff's argumentation similarly stresses the irony of the terms of the debate: the right has defined every aspect of the discourse on "political correctness", presenting "political correctness" as a "totalitarian threat to language and mind" (2000: 92) and therefore putting those associated with it in a defensive position, either denying the claims or remaining silent. Thus, for her, the silencing or the intimidation is done by people on the right and not by those who have been associated with "political correctness".

According to Lakoff (2000), it is also paradoxical that the right describes "political correctness" as a threat to the nation, while at the same time making it look ridiculous by resorting to jokes. However, by making the renaming associated with "political correctness" ridiculous, the aim of the right is "to maintain control of language at all costs" (100), and as "language is […] the means by which we construct and analyze reality" (20), the right can also maintain control over how reality is represented.

In addition, "political correctness" being negatively connoted, "political incorrectness" has accrued a positive connotation in certain contexts [23]. Indeed, as pointed out by Sara Mills, "if 'political correctness' is viewed as an over-zealous concern with the rights of political minorities, then 'political incorrectness' can be seen as a positive mocking or undermining of such concerns, with stress on the fun which 'PC' is trying to eliminate. (2008: 109)

Further, Sara Mills sees accusations of "political correctness" as being "an effective political intervention" from right-wingers, since these have "the effect of wrong-footing political activists" (2008: 102). She argues that "the term PC [is] being used to criticize anti-racist and anti-discrimination activists and to brand their activities as excessive. However, whilst it is politically inexpedient to criticize anti-racism, it is seen to be relatively acceptable to criticize PC" (2008: 103). She thus implies that criticizing "political correctness" is an indirect way of calling into question the linguistic reforms implemented by anti-racist and anti-discrimination activists so as to maintain the hegemony of the dominant group (white males) over racial, ethnic and sexual minorities, and as a consequence perpetuate the exclusion or marginalization of these minorities.

According to Mills, the debate over "political correctness"—notably the way it has been framed—has therefore had a negative impact on feminist linguistic reforms. First, it has led many people to associate anti-sexist campaigns with "political correctness", and thus not only with the parody that has been made of the related linguistic issues, but also with the threat they are said to represent for freedom of expression [24]. Therefore, in the public mind, it has contributed to downplaying the issues of equal opportunity and discrimination against women. It has "made the process of linguistic reform advocated by many feminists much more complicated and problematic" (Mills 2008: 108). Moreover, because the work of feminists has been characterized as being "politically correct", it has made it more difficult for feminists to explain what their work consists in and what measures against anti-sexism function because of the ideological presuppositions associated with "political correctness". "Political correctness" has also had more pragmatic consequences according to her: she thus claims that many anti-sexist language policies adopted in the 1980s have stopped being implemented notably for fear that they might be viewed as an attempt to adhere to the "politically correct" line, and thus as being concerned with superficial linguistic changes rather than with a more profound social transformation. However, since she views "political correctness" as a reaction against feminist reforms, she also argues that paradoxically the more the phrase "political correctness" is used, the more it demonstrates the impact which feminist campaigns have had (2008).

A more positive assessment of the debate over "political correctness" is made by Deborah Cameron: as she points out in *On Language and Sexual Politics* (2006), "if 'political correctness' means paying attention to the implications of all the words you use in an effort to avoid recycling disrespectful and oppressive propositions, I would say that non-sexist language guidelines need more of it rather than less" (23). The debate has thus managed to make it plain that linguistic choices are not neutral and are therefore not trivial (Cameron 2012). Indeed, those associated with "political correctness" have succeeded in politicizing all the terms by creating alternatives to traditional usage. The existence of a "politically correct" alternative has meant that language users have to make a choice from which political neutrality has been removed, as with this choice "reformers have in effect forced everyone who uses English to declare a position in respect of gender, race or whatever" (Cameron 2012: 119). There has also been a heightened interest in identity politics within the feminist critique of language (Cameron 1998). Indeed, the movement associated with "political correctness" has included the experiences of women, alongside those of racial and ethnic minorities, in discursive practices. Even though this was not a new trend in feminist linguistic theories, it has contributed to bringing a new perspective in the analysis of diversity by stressing the importance of respecting all types of differences.

Conclusion

"Political correctness" and the debate about it that started in the late 1980s have contributed to raising people's awareness about words or expressions which can be considered as offensive to women, thereby modifying somewhat the discourse

about women. This is also valid for the other non-dominant groups which have also denounced the use of terms that fail to take into account their experience or that they deem to be demeaning or discriminatory. However, this modification in the discourse about women has only been partial as illustrated by the way conservatives have redefined the term "political correctness". First, they have given it a negative connotation by associating it with a threat to freedom of speech and thought. By using it to refer to the reforms demanded by members of non-dominant groups in order for their particular experiences to be represented as well as respected, they have succeeded in controlling the meaning of these reforms by associating them not with respect but with intolerance. In doing so, they have elaborated a discourse which has framed these reforms as being dangerous rather than necessary. Secondly, even though the feminist campaigns regarding language use and sexism have led to the adoption of nonsexist and inclusive words by institutions, conservatives have proceeded to ridicule these linguistic reforms, reinforcing their unnecessary nature and thus demeaning them in the public mind. Moreover, as pointed out by Sara Mills, rather than being overt, sexism has become indirect, that is a "sexism which manifests itself at the level of presupposition, and also through innuendo, irony and humor" (2003: 90). Consequently, the association which has been made between feminist linguistic reforms, their theoretical base and "political correctness" has made it more difficult to modify the discourse about women, as sexism has become more subtle.

Notes

[1] Throughout this paper, we will be using the term "political correctness" with quotation marks as its use is contested. Indeed, many of those who have been associated with this movement have argued that this was a right-wing invention.

[2] If as pointed out by Sara Mills and Louise Mullany (2011), women's language had been studied by scholars like Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1922) or American sociolinguist William Labov (1966) prior to the development of gender and language studies per se, in this new subfield the articulation between language and gender was studied from a feminist perspective as well as in a more systematic way.

[3] It was first published in a shorter version in *Language in Society* in 1973.

[4] Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf were two American linguists who, through their study of Amerindian languages, came to the conclusion that linguistic differences explained the different ways in which various cultures viewed the world (Cameron 1998). Their argumentation was taken up by feminists in the 1970s to suggest that languages in which gender was grammatically marked and the masculine considered as unmarked led those who used them to view the world in "gender polarized and androcentric ways" (Cameron 1998: 150), since these languages had been developed from a male perspective.

[5] Cameron calls this analysis the "performance" approach (2005).

[6] For more detail on that, see notably Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (1992); Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux's *Education Still Under Siege* (1993); George Bornstein's article "Can Literary Study Be Politically Correct?", and Herbert Kohl's article "The Politically Correct Bypass: Multiculturalism and the Public Schools."

[7] They used the term in a non-pejorative way, and to highlight the marginal status of those who held left-wing ideas at a time when conservatism reigned in American society.

[8] Despite representing more than 50% of the American population, women can still be considered as a minority insofar as they continue to have a subordinate status in society.

[9] For instance, in his article "We Conservatives Wage a Phony War on Political Correctness," published in The Wall Street Journal in December 1991, Robert K. Kelner acknowledges that he with other young conservatives used the term "politically correct" against liberals when he was a student at Princeton: "I first heard the term 'PC,' or 'politically correct,' when I arrived as a freshman at Princeton in the fall of 1985. Back then it was a bit of college slang bandied about by young conservatives. We thought ourselves insurgents, bringing the Reagan Revolution to academe, that last bastion of the new left. By dismissing our enemies as 'PC', we made fun of the fact that the open-minded liberals were actually the most closed-minded people on campus" (7).

[10] The term "Discourse" is used in the sense given to it by poststructuralist Michel Foucault in his Archeology of Knowledge, that is to say, "a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (qtd. in Mills 2004: 6).

[11] In that analysis, feminist linguistic theorists have been influenced by Michel Foucault's theorization of power, which has also had a big impact on the development of the ideology of the "politically correct" movement. See Michel Foucault's *L'Ordre du discours* (1971).

[12] Naming is defined by Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler as a "fundamental process for identifying, defining, and conceptualizing experience" (qtd. in Treichler and Wattman Frank: 219).

[13] It is a portemanteau word initially created by French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida through the association of the words "phallocentrism" and "logocentrism".

[14] Feminists have also focused their attention on the textbooks schools use, criticizing them "for their stereotyped representation of the sexes and for their use of language that tended to make women invisible except in roles like mother, daughter, homemaker, and perhaps teacher and nurse." (Frank: 119)

[15] This was not the first feminist dictionary to be created and published, but contrary to previous ones which criticized "the negative view of women embodied in traditional dictionaries, *A Feminist Dictionary* tends to emphasize women's definitions of themselves." (Treichler: 63)

[16] The Modern Language Association (MLA) was among the first professional associations to adopt such guidelines.

[17] The term herstory is not simply a feminine alternative word for history, as it refers to a narrative told from the perspective of women and stressing their experiences and activities. (Treichler and Frank, 1989)

[18] According to the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon, more than 350 universities adopted speech codes in the 1980s and 1990s (Steinstra). However, several of them were challenged in state courts and federal district courts for violating the First Amendment. Some of these challenges were upheld, as was the case for the speech code adopted by the University of Michigan which was deemed to be too vague and too broad by a federal district court of the State of Michigan in 1989. See Doe v. University of Michigan.

[19] As Samuel Walker, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska, explains in *Hate Speech* the term is usually used to refer to "any form of expression deemed offensive to any racial, religious, ethnic, or national group. In the 1980s some

campus speech codes broadened it to include gender, age, sexual preference, marital status, physical capacity, and other categories." (8)

[20] A hostile environment is created "when unwelcome verbal, non-verbal or physical behavior of a prohibited nature is severe and pervasive enough to unreasonably interfere with an employee's work or a student's learning, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment to a 'reasonable person'." (The Law Firm of David A. Young, LCC)

[21] For examples of the media coverage of George H. W. Bush's speech, see for instance Christopher Myers's article "Many Praise Bush for Lashing Out at 'Political Correctness' concept, but Others See Misrepresentation" and Maureen Dowd's article "Bush Sees Threat to Flow of Ideas on US Campuses."

[22] Even if the "politically correct" movement does not compare to movements like the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, it has many of the characteristics that sociologists use to define movements, i.e. grievances, the belief in the possibility of changing society, the existence of a precipitating event and of a network. See Rodney Stark, *Sociology*. Wadsworth, 1994, p. 622. See also Christèle Le Bihan, *La polémique autour du mouvement politiquement correct sur les campus américains*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1998, pp. 36-58.

[23] In her book *Language and Sexism*, Mills identifies four groups of meanings associated with the use of the terms "politically incorrect" and "political incorrectness": "The first group of meanings (A) can be characterized as broadly positively evaluated: a positive association with risky humor and fun, as a term of praise for those who are doing something daring, and as an accurate, if unpalatable to some, assessment of affairs. The second group of meanings (B) can be characterized as when the phrase 'politically incorrect' is used to refer to a set of opinions which are considered trivial or concerned with the banning of offence. The third group of meanings (C) is when 'political incorrectness' is portrayed as ridiculous. Finally, there is a fourth group of meanings (D) where 'political incorrectness' is used as a synonym for sexism or racism" (108). So the terms "politically incorrect" and "political incorrectness" can have both positive and negative connotations, but it is their positive connotation which has tended to be stressed in the media with, for example, American comedian Bill Maher's talk show "Politically Incorrect" which was aired on Comedy Central from 1993 to 1996 and then on ABC until 2002.

[24] This was done notably through the association being made by journalists, but also some academics, between these linguistic reforms and a thought police trying to impose a linguistic conformism. Some articles also referred to a new McCarthyism. For an example of this, see historian Stephan Thernstrom's article "McCarthyism Then and Now". See also Jerry Adler's article "Taking Offense: Is This the New Enlightenment on Campus or the New McCarthyism?" published in the issue of December 24 1990 of *Newsweek* whose cover title was "Watch What You Say. THOUGHT POLICE. There's a 'Politically Correct' Way to Talk about Race, Sex and Ideas".

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