Talk a Lot

Intermediate Book 1

Why Use Politically Correct Language?

Introduction

Political Correctness (PC) is an unofficial movement that rose to prominence in the 1980s and early '90s. Its aim is to promote equality in society and reduce discrimination towards people belonging to different groups. Among its various activities that aim to influence society and government, one of its strategies is to make taboo forms of language that potentially cause offence among – generally speaking – minority groups, on the grounds of:

ability	**gender**	**sexuality**
age	**race**	**status**
appearance	**religion**	**other reasons**

In short, politically correct language means words and phrases that we use, instead of potentially derogatory or insulting language, to talk about something negative without causing offence. It is connected with **euphemism**, which can be defined as:

"A euphemism is a word or phrase that replaces part of a sentence which is considered offensive or taboo – i.e. that cannot be talked about in "polite" conversation."

Example: John is Ellen's boyfriend, but she introduces him to her parents as "A close friend", because she doesn't want them to know how serious their relationship is.

There are two kinds of politically correct language:

1. **Extreme Politically Correct Language**: phrases that we don't use very often in everyday life, because they seem too extreme or sound silly
   - e.g. "My little Billy isn't fat, he's just *big-boned*."

     Aim: to try to see something positive in something negative. But taken to extremes political correctness can become a bit of a joke in itself.

2. **Everyday Politically Correct Language**: phrases that we *do* need to use in everyday life, to avoid offending or stigmatising other people, especially people who belong to minority groups.

   - e.g. "We're planning a special lunch for *senior citizens* next week." [not *old people*] More respectful or neutral phrases replace blunter, more potentially insensitive or offensive language. For example, politicians are keen to use inclusive PC language in order to appeal to the greatest number of voters. Another example of required politically correct language is the use of gender-neutral terms, e.g. "police officer" instead of "policeman", to reflect changes in our workforce and culture.

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1. Extreme Politically Correct Language

Let's imagine two different situations:

Situation 1

You start a new job in a large office. The person showing you round describes some of the members of staff using the following politically correct language. Match each PC phrase with one of the franker meanings:

a) deaf	b) ugly	c) drunk	d) old	e) fat	f) ignorant

1. Paul isn't _____, he's just rather **factually unencumbered**.

2. Jean over there isn't _____, she's just **horizontally enabled**.

3. As you can see, Brioney is _____, but we prefer to say **aurally inconvenienced**.

4. Tina is almost sixty-six, but we don't call her _____; rather **chronologically gifted**.

5. Tommy works hard but has the tendency to get _____ – or as we like to put it, **over-served** – every now and again.

6. One might devise some cruel nicknames for Maggie, but I prefer to think of her as **visually challenging**, and not _____.

Situation 2

Your job doesn't work out and after about six months you begin a new job at a furniture store. The person showing you round describes a few of the people who work there using the following quite direct and insensitive language. You are so used to PC language by now that you try to correct your new colleague, using one of the following PC phrases in each case:

a) terminally inconvenienced	d) motivationally deficient
b) an individual with temporarily unmet objectives	e) potentially good
c) residentially flexible	f) involuntarily leisured

1. When you say that Jonathan is **lazy**, do you mean _____?
2. I prefer to think of your former colleague, Mr. Hoskins, as _____, rather than **dead**.
3. Instead of labelling your boss a **failure**, you should say that he's _____.
4. I'm sorry, but calling that person who asked you for change a **bum** isn't very kind. Could you perhaps refer to him as _____ instead?
5. I believe that instead of considering Larry **pure evil**, we should think of him as _____.
6. No, I wasn't **unemployed** for two months. I was simply _____.

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Here is a selection of politically correct phrases that we don't use very often, apart from to make jokes and perhaps poke fun at the politically correct movement – and to provide examples of "political correctness gone mad!" – i.e. when the politically correct movement goes against general common sense:

ABILITY

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
blind	visually challenged
deaf	visually orientated
deaf	aurally inconvenienced
ignorant	factually unencumbered
stupid	differently wise
incompetent	differently qualified
insane person	mental explorer
crazy/nuts	emotionally different
drunk	over-served

AGE

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
old	chronologically gifted
old	chronologically challenged
old	experientially enhanced
false teeth	alternative dentation

APPEARANCE

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
fat	differently sized
fat	horizontally enabled
fat person/fatty	person of substance
fat person/fatty	person with an alternative body image
ugly	cosmetically different
ugly	facially challenged
ugly	visually challenging
bald	hair disadvantaged
bald	follically challenged
short	vertically challenged
large nosed	nasally gifted

CRIME

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
criminal	morally challenged
criminal	behaviourally challenged
prisoner	resident at Her Majesty's pleasure

DEATH

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
dead	metabolically challenged
dead	biologically challenged

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dead	terminally inconvenienced

FAILURE

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
to fail	to achieve a deficiency
failure	deferred success
a failure (thing)	an incomplete success
a failure (person)	an individual with temporarily unmet objectives
wrong	differently logical
mistake	inoperative statement/event

GENDER

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
housewife	domestic engineer/artist
Manchester	Personchester

HOMELESSNESS

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
homeless (adj)	involuntarily undomiciled
homelessness	mortgage-free living
homeless person/bum	involuntarily domiciled
homeless person/bum	outdoor urban dweller
homeless person/bum	residentially flexible

PERSONALITY

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
liar	differently honest
clumsy	uniquely coordinated
lazy	motivationally deficient
boring	differently interesting
evil	morally different
evil	potentially good

RACE

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
baa baa black sheep… (children's nursery rhyme)	baa baa green sheep…

STATUS

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
geek/nerd	socially challenged
ghetto	ethnically homogenous area

UNEMPLOYMENT

Blunt / Frank / Direct Language:	*PC Phrases that are Too Extreme:*
redundancy	career change opportunity
unemployed	indefinitely idled
unemployed	involuntarily leisured

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unemployed	engaged in an orderly transition between career changes

2. Everyday Politically Correct Language

Here is a selection of common politically correct phrases that we have accepted into our everyday vocabulary, and that we use to replace language that might cause offence or even incite hatred towards other people, especially members of minority groups:

ABILITY

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
handicapped people/the disabled	disabled people/differently abled people
disability	ability
educationally subnormal/simple/ stupid/dumb	person with learning difficulties *or* special needs
the mentally handicapped/ retarded person/crazy guy/ madman	mentally ill people/individual with a mental illness
deaf	hearing impaired
blind	sight impaired
half blind	partially sighted
midgets/dwarves	little people
gifted child	advanced learner

AGE

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
old person	senior citizen
child/kid	young person

APPEARANCE

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
fat/obese	overweight/big/has puppy fat

GENDER

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
girls (about women)	women
Miss/Mrs	Ms
the little woman/the wife/'er indoors/ the old ball and chain	my wife/life partner
housewife	homemaker
policeman	police officer
postman	postal worker
steward/-ess	flight attendant
manageress/actress	manager/actor
barmaid/-man	bar attendant
fireman	fire-fighter
chairman	chair
mankind	humankind

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manhole	hole in the ground
manpower	labour/human resources
right-hand man	chief assistant

RACE

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
American Indians	Native Americans
Canadian Indians	First Nation People
blacks/coloureds	African Americans/black people/person of colour/ ethnic minorities
Aborigines	Aboriginal Australians/Australian Aboriginal person
white	Caucasian
half-caste	mixed race
blacklisted	banned
black sheep of the family	outsider, pariah

SEXUALITY

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
gays	gay people
sex change	gender reassignment
promiscuous	sexually active

STATUS

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
drug addict	person with a chemical dependency/person in recovery
tramp/bum	homeless person
trailer park	mobile home community
broken home	dysfunctional family

OTHER NEGATIVE THINGS

Don't say:	*Say instead:*
used/second-hand	recycled
worst	least best
mistake	learning experience
to lie	to be creative with the truth/with the facts
politically correct	culturally sensitive

Further Study:

* Consider politically correct language and behaviour in *your* culture. How politically correct are *you* / is *your* school or workplace?

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- Examine the language in "extreme" politically correct phrases, and try to build your own:

A typical "extreme" PC phrase consists of:

- an **adverb** of viewpoint (often an "-al" adjective + "-ly" suffix, e.g. *emotional* + *ly* = *emotionally*) related to the thing that you want to describe, such as:

academically		education
alphabetically		alphabet/language
aurally		hearing
behaviourally		behaviour/actions
biologically		biology/body/metabolism
chronologically		time
cosmetically		face/appearance
differently		being different
ecologically		the environment
economically		money
emotionally		emotions/feelings
environmentally		the environment
ethnically		ethnicity/race
experientially		experience/age
facially		face
factually		facts/information/knowledge
follically		hair
geographically		geography/places
historically		history
ideologically	connected with…	ideologies
indefinitely		lasting for a long time or forever
involuntarily		something not being your choice
mathematically		mathematics/numbers
metabolically		body/metabolism
morally		morality/behaviour/actions
motivationally		motivation level/behaviour
musically		music/rhythm
nasally		nose
nautically		boats/the sea/the ocean
politically		politics/power
psychologically		the mind/the brain/psychology
racially		race
residentially		housing
socially		society/other people
statistically		statistics/facts
technically		technical things
technologically		technology/computers/gadgets
terminally		death/the end
vertically		height
visually		sight

etc.

- …with an **adjective**, such as:

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challenged
challenging
deficient
different
disadvantaged
discouraged
embarrassed
impaired
inconvenienced
unencumbered
unfocused
untalented

> = **negative meaning** *e.g. you don't have enough of something or you are not able to do something*

enabled
enhanced
flexible
gifted
improved
interesting
orientated
qualified

etc.

> = **positive meaning** *e.g. you have a lot of something or are able to do something*

Examples of new politically correct phrases, using some of the words listed above:

- Somebody who is afraid of travelling by boat could be called **nautically challenged**.

- Somebody who is lost could be said to be **geographically unfocused**.

  etc.

Answers:

Situation 1:	1. f)	2. e)	3. a)	4. d)	5. c)	6. b)
Situation 2:	1. d)	2. a)	3. b)	4. c)	5. e)	6. f)