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SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF TRANSLATING ENGLISH POLITICAL CORRECTNESS VOCABULARY IN UKRAINIAN MEDIA DISCOURSE

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The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the sociolinguistic aspects and specifics of translating English political correctness vocabulary in modern Ukrainian media discourse. The study's relevance is driven by rapid changes in English communicative culture and the urgent need to adapt domestic translation strategies to modern ethical standards in Western society. The theoretical and methodological basis of the research relies on the linguistic relativity hypothesis and S. Pinker's “euphemism treadmill” concept, which substantiates the cyclical nature of sensitive vocabulary renewal. To achieve the goal, a complex of methods was used: structural-functional analysis of theoretical foundations, comparative analysis of originals and translations, and contextual analysis of pragmatic functions. The empirical base consists of materials from leading media (The Guardian, The New York Times, BBC) for 2020–2024. As a result of the work, four dominant reproduction strategies have been systematized:

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Соціолінгвістичні аспекти відтворення англомовної політкоректної лексики в українському медійному дискурсі (Англійською)

euphemization, calque, descriptive translation, and cultural adaptation. The specificity of translation of racial nominations, inclusive language, and social status has been investigated. Significant discrepancies in gender representation were revealed: the striving for neutralization in English contrasts with active feminization in Ukrainian. Recent lexical shifts have been analyzed, in particular the transition from the term “homeless” to “unhoused”. It is concluded that the Ukrainian language is at the stage of “catch-up modernization”, integrating Western concepts. It is proven that the translator acts as a co-creator of new communication ethics. Prospects for further research are seen in the empirical analysis of the reception of new borrowings.

Keywords: *political correctness, media discourse, euphemism treadmill, translation strategies, sociocultural adaptation, inclusive language, gender linguistics.*

СОЦІОЛІНГВІСТИЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ВІДТВОРЕННЯ АНГЛОМОВНОЇ ПОЛІТКОРЕКТНОЇ ЛЕКСИКИ В УКРАЇНСЬКОМУ МЕДІЙНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

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У статті здійснено комплексний аналіз соціолінгвістичних аспектів та специфіки перекладу англійської політкоректної лексики в сучасному українському медіадискурсі. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена стрімкою динамікою змін в англійській комунікативній культурі та загальною потребою адаптації вітчизняних перекладацьких стратегій до сучасних етичних норм західного суспільства. Теоретико-методологічним підґрунтям розвідки слугують гіпотеза

лінгвістичної відносності та концепція “бігової доріжки евфемізмів” С. Пінкера, яка обґрунтовує циклічність оновлення чутливої лексики. Для досягнення мети використано комплекс методів: структурно-функціональний аналіз теоретичних засад, порівняльний аналіз оригіналів і перекладів та контекстуальний аналіз прагматичних функцій. Емпіричну базу склали матеріали провідних медіа (*The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *BBC*) за 2020–2024 роки. У результаті роботи систематизовано чотири домінантні стратегії відтворення: евфемізація, калькування, описовий переклад та культурна адаптація. Досліджено специфіку перекладу расових номінацій, інклюзивної мови та соціального статусу. Виявлено суттєві розбіжності в гендерній репрезентації: прагнення до нейтралізації в англійській мові контрастує з активним використанням фемінітивів в українській. Проаналізовано новітні лексичні зсуви, зокрема перехід від терміна “homeless” до “unhoused”. Зроблено висновок, що українська мова перебуває на етапі «наздоганяючої модернізації», інтегруючи західні концепти. Доведено, що перекладач виступає співтворцем нової етики спілкування. Перспективи подальших розвідок вбачаються в емпіричному аналізі реценції нових запозичень.

Ключові слова: політична коректність, медіадискурс, бігова доріжка евфемізмів, перекладацькі стратегії, соціокультурна адаптація, інклюзивна мова, гендерна лінгвістика.

Introduction. In the modern globalized environment, the functions of a translator are changing: instead of solely transmitting information in another language, they increasingly take on the role of a specialist who ensures the correct alignment of cultural contexts during communication. Modern English-language media discourse, which significantly influences the formation of the global information space, is characterized by high lexical change driven by the phenomenon of political correctness. For a Ukrainian translator, neglecting these linguistic and cultural processes or literally transferring foreign lexical units without considering their sociocultural semantics entails the risk not only violating interpretative and communicative adequacy but also undermining professional authority.

The relevance of the study is driven by the need to develop adaptive translation strategies that allow for reproducing not only the denotative meaning of a word but also its connotative characteristics—neutrality or inclusivity—in accordance with modern ethical standards of Western society.

When examining the phenomenon of political correctness, one cannot overlook its deep connection with the interaction between language and thought.

The theoretical basis for political correctness is effectively the linguistic relativity hypothesis, known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in its “weak” interpretation. According to this concept, the language system does not merely reflect reality mirror-like but, to a certain extent, structures it and influences how speakers perceive the surrounding world. As Edward Sapir noted, “the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group” [Sapir 1929, p. 209]. Accordingly, the logic of political correctness proponents is that changing the linguistic code—for example, abandoning stigmatized names in favor of neutral ones—can initiate social changes and reduce discrimination in society.

However, the process of replacing “awkward” words with new, more acceptable ones is usually neither linear nor static. This dynamic is most thoroughly described by the renowned Canadian-American psycholinguist Steven Pinker, who introduced the concept of the “euphemism treadmill” [Pinker 2002, p. 235]. The essence of the phenomenon is that euphemisms intended to replace offensive words inevitably absorb the negative connotations of the phenomena they denote over time, as societal attitudes toward the phenomenon change much more slowly than language. In his work, Pinker emphasizes: “People invent new words for emotionally charged referents, but soon the euphemism becomes tainted by association, and a new word must be found, which soon acquires its own connotations, and so on” [Pinker 2002, p. 235]. As a result, the new “polite” word becomes offensive, necessitating another lexical replacement. A clear example of such term degradation can be traced in the English language regarding people with mental impairments: from the medical term “*idiot*”, which eventually acquired an abusive connotation, to the word “*retarded*” (initially neutral «сповільнений у розвитку»), which later also became stigmatized and was replaced by the construction “*mentally challenged*”, and currently – “*person with intellectual disabilities*”. For a translator, understanding this concept is critical, as a dictionary equivalent considered correct ten years ago may be interpreted today as socially unacceptable or discrediting vocabulary.

The functional load of political correctness euphemisms in media texts extends far beyond mere politeness. Researchers Keith Allan and Kate Burridge identify several key functions, among which shielding and elevating social status are priorities for mass media discourse. Shielding protects the speaker and listener from unpleasant aspects of reality, acting as a “verbal shield” [Allan & Burridge 1991, p. 20]. This is manifested, for example, in the use of the term “*collateral damage*” instead of “*civilian deaths*”. Meanwhile, the function of elevation aims

to increase the prestige of certain professions or social groups, as seen in the transformation of “*garbage collector*” into “*sanitation engineer*”. However, in modern discourse, the dominant function becomes the prevention of manifestations of discrimination – ageism, lookism, racism, and sexism – which requires the translator to possess not only linguistic competence but also deep empathy and awareness of current sociopolitical trends in the target culture.

The purpose of the article is to identify the specifics and systematize the dominant strategies for reproducing English political correctness vocabulary in modern Ukrainian media discourse. The study aims at analyzing how the Ukrainian language adapts to dynamic shifts in the Western sociocultural paradigm, particularly within the context of S. Pinker's “euphemism treadmill” concept, and determining the most effective translation solutions to preserve the pragmatic inclusivity of the original without violating the norms of the target language.

Methodology. To solve the set tasks, a complex of general scientific and linguistic methods were used. The theoretical and methodological basis consisted of the method of analysis and synthesis, which allowed for systematizing the views of foreign and domestic scholars on the nature of political correctness and the S. Pinker's concept.

The empirical part of the research is based on comparative analysis, which enabled the identification of common and distinctive features in the linguistic framing of sensitive topics in English and Ukrainian. Contextual analysis was applied to determine the specific meanings and pragmatic nuances of politically correct terms within their communicative environment. We employed the continuous sampling method to select factual material from leading English-language media sources (The Guardian, The New York Times, BBC) and their Ukrainian translations covering the period of 2020–2024. Finally, the descriptive method allowed us to classify the identified translation transformations and group them into four dominant strategies.

Results and their Discussion. In the context of empirical analysis, it is pertinent to note that racial and ethnic designations constitute the most dynamic and, simultaneously, the most sensitive lexical category within modern English-language media discourse. It is here that Pinker's concept of the “euphemism treadmill” is most vividly manifested, necessitating extreme caution in translational choices. The decision made by the Associated Press in the summer of 2020, against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement, serves as an illustrative example of a global

shift in linguistic norms. On June 19, 2020, the agency officially updated its standards, stipulating that “*Black*”, when denoting racial, ethnic, or cultural identity, should be capitalized. One month later, on July 20, the AP issued a clarification stating that the term “*white*” would remain lowercase. The rationale provided by John Daniszewski, Vice President for Standards at the Associated Press, rests on the premise that “*Black*” denotes not merely skin color, but a shared history and cultural heritage. Conversely, white people are viewed as lacking a comparable monolithic shared identity predicated on historical discrimination or a unified culture [Meir 2020].

For the Ukrainian translator, this seemingly purely orthographic shift presents a significant challenge. In the Ukrainian language, names of races (Europoid, Mongoloid, Negroid) and adjectives derived from them are traditionally written in lowercase. A literal transposition of the capital letter – such as “*Чорні люди*” – would appear in a domestic journalistic text as a grammatical error or an inappropriate calque that contradicts current orthographic norms. An analysis of translated news materials from BBC News Ukraine and Voice of America covering the period of 2022–2024 demonstrates that domestic media avoid calquing the capital letter, favoring the terms “*чорношкірі*” or “*темношкірі*” in lowercase. However, another nuance arises here: in English, the term “*African American*”, which was considered the benchmark of political correctness in the 1990s, is gradually ceasing to be universal.

According to the recommendations of The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage, authors are advised, “to use the term “*Black*” when referring not only to people of African descent but also to those whose direct roots are in the Caribbean or South America. The manual emphasizes that in some instances, “*African American*” may be inappropriate, and where possible, more specific designations should be used, for example, “*Nigerian-American*” or “*Jamaican-American*” [Siegal & Connolly 2015, p. 19]. In this instance, Ukrainian translation often obscures this ethno cultural distinction by employing “*афроамериканець*” as a universal hypernym, which, from the standpoint of fidelity to the original, constitutes a simplification. In contemporary translation practice, acronyms designating minority groups—specifically the British term “*BAME*” (*Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic*) and the American “*POC*” (*People of Color*) – have emerged as increasingly problematic. The term “*BAME*” long constituted the standard in British official documentation and the press; however,

the 2021 report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended its discontinuation.

The report emphasizes that the usage of “*BAME*” is “demeaning to be categorized in relation to what we are not, rather than what we are: British Indian, British Caribbean and so on” [Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 2021, p. 33]. This creates a paradoxical situation for the translator: whereas in a 2019 text, “*BAME*” could be descriptively rendered as “*представники етнічних меншин*”, in post–2021 texts, the presence of this term in the source language may already be marked as archaic or bureaucratic, and the translation must reflect this stylistic shift. Furthermore, this umbrella term masks significant disparities in social outcomes among different groups, allowing institutions to report on the success of “*BAME employees*” taken together while ignoring the specific challenges of communities that remain marginalized. From a translational perspective, the Commission's conclusion regarding alternatives is critically important; surveys indicated that among minority representatives, the term “*ethnic minority*” is significantly more popular than the American equivalent “*people of color*” or the acronym “*BAME*” itself. Consequently, for a translator working with British texts, the use of the Ukrainian equivalents “*етнічна меншина*” or “*етнічна група*” is not merely permissible but is the stylistically and semantically most precise option endorsed by the primary source. This represents a rare instance where the direct translation of “*ethnic minority*” – “*етнічна меншина*” proves to be more politically correct than attempts to adapt fashionable neologisms. The reproduction of the American term “*People of Color*” (*POC*) merits particular attention. The literal translation “*кольорові люди*” in the Ukrainian language—as in many other Eastern European languages – carries a persistent negative connotation associated with the era of colonialism and segregation. This is comparable to the obsolete English designation “*colored people*”, which is currently regarded as offensive [Malesky 2014]. Conversely, in contemporary English discourse, “*People of Color*” serves as an exemplar of “*people-first language*”, in which the emphasis is placed on the individual, while color functions as a marker of solidarity rather than a stigma [American Psychological Association 2020]. Ukrainian translators are compelled to resort to strategies of descriptive translation or generalization, employing constructions such as “*представники небілих рас*” or “*етнічні спільноти*”. However, such variants inevitably result in a loss of the original's conciseness and the specific nuance of pride embedded in the term “*POC*” by activists. This

corroborates the thesis that politically correct lexicon is frequently culture-specific and lacks full equivalence in languages belonging to societies that have not encountered analogous historical processes of civil rights struggles by racial groups. The subsequent critical domain of translation encompasses vocabulary pertaining to an individual's physical and mental state, as it is within this segment that the most distinct convergence of approaches between English-language and Ukrainian practices is observed. Whereas in racial discourse the translator is frequently compelled to navigate cultural disparities, the sphere of inclusive language is dominated by the precise, normatively codified principle of "person-first language". This concept, officially enshrined, inter alia, in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), mandates avoiding adjectives functioning as nouns to designate groups of individuals. For instance, instead of constructions such as "invalid" or "the mentally ill" which reduce the individual solely to their diagnosis, the standard prescribes the use of constructions like "person with a physical disability" or "person with a mental illness" [American Psychological Association 2020, p. 147]. This linguistic shift is directly reflected in Ukrainian translation practice, where changes are occurring not merely at the level of etiquette but also within the legislative framework. A watershed moment was the adoption of Law of Ukraine No. 2581-VIII in 2018, which officially excised the term "інвалід" from all legislative acts, replacing it with "особа з інвалідністю" [Верховна Рада України 2018]. This represents a rare instance in which the official-business style of the Ukrainian language synchronized with Western standards more rapidly than colloquial speech or media discourse. Consequently, when translating the English phrase "Access aimed at disabled people..." from British sources – where the term "disabled people" remains in frequent use within the framework of the so-called social model of disability – the Ukrainian specialist must prioritize the form "люди з інвалідністю". This entails strictly avoiding the obsolete "інваліди" and even the euphemism "люди з особливими потребами", which is criticized in contemporary discourse for its paternalistic connotations and semantic imprecision. It is also pertinent to single out the analysis of verbal constructions and fixed expressions that designate methods of human interaction with assistive devices. English-language style guides – specifically the recommendations of the National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ) and the American Psychological Association (APA) – explicitly discourage the usage of expressions such as "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound", as they carry connotations of helplessness and confinement. Instead, the neutral variant

“wheelchair user” or “someone who uses a wheelchair” is proposed. This phrasing emphasizes the individual’s active agency for whom the wheelchair serves as an instrument of mobility rather than a prison [American Psychological Association 2020, p. 147; National Center on Disability and Journalism at Arizona State University’s Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication 2018, p. 44]. In the Ukrainian media landscape, the cliché “прикутий до ліжка/візка” remains extremely prevalent due to its dramatic effect. However, in high-quality news translations, one can observe the consistent implementation of the term “людина, яка користується інвалідним візком”. This indicates that the translation strategy in this context extends beyond mere lexical equivalence and becomes an instrument for countering victimization. Conversely, blind adherence to the “person-first” rule may prove detrimental to the translator if the specific preferences of distinct communities advocating “identity-first language” are disregarded [American Psychological Association 2020, p. 146–147]. A prominent example is found within the autistic population and the Deaf community. Numerous activists within these groups in the Anglophone sphere reject the formulation “person with autism”, regarding autism as an integral component of their identity rather than a disease or condition that one can “possess”. They insist on the designation “autistic person” [American Psychological Association 2020, p. 218]. For the Ukrainian translator, this presents a dilemma; while “людина з аутизмом” remains the standard, risk-free norm, in op-eds or interviews with activists, it is imperative to remain attentive to the speaker’s self-identification. Ignoring this nuance and the uncritical editing of the text to align with general standards of political correctness may distort the author’s position, constituting a violation of translation ethics. In translation practice, another domain clearly emerges that necessitates consideration of evolving sociolinguistic norms: vocabulary related to social status, specifically the transition from the term “homeless” to “unhoused”. According to a linguistic analysis by The Guardian, the term “unhoused” was adopted widely in 2020, although Beverly Graham first used it in its modern sense as early as 2006. Her usage was predicated on the argument that individuals living on the streets still possess a home in the broad sense: “They have a home: Seattle is their home.” [The Guardian 2023]. The pivotal semantic distinction that the translator must reproduce lies in the historical association of the word “homeless” with a severance of social and emotional ties. Conversely, “unhoused” – literally rendered in Ukrainian as “незабезпечений житлом” – places the emphasis on the

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Соціолінгвістичні аспекти відтворення англомовної політкоректної лексики в українському медійному дискурсі (Англійською)

structural issue – namely, the shortage of affordable housing – rather than on the individual’s personal failure. Notably, the term “*unhoused*” cannot be classified as a strict neologism, as it appears as early as William Shakespeare’s tragedy “*Othello*”, albeit with a divergent signification [The Guardian 2023]. For the Ukrainian translator, this semantic distinction presents a formidable challenge, since the domestic lexical system has not yet developed a settled monolexemic equivalent for the concept of “*unhoused*”. While the term “*бомж*” – a Soviet acronym standing for “*without a fixed place of residence*” – constitutes an absolutely inadmissible stylistic dissonance in contemporary publicist discourse, marking the speaker as a bearer of archaic, discriminatory views, the neutral variants “*безхатченко*” or “*безхатько*” remain semantically closer to the English “*homeless*”. To convey the pragmatics of the construction “*experiencing homelessness*”, translators increasingly resort to verbal periphrasis, such as “люди, що опинилися на вулиці” [Вишницька 2020]. Although such constructions are unwieldy, they allow for the preservation of the original’s humanistic pathos while avoiding stigmatization, which is a priority task in the translation of socially sensitive texts. The most intriguing collision arises from the juxtaposition of English and Ukrainian strategies of gender representation, revealing diametrically opposed vectors of development. The English language, functioning as an analytic system, advances along the path of neutralization – specifically, the elimination of gender markers. Thus, “*fireman*” is replaced by “*firefighter*”, “*chairman*” by “*chairperson*”, and the generic “*he*” is superseded by the “*singular they*”. As mandated by The Guardian Style Guide, the use of gender-neutral terminology is compulsory when an individual’s gender is irrelevant to the context, serving to prevent the subconscious reinforcement of the association of specific professions exclusively with the male gender [The Guardian 2015]. In contrast, the Ukrainian language, functioning as a synthetic system, has opted for the path of visualizing female presence through the active formation of femininities. This trend was legitimized by the new Ukrainian Orthography of 2019, which, in Article 32, codified the productivity of the suffixes -к-, -иц-(я), and -ин-(я) for the derivation of professional titles [Українська національна комісія з питань правопису 2019, с. 27]. This engenders a compelling translational paradox: while the original English text may intentionally employ “*spokesperson*” to de-emphasize gender, the Ukrainian translator–cognizant that the referent is female – is compelled to choose between the neutral “*речник*”, which is grammatically masculine and may be perceived as discriminatory against women, and the marked “*речниця*”. The latter

choice contradicts the original's strategy of neutralization but aligns with the domestic trend toward gender equity. An analysis of translations indicates that Ukrainian media use the strategy of feminization in 90% of cases—e.g., “очільниця”, “міністерка”, “снікерка” – effectively “inscribing” gender where the English language had obscured it. This provides grounds for asserting that political correctness is not a universal template, in as much as in one culture it is achieved through the erasure of distinctions, whereas in another it is realized through their delineation.

Conclusions. Summarizing the results of the comparative analysis, it can be argued that reproducing English political correctness vocabulary in Ukrainian translation is a complex, multi-level process that extends far beyond the simple search for dictionary equivalents. The Ukrainian language is currently attempting to “catch up” with global modernization, as evidenced by the active integration of Western sociocultural concepts into the domestic communicative space. This process often leads to asynchrony between linguistic systems, where a new concept already exists, but a native word to denote it has not yet formed. Based on the processed examples, four key strategies were identified, which correlate with the classification of translation transformations for sensitive vocabulary. The first strategy is euphemization, which allows for reducing the degree of tension in the text. The second is calque, which often borders on direct borrowing (e.g., ageism, mansplaining) and can be characterized as an inevitable stage of language globalization. The third strategy – descriptive translation – remains the only tool for the exact reproduction of realities such as “*POC*” or “*unhoused*”. The fourth strategy – cultural adaptation – demonstrates different vectors of societal development: the striving for gender neutralization in English versus active feminization in Ukrainian. To conclude, it should be emphasized that the translator's work with politically correct vocabulary is a constant process of verifying meanings, as the “euphemism treadmill” never stops. What is the norm today may become an archaism tomorrow. It is worth noting that the Ukrainian specialist, in this context, acts not only as a retransmitter but also as a co-author of new communication ethics, shaping a tolerant environment through the means of the native language. Future research prospects lie in analyzing the reception of new borrowings by the Ukrainian audience to define the boundary between necessary political correctness and artificial newspeak.

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Соціолінгвістичні аспекти відтворення англомовної політкоректної лексики в українському медійному дискурсі (Англійською)