Political Correctness

- Language, or behavior, which is claimed to be calculated to provide a minimum of offense, particularly to the racial, cultural, or other identity groups being described

- Term "PC" is hotly contested
- Identity politics (gay rights, feminism, multiculturalism, disability rights)
- "gender-neutral" job titles: lineworker vs lineman, chairperson vs chairman, differently abled vs disabled, Native American vs Indian

- Modern concept arose in 1970's-80's: socially acceptable for women and non-Caucasians to pursue lifestyles that had been previously been held (nearly) exclusively by Caucasian men, such as senior management position within a large corporation.

- English language must change its male-centered nouns such as "chairman" to more inclusive terms such as "chairperson"

- Using "person with a disability" or preferably "differently abled" in preference to "handicapped" or "crippled"; "mentally ill" in preference to "crazy"

- Belief based on Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: language's grammatical categories shape its speakers' ideas and action

- The objective was (and remains) to bring peoples' unconscious biases into awareness, allowing them to make more informed choices about their language and making them aware of things different people might find offensive

Goal of changing language

- Certain people have their rights, opportunities, or freedoms restricted due to their categorization as members of a group with a derogatory stereotype

Goal of changing language

- This categorization is largely implicit and unconscious, and is facilitated by the easy availability of labeling terminology

Goal of changing language

- By making the labeling terminology problematic, people are made to think consciously about how they describe someone

Goal of changing language

- Once labeling is a conscious activity, individual merits of a person, rather than their perceived membership in a group, become more apparent

- Language's grammatical categories control its speakers' possible thoughts
- Ways in which we see the world may be influenced by the kind of language we use
- Sexist language promotes sexist thought

- Members of identity groups sometime embrace terms that others seek to change
- Deaf culture has always considered the label "Deaf" as an affirming statement of group membership and not insulting

- Term now substituted for term "deaf" is "hearing impaired"
- Developed to include people with hearing loss due to aging, accidents, and other causes
- Considered highly derogatory by many deaf people

- Term "Hard of Hearing" however, is considered an acceptable descriptive term for a person who has limited to no hearing

- New terms are often awkward
- Substitutes for the original stark language concerning differences such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and political views

- Some argue that political correctness amounts to censorship and endangers free speech
- Politically correct terminology can be used to soften concepts that would be unacceptable in normal language

- Conservatives often view many politically correct terms as being linguistic cover for an evasion of personal responsibility
- "juvenile delinquents" become "children at risk"
- "Illegal aliens" become "undocumented workers"

- Political correctness can often detect offensive language when there is none
- "herstory" instead of "history"

- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell
- Newspeak
- "bad" replaced by "ungood" and the concept of "freedom" has been eliminated over time

- If humans cannot form the words to express the ideas underlying a revolution, then they cannot revolt