

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

POLITICALLY CORRECT ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND GENDER IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ABSTRACT

In the present study, we investigated the responses provided by Bosnia and Herzegovina's male and female respondents in regards to their usage of politically correct English language across various categories. Those categories include gender, disability, age, work, socioeconomic status, and race terminology. We hypothesized that significant differences would be present between respondents based on their gender. As the results suggest, female respondents were more inclined to use politically correct terminology in comparison to their counterparts, male participants. The distinctions were found to be present in all categories but mostly related to gender, where female respondents showed a higher preference for politically correct English language, while male respondents showed a tendency to select less politically correct English language terminology. Furthermore, categories related to disability and race showed mixed results to some extent. Therefore, we conclude that the findings point towards the importance of comprehending gender-specific tendencies when it comes to the adoption and usage of politically correct English language, as such differences can have significant influence on inclusion and communication within varied social and formal contexts.

Keywords: politically correct language, English, gender



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1. Introduction

As political correctness and politically correct language have gained attention from various disciplines over the last several decades, it has become a widely researched topic. The Global North has witnessed a large body of research on the topic, a natural phenomenon considering that its origins are drawn to the USA. Thus, the research focuses primarily on politically correct English, given its global influence and the prevalence of English-speaking academic and media institutions. However, there is also significant research on implementing politically correct language and its unique adaptations within native languages worldwide, exploring how local cultural, social, and linguistic contexts influence the development and acceptance of politically correct terms and practices in non-English-speaking regions and the Global South. In this sense, the Balkans region, more specifically Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), has also undergone exploration of the interconnectedness of the Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian Language and political correctness in a broad sense. However, the politically correct *English language* usage within this English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting is still under-researched.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge this notable gap and explore an aspect of the politically correct English language in B&H. In this Global South country, English has a strong foothold and plays a vital role in different walks of life, such as educational settings, business, etc. (e.g., Brdarević-Čeljo & Dubravac, 2022; Dedović-Atilla & Dubravac, 2022). More specifically, exploring how different genders engage with rhetorical sensitivity in English-spoken contexts within the country's unique socio-cultural setting was the focus of this study, as the previous global and local research has pointed toward the differences in male and female speech. Thus, we assume that these differences might also reflect on the politically correct terminology used.

To achieve this aim, 150 participants, including students and educators from Bosnian international universities and high schools, were recruited. The recruitment of participants from international educational settings was intentional, as they are enrolled in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs and thus provide a natural pool to explore politically correct English language usage.

We hope the current study will provide valuable insights into the dynamics of political correctness of the English language within Bosnian

society, specifically in terms of comparing the usage between genders. It will add to the expanding research on gendered communication studies in this region that has not delved into this specific research topic. We expect that the findings will be helpful to individuals and educators across the disciplines researching the phenomenon, as well as educational policymakers and curricula planners alike.

2. Literature review:

2.1. Defining Political Correctness

According to Collin's Dictionary, political correctness today is "demonstrating progressive ideals, especially by avoiding vocabulary considered offensive, discriminatory, or judgmental, especially concerning race and gender." As language is seen as a means to accomplish more than merely communicate, political correctness is essential in showing respect towards others. It is not easy to trace the very first coinage of this term, as there are different accounts for the exact date of its origin. It is generally linked to the mid-20th century in the United States, gaining significant traction during the 1970s and 1980s. It is believed that 'Caren de Crow, president of the National Women's Organization in 1975, first introduced the concept of "political correctness"; others attribute the term to 1793 when the Supreme Court of the United States heard the case of *Chisholm vs. Georgia*' (Monashnenko et.al. 2021, p.150). At this time, marginalized groups started objecting to derogatory and exclusionary language, which enforced social inequalities (Cameron, 1995). Feminists, in particular, played a central role in the promotion of gender-neutral language as they argued that traditional usage of language fostered gender stereotypes and biases (Pauwels, 1998). Overall, it is clear that it emerged from social movements advocating for civil rights, gender equality, and the rights of marginalized groups to promote inclusive, non-discriminatory language that respects and acknowledges the diversity and dignity of all individuals. The concept was influenced by earlier efforts to address social injustices through language reform and has evolved to address a wide range of social issues and sensitivities in public discourse (see more in Allan & Burridge, 2006; Hughes, 2010).

From its very inception, the construct has had its proponents and critics. Thus, the advocates (e.g., Cameron, 1995; Fairclough, 2003; Maass et al., 2013; Wood, 2011) often emphasize its positive aspect, perceiving it "as a way to refrain expressions, attitudes, and actions encouraging

the marginalization or exclusion of a person or a group based on their cultural, racial, ideological, or any other particular characteristic considered as relevantly different" (Avery & Steingard, 2008, p. 270). Substantial empirical research supported the benefits of this stance, with a study finding that participants exposed to gender-neutral job titles were more likely to perceive women as suitable for leadership roles (Horvath & Sczesny, 2015). Similarly, it is noted that gender-fair language could reduce implicit gender biases in children (Sczesny et al., 2016). Conversely, critics state that the concept can lead to censorship and stifle free expression (e.g., Hughes, 1993), that it distracts from real social issues (Slovenko, 2007), i.e., can be perceived as insincere or tokenistic if not accompanied by genuine efforts to address underlying social inequalities, or is against "linguistic sanity" (Kreeft, 2005, p.36).

Finally, as the findings of the studies are mixed and thus ambiguous, many scholars adopted a balanced and more nuanced approach, recognizing both its benefits and less positive implications or pitfalls (e.g. Allan & Burridge, 2006; Drury, 1996). Thus, Gallina (2016) has an interesting insight stating that freedom of speech is left to people when a community has determined what it does not want to hear in advance. Regardless of the stance, the topic has been widely researched and discussed in various domains and contexts, with two theoretical frameworks being most prominent in this pursuit.

First is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – the theory suggests that thoughts and perceptions of human beings can be easily shaped just by using certain kinds of words that may be all-inclusive (Whorf, 1956). This perspective implies that altering languages broadens social identity dialogue, thus fuelling requisite social change. Another crucial theoretical contribution made towards politically correct language is Critical discourse analysis (CDA). Among others, Fairclough (2001) has argued that political correctness challenges dominant discourses that marginalize some people. By promoting inclusive language, CDA attempts to make such power structures visible to dismantle them.

In conclusion, the political correctness phenomenon has evolved from its roots and developed into a multidimensional framework highlighting its potential advantages in fostering inclusive language, but its disadvantages too, concerning freedom of expression. The following section will shed more light on the interplay between political correctness, gender, and language, as this is the focus of the study.

2.2. Gender, Language, and Political Correctness

In the 20th century, we have witnessed an increased interest in the differences between women's and men's speech. Thus, gender and communication scholarly work has focused on the finding of the manner, type, and extent of differences in the communication behaviors of males and females, as well as the consequences of such differences and the causes of such distinctions. Deborah Tannen is one of the most innovative theorists in this subfield of gender and language use, significantly influencing our understanding of gender differences in communication styles. Tannen (1990) asserts that there are qualitative differences in the discourse between males and females and that "male" talk is best described as *report talk* while "female" talk can be aptly described as *rapport talk*. The former is information-exchange-driven and aims at asserting one's status, while the latter is about establishing and maintaining relationships.

The author Julia T. Wood (2011) also investigated the same phenomenon. It is argued that communication differences are products of cultural and societal norms, and men and women are expected to exhibit different communication features (Wood, 2011). To the above ideas, Kramarae (1981) also proposed the theory that she referred to as the muted group theory, whereby women are practically silent, or their voices are suppressed, marginalized, or less visible in communicational contexts that men dominate.

Regarding language and gender interplay specifically, Robin Lakoff is considered one of the pioneering sociolinguists who explored the link more deeply. Her work, *Language and Woman's Place* (Lakof, 1975) laid the groundwork for feminist linguistic analysis by highlighting how women's language use is often characterized by politeness, tentativeness, and a lack of assertiveness, which can perpetuate gender inequalities.

Sally McConnell-Ginet and Penelope Eckert also significantly contributed to the scholarly thought within this subdomain. In their work *Language and Gender* (McConnell-Ginet & Eckert, 2003), the authors present a detailed overview of the intricate relationship between language, gender identity, and the social structures of power. They stress that gender is performative and is shaped by people's linguistic choices and discursive pragmatics rather than inherent biological features. Additionally, Janet Holmes (2006) contributed to this field by focusing on gendered business communication, i.e., how gendered communication occurs in the workplace

and impacts the promotion and organizational experience.

Newman et al. (2008) also conducted an extensive analysis of 14,000 text samples to find and identify gender differences in language use. They found that women and men use language differently. Women use more words related to psychological and social processes, while men often refer to object properties and impersonal topics. This further suggests that gender does influence language, but rigid norms do not necessarily constrain individuals and may exhibit a range of language behaviors (Newman et al., 2008).

At this juncture, it is essential to mention the interesting typology (relevant to the study) of languages being divided into grammatical gender languages, natural gender languages, and genderless languages (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2011). Examples of the first are German, French, or Croatian, the second is English, while Turkish or Finnish are genderless languages. The three categories' differences reflect linguistic trends that share their initial purpose. In natural gender languages, there is a trend towards reducing gender-specific terms. Conversely, in grammatical gender languages, there is a trend towards introducing more gender-specific terms (European Parliament, 2009). Both trends can be interpreted as "politically correct since their goal is to modify the existing language and create a more "gender-fair" language". (Pogrmilović, 2019, p.119)

When it comes to politically correct language and gender specifically, it is essential to note that the tendency for the usage of politically correct terminology was actively supported by feminists who fought for women's rights in public and political life, including the possible linguistic discrimination. Feminists introduced such forms of address as Ms, which is neutral like Mr. and does not indicate a woman's marital status (Fahrutdinova et al., 2014). The 20th century was marked by women pursuing the same rights as men in diverse cultures and traditions. Thus, "in PC language, this is seen in changes to job titles, such as policeman, postman, and chairman, which now commonly go by the gender-neutral titles police officer, letter carrier, and chairperson or chair" (Li-na, 2018, p.67)

Advocates of non-sexist usage denounce terms such as male nurse, female doctor, or male model because these terms, in their opinions, are used gender irrelevant. They emphasize that "the statement carries the exception, implying the worker of that gender is somehow inferior or atypical of

that occupation." (Li-na, 2018, p. 67). Thus, gender stereotypes not only capture how men and women are expected to behave but also communicate how it is believed that they should behave (Prentice & Carranza, 2002), with some research indicating that women who behave in line with the stereotype are evaluated more positively than women who seem to challenge gender-stereotypical expectations (Eagly et al., 1994).

The research that has been done so far on exploring how men and women vary in their adoption and application of PC language mainly points towards women being more prone to its use. One of the early studies by Rubin and Greene (1991) examined how gender influenced the employment of inclusive languages. Women used gender-neutral terms more than men did, particularly in professional and academic domains, as found by these researchers. This behavior was associated with women's heightened attention to gender equality matters and understanding the influence of language on social perceptions. Additionally, Deborah Cameron's (1995) work on verbal hygiene showed that women tend to be more active in adopting politically correct language toward inclusiveness and challenging traditional power structures. This aligns with broader feminist objectives to achieve gender parity while resisting patriarchal norms. Swim, Mallett, and Stangor (2004) conducted a study examining gender differences in responses to sexist language. The results indicated that women were more able to recognize and respond negatively to sexism than males did through words. Furthermore, women also used PC language more often than their male counterparts as a means of countering this manifestation, highlighting a gender-based divergence in sensitivity to language that perpetuates stereotypes. Stout and Dasgupta's research (2011) also research demonstrated that women are more supportive of PC language policies and practices responded to the use of gender-exclusive language (he) during a mock job interview with a lower sense of belonging, less motivation, and less expected identification with the job compared to others exposed to gender-inclusive (he or she) or gender-neutral (one) language. Finally, Crawford and English (1984) found that men's recall of a text was better in the masculine and women's recall in the gender-fair language condition. This finding suggests that learning to use gender-neutral language involves more than overcoming linguistic novelty, as for men, it implies an unwelcome loss of their privileged position in language.

The studies that were conducted in the surrounding area of B&H also mirrored these findings, showing that there are differences between male and female speech in different contexts (e.g., Golub, 2022; Rinčić, 2018; Varošanec-Škarić et al., 2013).

In terms of the exploration of politically correct language and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian Language, the studies are rather scarce and largely focus on gender inclusivity as the most prominently explored aspect of political correctness, with a few ones investigating the language of disabilities and ageism.

In this sense, Zlotrg has extensively written on the status of gender-related politically correct language, placing it in historical and geographic contexts. (Zlotrg, 2012, 2019, 2023). Additionally, Čaušević and Zlotrg (2011) created a Guidebook with guidelines on how to avoid discrimination in education, media, and legal context with a focus on gender-inclusive language (addressing the politically correct language in terms of disabilities and LGBTIQ population. Similarly, to determine gender sensitivity and equality in literary texts, Trifunović and Petrović (2014) conducted an analysis that found that after the year 2000, educational materials generally promoted gender sensitivity and respect for gender equality principles. Both female and male characters were portrayed with non-traditional traits. Therefore, the materials for studying the Serbian language convey socially accepted ideas about gender, emphasizing that school materials are a crucial part in developing gender traits in children, using books to communicate values and norms that promote gender equality. (Trifunovic & Petrovic, 2014) Others who explored gender-fair language in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian Language include Begović (2015), Filipović (2011), Janušić (2008), Stevanović (2019), and Zahirović (2023).

Regarding the representation of people with disabilities in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian languages, Ružičić (2004) and Ružičić-Novković (2014) provided valuable insights. Ružičić (2004) focused on the representation of people with disabilities in media discourse in Serbia. As the research had an aim to understand how media contributes to systematic discrimination, it was found out that the portrayal of people with disabilities often perpetuates negative stereotypes and does not help change attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Ružičić-Novković (2014) also emphasized the gradual change in the Serbian language, with efforts that have been made to create a historical overview

of disability terminology and compile a dictionary to ensure proper and respectful language used in formal settings. Additionally, Matić and Stojan (2009) also explored how persons with disabilities are represented in the print media.

Bašaragin (2020) explored the link between ageism and language. The results showed that an anti-aging magazine ad, taken as a whole and in parts, advocates implicit and explicit intolerance towards aging (women) and that the use of offensive expressions for old persons is part of the patriarchal attitude towards them. The conclusion is that old age is a social construct of the patriarchal society that should be changed by young people.

However, as these studies mainly dealt with native languages and the surrounding countries and focused on gender differences in language use in general, it is clear that the use of politically correct English Language in B&H is highly under-researched. Moreover, the politically correct English language among individuals (and genders) using it has not been explored so far, highlighting the need for further research in this field.

3. Methodology

The present section will provide more detailed information regarding survey's participants, research question and hypothesis, instrument, and data collection and analysis.

3.1. Participants

The sampling size was 150 international university students and professors teaching in international high schools and universities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, out of which 64 were educators (42.6%) and 86 students (57.3%). Out of 150 respondents, 64% were female, and 36% were male respondents (see Table 1). Participants were also required to provide their age, and their responses were divided into four age groups: 20–24 accounts for 53.3% of the total respondents, or slightly over half of the sample, most likely made up of study participants' pupils (see Table 1). The next age group, which accounted for 32% of all participants, is 25–34. This group is followed by 35–44-year-olds (11.3%) and 45+ (3.3%). As shown in Table 1, 66% of respondents have been learning/using the language for more than ten years, and 26% of respondents said they have been learning/using English for six to ten years, strengthening their comments' relevance. Merely 5.3% of participants indicated that they have been using English for three to five years, 2% for one to two years, and 0.7%

for less than a year. These 8% of students most likely recently started their university paths.

Table 1:

Group descriptives regarding respondents' demographic information

Age		
Value	Frequency	Percent
20–24	80	53.3
25–34	48	32
35–44	17	11.3
45+	5	3.3
Status		
Value	Frequency	Percent
Educator	64	42.7
Student	86	57.3
Gender		
Value	Frequency	Percent
Female	96	64.0
Male	54	36.0
Educational Degree		
Value	Frequency	Percent
High School	74	49.3
Bachelor's degree	38	25.3
Master's degree	30	20.0
Doctoral degree	8	6
Time using English		
Value	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 year	1	0.7
1–2 years	3	2.0
3–5 years	8	5.3
6–10 years	39	26.0
More than 10 years	99	66.0
English Level		
Value	Frequency	Percent
Poor	2	1.3
Fair	6	4.0
Good	17	11.3
Very Good	55	36.7
Excellent	70	46.7

In addition to the highly significant data on the amount of time respondents have dedicated to learning or utilizing the English language, another

piece of information is completing their educational degree. Among the students who took part in the study (refer to Table 1), 24,7% had a bachelor's degree, 20% had finished a master's degree, 6% had completed PhD studies, and 49,3% had completed high school education (university students). In terms of the participants' level of English language knowledge, 94.7% of respondents said they had decent English language proficiency, i.e. good (11.3%), very good (36.7%), or outstanding (46.7%) command of English language, while the minority of 5.3% participants assessed their knowledge as poor (1.3%) or fair (4.0%). The opinions of these students and teachers will help provide a nuanced picture of the state of PC English in this specific context.

3.2. Research Question and Hypothesis:

In order to fill this geographical and sociolinguistic gap, this study will attempt to answer the following research question:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in using politically correct terminology across various categories, including gender, disability, age, work, socioeconomic status, and race, in Bosnia and Herzegovina's educational settings?

To answer the research question, the following hypothesis has been set:

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in using politically correct terminology across various categories, including gender, disability, age, work, socioeconomic status, and race, in Bosnia and Herzegovina's educational settings.

3.3. Instrument

A quantitative approach was adopted to collect valuable insights that will be valid for the present research topic. A simple questionnaire (see Appendix) was distributed containing twenty-five questions: five related to respondents' demographic information and twenty related to the use of PC language concerning gender, disability, race, age, work, and socioeconomic status (see Appendix).

The first part of the questionnaire, demographic information, consisted of five questions in which participants were required to provide information regarding their age, gender, socioeconomic background, occupation, level of education, and proficiency level in English.

The next part of the instrument, i.e., the questionnaire (see Appendix), consisted of twenty questions to gather information on participants' language use in politically correct English, listed in six categories: disability, age, socio-economic status, work, gender, and race. The questions were formulated in a way where participants needed to select the term they usually use the most, and they were also provided an extra space to write their version if none of the given ones suited them. Among the given options, there were more and less politically correct terms, always ordered differently to avoid bias and collect honest and relevant information. The accuracy of the terms on the spectrum of politically correct terms was measured against the Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.), aided by Disability Language Style Guide by the National Center on Disability and Journalism and Merriam-Webster Dictionary. This part allows us to examine how people prefer expressing themselves in a PC English language environment.

The development of the survey questionnaire and the initial idea for such a survey was a case study from Thailand, where Phumsiri and Tangkiengsirisin (2018) analyzed the use of English with political correctness. Based on this case study, our survey adapted some questions to better align with the present research objectives. The questions were modified to acknowledge the contributions of the previous study, and the present study's questionnaire (see Appendix) expanded the existing knowledge in the field while constructing the survey to meet the specific needs of our research. Finally, reliability and validity tests were performed before the questionnaire was delivered to the respondents.

Finally, in the Results section, questions from the questionnaire regarding the use of politically correct English language (see Appendix) will be abbreviated to LC1-LC20 (*meaning: Language choice question 1, Language choice question 2, etc. – Language Choice question 20*) for a more representative and clearer results presentation.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was distributed online and intended to gather data on the usage of the politically correct English language among professors of international high schools and universities and international university students. Regarding the methods of participants' selection,

the decision to include students and professors from international educational institutions was made deliberately to enhance the study's findings by including participants from international educational institutions, as they are included in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs, which testifies to their familiarity with the usage of the English language (either politically correct or not). Educators in international high schools and universities were selected based on their role in promoting and modeling the politically correct English language within international educational environments to obtain better insights since the study aimed to determine the differences in participants' usage of the politically correct English language. Students of international universities were similarly selected based on their engagement in academic and social settings, providing real-world perspectives on how the politically correct English language is used. It was purposefully decided to include educators and students to capture a holistic view of the political English language in Bosnia and Herzegovina's educational settings and provide a more reliable answer to the research question.

The online survey was distributed to students' representatives via institutional e-mails and to international university and high school professors in the same manner or via institutional community groups. Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study objectives. They were aware that taking part in the survey is entirely optional, which gives them the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, they were informed about the approximate duration they would need to complete the survey. In order to ensure privacy, every response was anonymized, and any identifying information was kept private. Participants were not compensated for their participation.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v. 25) was used to analyze the data collected, precisely the Independent Samples T-test for male and female participants' differences regarding their language use of politically correct English language across all categories and group descriptive tables including mean scores and standard deviation for both gender categories across all twenty questions. The following chapter will present the table showing group descriptives regarding male and female actual use of the PC English language.

Results

Regarding the presentation of the results, it is essential to note that the participants were offered three choices, ranked from 1 to 3 (with one being the most politically correct and three being the least). As pointed out previously, more and less politically correct terms were included, always ordered randomly to lead participants to provide unbiased answers. The overall descriptive analysis of male and female respondents' input regarding politically correct English language terminology showed a greater preference for politically correct English language usage among women. As shown in Table 3, the mean score of female overall answers was $M=1.80$ and male respondents' $M=2.00$; it can be concluded that female respondents tend to use more politically correct terminology than males.

Table 2:
Statistical Analysis of overall Mean values of respondents' PC English language use

Participants	Questions	Mean
Male	LC1 - LC20	$M=2.00$
Female	LC1 - LC20	$M=1.80$

Furthermore, the statistical analysis showed that twelve out of twenty questions showed statistical significant differences between male and female participants' answers (see Table 3):

Table 3:
Independent sample T-test regarding the statistically significant difference in male and female actual use of PC English language

Variable	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Independent Samples Test		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
LC1	2.768	.098	-2.227	148	.027
LC2	7.047	.009	4.140	127.868	.000
LC3	9.377	.003	-4.413	91.792	.000
LC4	10.374	.002	-2.374	89.132	.020
LC5	17.046	.000	1.598	86.674	.114
LC6	0.096	.758	-1.340	148	.182
LC7	11.026	.001	-0.979	135.971	.330
LC8	4.016	.047	0.782	148	.436
LC9	5.419	.021	-3.820	100.196	.000
LC10	12.158	.001	-3.750	118.948	.000
LC11	46.900	.000	-4.510	131.294	.000

LC12	15.933	.000	-1.751	92.042	.083
LC13	10.326	.002	-3.057	127.925	.003
LC14	0.486	.487	-2.400	148	.018
LC15	8.004	.005	-0.606	120.875	.546
LC16	8.702	.004	3.227	123.963	.002
LC17	0.496	.482	0.521	148	.603
LC18	10.961	.001	-4.482	119.890	.000
LC19	8.554	.004	-0.198	129.309	.843
LC20	9.390	.003	-2.402	127.660	.018

As seen in Table above, Levene's test showed significant differences ($p<0.05$) for questions LC2, LC3, LC4, LC5, LC7, LC9, LC10, LC11, LC12, LC13, LC15, LC16, LC18, LC19, and LC20. In terms of the examined categories, the differences were shown as presented below:

- Disability-related: LC1, LC2, LC3, LC4
- Gender-related: LC9, LC10, LC11
- Work-related: LC13, LC14
- Race-related: LC16
- Socioeconomic status: LC18, LC20

In the following section, group descriptives will be presented for males and females across all the twelve aforementioned questions related to language choice in politically correct English that showed statistical significance in the difference between both genders. Examining the descriptive statistics for both genders provides more insights into potential differences in politically correct English language usage.

Regarding questions from the gender-related politically correct English language, the difference between male and female participants was found to be present in gender-specific terms such as LC9: female participants showed a strong preference for the most politically correct term "flight attendant," with a mean score of $M=1.52$, whereas male participants were more likely to use outdated, gender-specific terms, such as a steward(ess) or an air-host(ess), as reflected in their higher mean score of $M=2.13$. (see Table 4). Another question regarding gender-neutral terms, LC10, showed that female respondents were more inclined to use the term "stay-at-home-parent/spouse" ($M=2.01$) compared to male respondents who preferred less politically correct terms like "housewife" ($M=2.59$). The last question from the gender-related category

related to gender-neutral pronouns – LC11 showed that females demonstrated more openness to using gender-neutral pronouns such as “they” (M=1.90) in contrast to males who preferred gender-specific pronouns (M=2.57).

Table 4:

Group descriptives regarding students’ and educators’ actual use of PC English language

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
LC1	Female	96	1.66	.993
	Male	54	2.06	1.156
LC2	Female	96	2.01	.900
	Male	54	1.44	.744
LC3	Female	96	1.29	.664
	Male	54	1.87	.825
LC4	Female	96	1.50	.768
	Male	54	1.87	.991
LC9	Female	96	1.52	.870
	Male	54	2.13	.972
LC10	Female	96	2.01	.968
	Male	54	2.59	.880
LC11	Female	96	1.91	.996
	Male	54	2.57	.792
LC13	Female	96	1.51	.696
	Male	54	1.83	.575
LC14	Female	96	1.65	.665
	Male	54	1.93	.723
LC16	Female	96	1.61	.745
	Male	54	1.24	.642
LC18	Female	96	1.83	.959
	Male	54	2.52	.863
LC20	Female	96	2.42	.735
	Male	54	2.69	.609

Furthermore, as displayed in Table 4, the first four questions from the questionnaire from disability-related questions (see Appendix) showed statistically significant differences between males and females. LC1, regarding wheelchair users, showed that females showed a higher sensitivity to person-first language, preferring the term “a wheelchair user” (M=1.65) over males who opted more for terms such as “confined to a wheelchair” or “a victim of disability” (M=2.05).

Secondly, related to deaf terminology in LC2, males were more likely to use the term “deaf” (M=1.44), while females preferred “hard of hearing” (M=2.01). Additionally, LC3 about disability terminology indicates that females favored the term “a person with a disability” (M=1.29), while males leaned towards less preferred terms like “handicapped” (M=1.87). Finally, in LC4, females preferred the term “a person with an intellectual disability” (M=1.50) over males who were more prone to use terms such as “intellectually disabled person” (M=1.87).

Additionally, the work-category questions also showed the females’ preferences for politically correct language. LC13, including vocabulary concerning sanitation workers, female respondents showed a preference for the term “sanitation worker” (M=1.51) over males (M=1.83) who use terms such as a “garbage man” more frequently than women. Moreover, LC14, including cleaner terminology, also showed that females preferred the term “cleaner” (M=1.64) compared to males who were more likely to use terms like “cleaning lady” or “maid” (M=1.92).

Moreover, in race category questions, LC16 showed that males preferred the term “black person” (M=1.21), while females had a mean score of M=1.61, indicating a variance in terminology preference. Together with the race-related questions, the socioeconomic status category showed the difference between males and females in two questions, LC18 and LC20.

LC18 regarding income terminology showed that female respondents showed a preference for the term “lower income” (M=1.83), whereas males leaned towards terms like “impoverished” or “poor” (M=2.51). Finally, LC20 concerning terminology about immigration, females preferred a more politically correct term “undocumented immigrant” (M=2.41), contrary to males who were more likely to use the term “illegal immigrants” (M=2.68).

In summary, the results indicate that female participants showed a clear preference for politically correct English language in comparison to males, with significant differences observed across categories such as gender, disability, work, race, and socioeconomic status. These results provide a foundation for the following section, where they will be discussed in terms of the previous research and the set hypothesis.

Discussion

Concerning the analysis of the results, it is essential to mention that our hypothesis has been partially confirmed, meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between males and females in Bosnia and Herzegovina's educational settings when it comes to the actual usage of the majority of politically correct terminology while communicating in English. Based on the results provided, it can be concluded that females are the ones who are more likely to use politically correct language when communicating in English, thus confirming a significant pool of previous research in the field in other countries and languages (e.g. Crowford & English, 1984; Rubin & Greene, 1991; Stout & Dasgupta, 2011; Swim et al., 2004;).

The findings are significant considering the country's unique cultural and historical context, where traditional gender roles have shaped societal expectations for a long time. Throughout history, women in Bosnia and Herzegovina were often confined to domestic roles, with limited opportunities to be involved in professional or public life. Furthermore, these roles did not require using inclusive or politically correct language. However, the present trend among women to accept politically correct language reflects their collective efforts and the need to challenge these traditional limitations tied to women.

The results imply that females might be more sensitive to gender-neutral language in domestic roles and more prone to using gender-neutral and inclusive language in professional settings. The results also indicate that women are more comfortable and familiar with using language that shows respect for non-binary identities and have a greater preference for this terminology. All of this highlights that women lean towards a more inclusive environment and language towards minorities. Women also showed a great understanding of a person-first language, which suggests that they adhere to the standards and guidelines in communication as proposed by APA in the context of intellectual disabilities, race, and socioeconomic status, thus suggesting that their stances overall are aligned with PC language advocates (e.g., Cameron, 1995; Fairclough, 2003; Maass et al., 2013; Wood, 2011)

However, both male and female participants showed that they use more politically correct

terminology when using vocabulary concerning people from the Deaf community, which showed their familiarity with the community's preferences since both choices they selected, deaf and hard of hearing, are considered politically correct in different contexts. On the other hand, an exception where males use a more politically correct term, which is race, where men were the ones who expressed the higher understanding in the usage of politically correct terminology, might suggest that males are the ones who are more familiar with specific inclusive terms depending on the context. Thus, overall, it seems that the male examined population is either unfamiliar with the lexical nuances between the use of different synonyms or, as previous research suggests, it may stem from differing views on the necessity and impact of such practices.

Regarding the presented significant differences in the usage of politically correct language when communicating in English between males and females in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is suggested that females are generally more open to inclusive terminology. This phenomenon can be due to various factors, including the country's cultural norms, socialization, a more nuanced understanding of English language vocabulary, exposure to education on the researched topic, and professional environments. Women may have been engaged in education programs about politically correct language, which shows a higher level of awareness of it. They might be further exposed to more gender-sensitive discussions, debates, and educational settings that emphasize inclusive language, which had a huge impact on the fact that they are the ones who show a greater tendency to use politically correct terminology when communicating in English. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina also might be conditioned to use more socially and culturally respectful language, confirming some previous claims (e.g., Lakoff, 1975). Adding to this, the reason behind the females' higher level of usage of politically correct terminology when communicating in English might be attributed to the fact that some social norms in Bosnia and Herzegovina additionally encourage women to be more empathetic and to use more considerate language to show the care of others' feelings. Adding to that, they might have more personal or professional experiences that would make them the ones who are more sensitive to the usage of politically correct language. For example, women might face gender-based discrimination more than men, making them understand and

show more understanding of the impact of language on social inclusion and respect among people. As the survey took place in educational settings, the results might also be attributed to the fact that education is a more female-dominated field, as well as healthcare. Therefore, it might stress the importance of inclusive language more than in male-dominated fields.

The results might be interpreted in a way that it can be said that the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina is gender stereotypical to some extent. As stated, gender stereotypes thus not only capture how men and women are expected to behave but also communicate how it is believed that they should behave (Prentice & Carranza, 2002.) A notable observation from the questionnaire is that male respondents frequently use terms such as “cleaning lady” instead of the gender-neutral terms “sanitation worker” and “housewife” over “stay-at-home/spouse.” These particular choices indicate male’s adherence to the aforementioned traditional, more gender-specific terms among men. The reason behind this might be a slower change in male-dominant social spheres or even a lack of exposure to education on this topic to promote a more inclusive language. However, female participants showed a preference for gender-neutral terms, like “sanitation worker” and “stay-at-home parent/spouse,” suggesting that they show an effort to use language that respects the dignity of an individual and avoids the usage of outdated stereotypes, which are more favorable towards men.

Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina have unique traditions and cultures that might have a great influence on the results. Traditional gender roles and cultural norms might dictate that women are obliged to be more empathetic and to use more considerate language in their communication styles. Throughout history, women have normally been held back in society as a less capable ‘group,’ which might be the reason why they are from a young age socialized to be more respectful and aware of others’ feelings and needs, which further leads to a greater emphasis on using language that is more respectful, inclusive and non-offensive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings reveal that both groups, females and males, have a solid level of usage of politically correct English language terminology in general, with female participants

expressing more preference for its usage. This can further be reflected in an important cultural shift to more recent pro-politically correctness values that promote inclusivity and respect for everyone.

This shift is of great significance, given the historical background of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with conventional gender roles deep-rooted for a long period. The implications behind the findings are that although politically correct language is becoming more widely recognized, accepted, and used by people, there is still area for improvement for the politically correct language to be fully incorporated and a part of the local way of life and the educational system. Educators, however, showed that they are dedicated to fostering more inclusive workplaces, but they are also the ones who need to adapt their materials and methods to conform to the more politically acceptable norms.

As expected, women are at the forefront of this change, being the main actors of it since they are using language as a tool to promote equality and to challenge traditional stereotypes that have been present for a longer period of time. Understanding these dynamics further offers valuable insights into the societal changes going on in Bosnia and Herzegovina at present. The significant differences between males and females in their use of politically correct language underscore the need for targeted educational initiatives to promote inclusive language use. These findings show the importance of continuing to invest great efforts to raise awareness and understanding of politically correct terminology, making sure that both males and females are equally capable of contributing to creating respectful and inclusive communication environments. Cultural and societal norms, as the results suggest, still play an important role in shaping the way people use language, and in creating a more inclusive society, it is of high importance to address these norms. At the same time, it is crucial to underscore that the unconditional acceptance of all language promoted as politically correct, as well as its rejection, are the two extreme poles that disregard nuanced contexts of different terms and different settings. Thus, the educational initiatives, as well as people’s implementation of the language style guidelines, should be a result of informed decisions built upon the pillars of critical thinking, comprehensive scientific research, context, empathy, common sense, and scientific facts. This virtually means that, as with most things in life, the politically correct language should not be guided by an all-or-nothing approach, with unconditional

acceptance or rejection of all of it; rather, a more scalable solution, a nuanced choice, and context-bound decision should be at the forefront of the process.

In order to build on these findings, future research might consider a longitudinal study that would examine the way the usage of politically correct language evolved among different demographic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, one more direction could be to investigate the influence of different kinds of media and social networks on adopting politically correct terminology. Comparative studies might also provide deeper insights into the sociolinguistic factors that influence the way politically correct language is adopted globally. Finally, a qualitative study might shed more light on the reasons behind the linguistic choices among the participants.

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Appendix

Survey

Welcome to our survey on the use of politically correct (PC) English language in Bosnia and Herzegovina's educational settings. This survey aims to explore whether there are differences between genders in the actual use of politically correct English language in educational settings. We thrive to gather information from students and educators about their actual use of politically English language in our diverse educational environments.

What is a Politically Correct Language?

Politically Correct Language refers to a way of communicating that aims to avoid offending or marginalizing specific groups of people (e.g., based on sex, race, religion, appearance, disabilities, etc.). It emphasizes sensitivity, inclusivity, and respectful expression, and it has both proponents and critics globally.

Your Participation Matters

Your participation in this survey is valuable. It will help us better understand the role of politically correct English in our educational environments. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important survey.

Demographic Information:

Age: _____

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

What is your current status?

- Student
- Professor/teacher/educator

Completed educational degree:

- High school
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Other (please specify): _____

How would you rate your English Language skills?

- Poor – Your English skills are very limited, with minimal understanding and ability to communicate.
- Fair – Your English skills are basic; you can understand and communicate simple ideas but struggle with more complex language.
- Good – Your English skills are competent for everyday use and most professional contexts, though you may occasionally face difficulties with complex structures or expressions.
- Very Good – Your English skills are strong; you can understand and communicate effectively in almost all situations, with only occasional errors or misunderstandings.

- Excellent – Your English skills are exceptional; you have a mastery of the language, including nuanced understanding and the ability to communicate complex and detailed information flawlessly.

Language Choice in PC Context:

In this part of the questionnaire, you will be presented with a series of terms related to different contexts. For each set of terms, please select the one that you most frequently use in the specified context.

1. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC1**

- confined to a wheelchair.
- a wheelchair user
- victim of disability
- your version: _____

2. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC2**

- deaf
- hard of hearing
- hearing-impaired
- your version: _____

3. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC3**

- invalid
- handicapped
- a person with a disability
- your version: _____

4. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC4**

- a person with an intellectual disability
- mentally retarded
- intellectually disabled
- your version: _____

5. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC5**

- a person who stutters
- a person with a speech impediment
- a person who cannot talk right
- your version: _____

6. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC6**

- postman
- mailman
- mail carrier
- your version: _____

7. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC7**

- Businessman
- Businessperson
- Businesswoman
- your version: _____

8. When referring to a mixed group, you say... **LC8**

- Guys
- Folks
- Ladies and gentlemen
- Your version: _____

9. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC9**

- air host(ess)
- flight attendant
- steward/stewardess
- your version: _____

10. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC10**

- housewife
- home-maker

- stay-at-home parent/spouse
- your version: _____

11. John identifies as a non-binary person. You say: **LC11**

- John said he would bring his phone.
- John said they would bring their phone.
- John said zie would bring zer phone.
- your version: _____

12. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC12**

- senior
- old man/old woman
- older person
- your version: _____

13. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC13**

- garbage man
- trash man
- sanitation worker
- your version: _____

14. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC14**

- cleaning lady
- maid
- cleaner
- your version: _____

15. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC15**

- low-skilled worker
- entry-level worker
- unqualified worker
- your version: _____

16. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC16**

- black person
- colored person
- negro person
- your version: _____

17. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC17**

- Oriental people
- Asian people
- Exotic people
- your version: _____

18. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC18**

- poor
- impoverished
- lower-income
- your version: _____

19. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC19**

- Third-World countries
- Underdeveloped countries
- Developing countries
- your version _____

20. Which term do you most frequently use? **LC20**

- illegal immigrant
- undocumented immigrant
- a person without a legal status
- your version _____

Do you wish to add anything else about your views regarding the usage of the politically correct English language?

