

## SECTION 22.

### PHILOLOGY AND JOURNALISM

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## INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND ETHICAL COMMUNICATION

**Abstract.** *The article examines the principles of inclusive language in both Ukrainian and international contexts, highlighting its role in creating a safe, respectful, and barrier-free communicative environment. It explores linguistic and ethical approaches to addressing people with disabilities, gender diversity, ethnic and racial groups, and various family statuses. Special attention is given to the easy-to-read language format as a tool for improving information accessibility, alongside an overview of international practices. The study emphasizes that the development of inclusive communication in Ukraine is particularly significant during wartime, as it supports vulnerable groups, strengthens empathy, and reinforces democratic values.*

In the modern globalized world, language increasingly functions not only as a tool for transmitting information but also as a means of shaping social reality, constructing identities, and supporting the dignity of every individual. The trends of recent decades demonstrate growing attention to ethical communication and inclusive vocabulary, which are gradually becoming an integral part of public discourse in many countries. Inclusive language, oriented toward respect, non-discrimination, and sensitivity to the specificities of different social groups, has emerged as a response to profound intercultural, social, and political transformations. Its primary purpose is to minimize linguistic manifestations of stigmatization, promote equality, and ensure that every person feels heard and represented in all forms of communication.

This topic is particularly relevant in the Ukrainian context. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has caused significant demographic, psychological, and social changes that directly affected the structure of society and the needs of its citizens. The number of people with physical and psychosocial disabilities has increased dramatically, as has the number of service members, veterans, internally displaced

persons, and individuals who have experienced loss or traumatic events. At the same time, the number of women raising children on their own has increased, along with those whose families have been separated by war, and individuals seeking new ways of self-identification and recovery after severe upheavals. All these groups require particular attention and respect in communication, which reinforces the need for accurate, non-violent, and considerate vocabulary.

Alongside wartime challenges, Ukrainian society is also following global trends, including the increasing visibility of people with diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as individuals with mental disorders or specific needs related to psychological well-being. The diversity of social roles, family models, and forms of self-expression necessitates a mindful approach to the language used to refer to people and their life situations. Vocabulary that was once considered acceptable is now often viewed as inappropriate, creating a need for its revision in accordance with principles of human dignity.

Inclusive language is a system of linguistic practices and approaches aimed at avoiding discrimination, stigmatization, or devaluation of people on any grounds. It encompasses lexical, grammatical, stylistic, and communicative principles that help create respectful, accurate, and safe interaction. Inclusive language is not limited to prohibitions or fixed rules. Its purpose is to cultivate conscious speech practices and understanding that language can influence a person's self-esteem, social identity, and psychological comfort.

The term “inclusive language” emerged in Western academic discourse in the second half of the 20th century, closely tied to the development of civil rights movements, the feminist movement, advocacy for accessibility, and broader human rights initiatives. Over time, the concept expanded to include language about people with disabilities, gender minorities, ethnic communities, socially vulnerable groups, and communication in the field of mental health. Today, inclusive language reflects the culmination of long-term cultural, political, and scholarly processes aimed at promoting equality and acknowledging human diversity. It performs not only a descriptive or stylistic function but also a deeply ethical one, shaping a new quality of social interaction and reducing linguistic discrimination. For this reason, the study of inclusive language is crucial for analyzing contemporary communication practices, particularly in the context of the societal transformations that Ukraine and the world are experiencing [1].

### **Key Areas of Inclusive Language:**

#### **– Mental Health**

One of the key areas involves sensitive language related to mental health. Although modern society increasingly speaks openly about psychological

difficulties, the risk of stigmatization through inappropriate expressions remains. Everyday phrases like “he is crazy,” “she has something wrong with her head,” or “she is hysterical” reinforce distorted perceptions of mental states and perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

A central goal of inclusive communication is to overcome the stigma that has been reinforced for many years through the use of derogatory or dramatized expressions. Lexemes such as “crazy,” “psycho,” and “insane” have long associated people with mental disorders with being dangerous, unpredictable, or “abnormal.” Their avoidance and replacement with neutral phrasings reflect a responsible societal stance and offer needed support.

An important element is the person-first approach, which centers the individual rather than the diagnosis. For example, the phrase “a person with depression” highlights the multifaceted nature of the individual, while “a depressed person” reduces them to a single trait. This practice reinforces human dignity and correctly reflects that a mental disorder is only one aspect of a person’s life, not a defining characteristic. Additionally, modern communication ethics encourages a shift from a deficit-focused mindset to asset-framing, which emphasizes a person’s strengths, aspirations, and potential [2].

#### – People with Disabilities

The language society uses to describe people with disabilities reflects not only attitudes toward them but also the maturity of its social practices. Contemporary approaches emphasize recognition of human dignity and rejection of stigmatizing or depersonalizing terminology. A key principle is placing focus on the person rather than the condition, which is reflected in constructions such as “a person with...”. It supports respect, prevents reducing a person to a medical diagnosis, and aligns with an inclusive understanding that disability is one aspect of life, not a defining attribute [3].

At the state policy level, these changes have been formally reinforced. Since 2018, Ukrainian legislation has officially removed the word “інвалід” and replaced it with the term “людина з інвалідністю.” This decision aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It marks a societal shift from a medical or charitable approach to a rights-based and person-centered model. Emphasizing the individual highlights that their social value and rights remain unchanged regardless of physical or cognitive conditions [4].

The relevance of this topic has grown significantly during the full-scale war, as the number of people with disabilities resulting from combat and injuries continues to rise. It heightens the need for a culture of respect, equality, and inclusion. International practices emphasize the importance of shifting from the

integration model, where responsibility primarily lies with the individual, to the inclusion model, which requires transforming the societal environment. The focus includes equal access to services, representation of people with disabilities in decision-making, combating stereotypes, and developing language that avoids reproducing discriminatory perceptions. Additionally, modern communication ethics encourages a shift from a deficit-focused mindset to asset-framing, which emphasizes a person's strengths, aspirations, and potential [5].

#### – Gender and the LGBTQ+ Community

Modern linguistic practices in public spaces increasingly reflect the global shift toward gender inclusivity. For decades, public communication relied on predominantly masculine forms: terms such as chairman, manpower, or the universal use of he created a subtle but significant asymmetry. In such a model, the masculine was treated as the “norm,” while other gender identities remained invisible or secondary.

Today, global practices are demonstrating a shift toward more neutral and inclusive vocabulary. Public instructions, informational materials, and announcements now more often include formulations such as ‘clients of all genders,’ as well as the singular ‘they’ to refer to a person with an unknown or non-binary gender identity. Phrases like “All Genders Welcome” and gender-neutral job titles, such as chairperson, are becoming more common. Many institutions also introduce visual markers that move beyond binary gender models. Nevertheless, inclusive practices are often applied inconsistently [6].

Ukraine is also moving toward more inclusive communication, even though the practice is not yet fully systematic. The media increasingly publish materials using appropriate neutral or non-binary forms. A notable example was the visit of Nemo, the Eurovision winner, who uses the pronoun they. Ukrainian media widely adopted this form, showing readiness to adapt linguistic practices and respect an individual's self-identification. This trend aligns with the growing societal support for equality. According to 2024 surveys, 70.4% of Ukrainians believe that LGBTQ+ people should have the same rights as all other citizens. Compared with 2022, this figure has increased by 6.7%, indicating a gradual rise in tolerance and a reassessment of societal attitudes [7].

#### – Ethnic Groups and Races

The language we use to refer to different racial and ethnic groups carries significant importance, as it can either emphasize dignity and respect or, conversely, reproduce colonial biases, stereotypes, or offensive generalizations. Even in societies with relatively limited racial diversity, incorrect or outdated labels can create alienation, diminish identity, and shape distorted perceptions of certain

groups.

One of the key principles of inclusive language is accuracy and specificity. Historically, the term Indian was used for a long time to refer to the Indigenous Peoples of North America. However, it originated from Columbus's misconception and is now considered inappropriate.

In contemporary practice, it is more appropriate to use either the exact names of specific nations or the general term Indigenous Peoples, depending on the context. This example clearly illustrates the fundamental principle: to name a group according to how it identifies itself, rather than how others once labeled it.

It is equally important to avoid inaccurate generalizations. A common and often criticized mistake is referring to all people of Latin American origin as "Mexicans." It is offensive because it erases cultural, national, and historical differences between numerous peoples. The Ukrainian context has a similar issue: individuals from various Asian countries are sometimes automatically called "Chinese," which is also an example of inaccuracy and stereotyping.

Special attention is required for terms rooted in colonial logic or containing implicit hierarchy. Expressions such as "Third World" or "developing countries" are increasingly being replaced with more neutral formulations like "Global South" or "low- and middle-income countries," as previous versions created the impression of inferiority for entire regions. It is also important for Ukraine, as language should not reinforce imaginary "stages of development" that perpetuate outdated colonial approaches.

Many terms have become offensive due to their origins. For example, the word Gypsy in reference to the Roma is unacceptable and derogatory. Instead, appropriate names include Roma, Romani, Romany, or Travelling Communities, depending on how the community chooses to identify itself. It is especially relevant for Ukraine, where the Roma community is an integral part of a multicultural society, and linguistic practices significantly influence the level of respect and societal attitudes toward it. Even a few correct formulations can meaningfully transform the atmosphere of communication, making it safer, more attentive, and more humane [8].

#### – Family Status

A separate aspect of modern inclusive communication is the attentiveness to language that describes family status. Social realities are rapidly changing – not only globally but especially in Ukraine, where the war profoundly transforms family structures, role models, and the life circumstances of millions. In such a context, sensitivity toward how we speak about someone's family history becomes not merely a sign of politeness but a marker of respect, empathy, and psychological



safety. Many established expressions, such as «безбатченко», «інтернатовець» or «мати-одиначка», carry emotional and social weight that may traumatize or stigmatize a person, even when the speaker has no harmful intent.

The modern approach to inclusive language encourages shifting toward formulations that describe a life situation without attaching demeaning or marginalizing labels to a person. For instance, instead of emphasizing the absence of one parent, it is appropriate to say: «a child raised by their mother» or «a child who grew up in an institution». Such constructions maintain respect and avoid imposing an identity built upon trauma, loss, or social stigma.

It is also important to recognize that today, a significant portion of the population is experiencing profound personal losses due to the war. Therefore, even ordinary everyday questions about family can cause pain. In such situations, sensitive language can serve as a form of support, empathy, and acknowledgment of someone else's experience.

Another important direction of modern inclusive language is the easy-to-read language format – a method of presenting information that makes it accessible for people who have difficulties reading or understanding complex texts. Easy language is characterized by precise and straightforward wording, logical structure, and the absence of complicated syntactic constructions.

In many countries, this approach has been integrated into state standards and communication practices for a long time. For example, in the United States, there are legal requirements to ensure accessibility of public services for people with disabilities. In Sweden and Germany, detailed rules and codes for creating easy-to-read texts have been developed, which include involving target groups to test comprehension.

In Ukraine, the development of easy language is only beginning. Although official standards are not yet established, various initiatives are emerging that promote this format, create adapted books, textbooks, informational materials, and educational projects. This is a crucial step toward creating an inclusive society where information is accessible to everyone, regardless of cognitive or social differences [9].

**Conclusions.** Inclusive language is a vital tool for modern ethical communication and a fundamental component of a democratic society. It aims to create a space in which every person feels respected, accepted, and psychologically safe. In the context of Ukraine, a country facing immense social and humanitarian challenges, inclusive communication gains particular importance. It helps foster mutual understanding, supports those who have experienced loss or trauma, integrates diverse social groups, and promotes a culture of empathy.

As a result, inclusive language emerges not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as an important social practice that helps build a more just, caring, and responsible society. Its implementation in Ukraine is a necessary step toward creating an environment in which everyone has the opportunity to be heard and understood without fear of judgment or bias.

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