

Der Open-Access-Publikationsserver der ZBW – Leibniz-Informationzentrum Wirtschaft  
*The Open Access Publication Server of the ZBW – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics*

Hinner, Michael B.; Dreisörner, Mirjam; Felich, Antje; Otto, Manja

## Working Paper

# Business and intercultural communication issues: Three contributions to various aspects of business communication

Freiberg working papers, No. 2004,02

### Provided in cooperation with:

Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg

Suggested citation: Hinner, Michael B.; Dreisörner, Mirjam; Felich, Antje; Otto, Manja (2004) : Business and intercultural communication issues: Three contributions to various aspects of business communication, Freiberg working papers, No. 2004,02, <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/48389>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die ZBW räumt Ihnen als Nutzerin/Nutzer das unentgeltliche, räumlich unbeschränkte und zeitlich auf die Dauer des Schutzrechts beschränkte einfache Recht ein, das ausgewählte Werk im Rahmen der unter

→ <http://www.econstor.eu/dspace/Nutzungsbedingungen> nachzulesenden vollständigen Nutzungsbedingungen zu vervielfältigen, mit denen die Nutzerin/der Nutzer sich durch die erste Nutzung einverstanden erklärt.

#### Terms of use:

*The ZBW grants you, the user, the non-exclusive right to use the selected work free of charge, territorially unrestricted and within the time limit of the term of the property rights according to the terms specified at*

→ <http://www.econstor.eu/dspace/Nutzungsbedingungen>  
*By the first use of the selected work the user agrees and declares to comply with these terms of use.*

TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY BERGAKADEMIE FREIBERG  
TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT BERGAKADEMIE FREIBERG

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
FAKULTÄT FÜR WIRTSCHAFTSWISSENSCHAFTEN



Michael B. Hinner  
Mirjam Dreisörner  
Antje Felich  
Manja Otto

Business and Intercultural  
Communication Issues

Three Contributions to Various  
Aspects of Business Communication

**FREIBERG WORKING PAPERS**  
**FREIBERGER ARBEITSPAPIERE**

**# 02**  
**2004**

The Faculty of Economics and Business Administration is an institution for teaching and research at the Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg (Saxony). For more detailed information about research and educational activities see our homepage in the World Wide Web (WWW): <http://www.wiwi.tu-freiberg.de/index.html>.

**Addresses for correspondence:**

Prof. Dr. Michael B. Hinner (Editor)  
Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg  
Fakultät für Wirtschaftswissenschaften  
Professur für Kommunikationswissenschaften  
Lessingstraße 45, D-09596 Freiberg  
Phone: ++49 / 3731 / 39 27 50  
Fax: ++49 / 3731 / 39 40 30  
E-mail: [hinner@bwl.tu-freiberg.de](mailto:hinner@bwl.tu-freiberg.de)  
[Mirjam80@aol.com](mailto:Mirjam80@aol.com)  
[Antje.Felich@t-online.de](mailto:Antje.Felich@t-online.de)  
[Manja.Otto@student.tu-freiberg.de](mailto:Manja.Otto@student.tu-freiberg.de)

---

**ISSN 0949-9970**

The Freiberg Working Paper is a copyrighted publication. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, translating, or otherwise without prior permission of the publishers.

Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Michael Fritsch

All rights reserved.

---

## **Inhaltsverzeichnis**

1	Psychological Contracts: IBM's Dilemma.....	1
	(Mirjam Dreisörner)	
2	Political Correctness: Attack of the Thought Police or Creation of a Better World? .....	13
	(Antje Felich)	
3	Can Computer-Mediated Communication Supersede Face-to-Face Communication?.....	29
	(Manja Otto)	

## Editor's Comment

Dear Reader:

The papers you are about to read were written by three students of Business Administration in partial fulfillment of the Scholarly Rhetoric Seminar held at the Department of Business Administration and Economics at the TU Bergakademie Freiberg. Seminar participants have to write a paper in English on a topic that is associated with either Business Communication, Intercultural Communications, or U.S. Cultural Studies, i.e. the domain of this professorship. Because some of the papers are of excellent quality, both in language and content, it was decided to create a forum for their publication. Hence, this collection of papers written by three business students.

The purpose of publishing these papers is two-fold: On the one hand, interested parties will have the opportunity to inform themselves of the aptitude of today's business students; and, on the other hand, it will be possible to support and propagate the work of excellent students. I feel good work should be supported and made public because we hear so much about the failings of today's educational system. These three papers should demonstrate that we still have good students who are not only fully versed in English – despite the fact that they are not native speakers of English – but also good researchers and analysts. These students tackled problems that many businesses face today; thus, proving that today's students not only are aware of current business problems, but are also seeking solutions to those problems. This should send encouraging signals to the world of business.

The editor's task was to offer advice and guidance to the students as they researched and wrote their papers during the seminar. Prior to publication, all papers were once again proofread. The purpose of proofreading was not to change the content or intent of the students' papers, but to ferret out oversights and errata. And if critical questions still needed to be answered, then the students were asked to answer those questions. But this, too, only demonstrates the motivation of the students who continued to work on their papers after having officially completed the seminar last semester.

Mirjam Dreisörner presents a paper on psychological contracts which have been the subject of many studies in the USA over the last forty years. In Germany, however, this topic has not

yet received much attention. But it should because the issue is very important in the motivation of employees. Many employees assume a particular employment relationship exists which is not specified in any written agreement. In fact, this relationship is deduced from perceived actions. Many employers, though, are unaware of this interpretation of the employment relationship. Consequently, problems arise if the employee perceives that the company failed to fulfill its obligations towards the employee. Anger and resentment directed at the employer are the result as illustrated by the example of IBM. Needless to say, this demonstrates how important psychological contracts are in any employment relationship. Awareness can be the first step towards countering this potential problem. Ms. Dreisörner makes us aware of this potential problem.

Antje Felich analyzes the impact of political correctness on American society, the English language, and the world of business. Ms. Felich provides an overview and insight to a topic that should be of interest to any business seeking to enter the U.S. market because political correctness plays a significant role in determining hiring quotas, sexual harassment at the workplace, and classifying language as derogatory. Similar to product liability, political correctness has been the issue of many well publicized legal actions in the USA. Thus, political correctness has become one of the most debated issues in American society today. It, therefore, behooves a business seeking to enter the U.S. market to be aware of this issue and to adjust its company policy accordingly.

Manja Otto's paper examines the impact of the internet on human communication. In particular, the paper focuses on various aspects of written communication in the virtual dimension, such as internet relay chat, electronic mail, bulletin boards, forums, instant messaging as well as the influence of the internet on off-line communication. While the internet offers many advantages, it can also produce some disadvantages. The fact that the internet is capable of bridging great distances and, thus, providing communication access at an unprecedented scale, seems also to, paradoxically, result in fewer personal meetings and may, therefore, reduce face-to-face communication. Hence, Ms. Otto offers a critical look at the possibilities and potential perils of computer mediated communication.

Michael B. Hinner

Professor of Business English and Business Communication

## Abstract

This paper describes psychological contracts and how they are created. Even though the phenomenon of the psychological contract can be observed in a variety of relationships, this paper solely discusses psychological contracts in business settings. The paper discusses in particular how psychological contracts affect the employee/employer-relationship.

The findings will then be applied to the example of IBM in the early 1990s, when IBM decided to lay off employees despite its no-layoff policy. Finally, suggestions are made as to what could have been done to prevent the negative effects of psychological contract violation at IBM.

JEL-classification: D23; J50; M12; M14

Key words: Psychological Contracts, IBM, Workplace Relationship

## Zusammenfassung

### *„Psychologische Verträge: IBMs Dilemma“*

Der Aufsatz definiert die Eigenschaften eines psychologischen Vertrages und erklärt sein Zustandekommen. Obwohl psychologische Verträge in vielen Situationen auftauchen, konzentriert sich diese Arbeit auf psychologische Verträge in Arbeitsverhältnissen. Besonders wird betrachtet, welchen Einfluss psychologische Verträge auf das Arbeitnehmer-/Arbeitgeberverhältnis haben.

Die Ergebnisse werden dann auf das Beispiel von IBM in den 90er Jahren übertragen. IBM entschied zu diesem Zeitpunkt, Arbeitnehmer trotz eines Arbeitsplatzsicherheits-Grundsatzes zu entlassen. Letztendlich werden Vorschläge unterbreitet, wie die negativen Effekte der Verletzung des psychologischen Vertrages bei IBM hätten verhindern können.

JEL-Klassifikation: D23; J50; M12; M14

Schlagworte: Psychologische Verträge, IBM, Arbeitsplatz-Verhältnisse

## **1 Psychological Contracts: IBM's Dilemma**

This paper seeks to explain what a psychological contract is and how it affected IBM's business and employee behavior after the layoffs at IBM in the early 1990s. Even though the phenomenon of the psychological contract is a very wide field and can be observed in a variety of relationships and in various situations, due to restrictions of space, this paper solely focuses on psychological contracts in business settings.

The psychological contract received relatively little attention in the European business world so far, but is a well recognized field of research in the USA. Since psychological contracts were first mentioned in literature in the 1960s, the definition of the psychological contract has changed. In 1962 Levinson et al. still described the psychological contract as “a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be even dimly aware but which nonetheless govern their relationship to each other” (21). Recently Rousseau defined the psychological contract as “an individual's belief in mutual obligations between that person and another party, such as an employer” (“Psychological Contract Inventory” 1). Rousseau's definition is also widely accepted by several other researchers in the field of the psychological contract (Morrison et al. 228, Turnley et al. 367-368, Robinson 574, Lee 1). The difference between the two definitions given by Levinson et al. and Rousseau is that in the latter, the psychological contract is only based on the perception of one individual – the employee's in this case. Therefore, “psychological contracts . . . entail beliefs about what employees believe they are entitled to receive, or should receive, because they perceive that their employer conveyed promises to provide those things” (Robinson 575). So for a psychological contract to develop, the employee must believe that promises concerning the employment relationship, such as promotions for outstanding efforts, health care benefits or job security, for example, have been made by the employer. It is important to emphasize, though, that in the mind of the employees, the psychological contract is a mutual agreement which means that the employees are of the perception that the employer holds the same beliefs regarding the employment relationship as they do (Rousseau, “Schema” 512). The employer can, but must not, hold the same beliefs about the employment relationship as the employee does.

The promises that have been made or that the employee believes have been made can take two forms: promises can be derived both from words – spoken or written – and “from the interpretation of actions, including discrete behaviours and repeated practices” (Rousseau, “Schema” 525). Consequently, the interpretation of a psychological contract by an employee is highly subjective. But without promises having been made or at least the perception that



promises have been made, an employment relationship would not come into being. In “the relationship between the individual and the organization, each party participates *only* because of what it expects to receive in exchange for participation” (Thomas 1).

What a party is entitled to receive during the exchange relationship cannot be explicitly stated in a written contract; there is always room for interpretation due to ambiguous expressions. “‘To give one’s best efforts’, ‘be loyal’, or ‘offer excellent training’ all require some interpretation of what actually has been promised” (Rousseau, *Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 44). Therefore, it is in the course of the relationship with their employer that the employees will gain a clearer understanding of what they can expect from their employer. At the same time, the employees will also come to a conclusion about what they are obligated to give the employer in return for keeping what the employees think is the employer’s part of the psychological contract. This clarification on the part of the employees about what the psychological contract entails will take place through the interaction with colleagues and what the employees observe to be common practice in the company (Turnley et al. 370-371). Thus, employees form their own picture of what they think the psychological contract consists of.

One phenomenon is existent, though, that jeopardizes the correct interpretation of the psychological contract by the employee: the self-serving bias. People are likely to interpret their surroundings in ways that are consistent with their own interests. “Those biases reported consistently in self-relevant cognitions include unrealistically positive views of the self, exaggerated perceptions of personal control, and unrealistic optimism” (Rousseau, *Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 43). This bias not only jeopardizes the correct perception of psychological contract features but also influences the employees’ perception of the psychological contract fulfillment (Turnley et al. 371, Paul et al. 478, Rousseau, “Schema” 528-529). The non-fulfillment of a psychological contract by one party is called a contract breach: “Psychological contract breach is a subjective experience, referring to one’s perception that another has failed to fulfill adequately the promised obligations of the psychological contract” (Robinson 576)

For the employee to become aware of a contract breach, though, it is not important if the contract has really been breached. Only the employee’s individual perception of how well or how badly the contract has been fulfilled is of prime importance. So even if a contract has been breached, it has no influence on the employer/employee relationship as long as the employee does not perceive the breach. It still does not necessarily take a contract breach for the employee to perceive one (Robinson 576). Consequently, a perceived breach reflects only

the employee's conviction that the company failed to fulfill its obligations in relation to the employee's contributions. The contract breach alone must not necessarily have an impact on the employer/employee relationship, though. "Misunderstandings may be ignored, some remedied by rationalization" (Rousseau, *Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 112). This means that a contract breach – even a perceived one – can be overlooked by the employee due to predispositions that will be discussed below.

The phenomenon that really has a lasting influence on the employer/employee relationship is perceived contract violation. The term contract violation refers to a more emotional view of the contract breach. Perceived violation is often followed by disappointment and anger (Turnley et al. 369). Morrison et al. reserve the term violation "for the emotional and affective state that may, under certain conditions, follow from the belief that one's organization has failed to adequately maintain the psychological contract" (230). Generally, violation is a perceived stark breach, i.e. any psychological contract breach can turn into a violation as soon as the employee perceives it to be strong enough. When the threshold between a breach and a violation is crossed depends on the employees' internal sense-making process of under what circumstances the contract breach occurred. According to Morrison et al.:

An important part of the sense-making process leading to violation is an assessment of the outcomes. In particular, the intensity of violation will be related to the perceived magnitude of the contract breach, defined as the size of the discrepancy between the two ratios of contract fulfillment. . . . The greater the perceived imbalance or discrepancy between the two parties' contributions, the stronger the relationship between perceived breach of contract and violation (243).

Furthermore, judgements about why the contract breach took place will be part of the interpretation process of the contract breach. "Regardless of the actual conditions leading to a perceived breach . . . employees will experience more intense negative emotions if they attribute it to purposeful renegeing" (Morrison et al. 243-244). This means that employees will feel more anger and resentment if they can blame the breach of their contracts on their employer. Also, the employees' negative feelings about the contract breach will increase if their employer "could have controlled or foreseen the factors precipitating the contract breach" (Morrison et al. 244). The most important factor in the attribution process is perceived intentionality, though. "If the employee perceives that an organizational agent was aware that an agreement was being broken and that the breach of contract was a purposeful act . . . feelings of violation will be intensified" (Morrison et al. 244). The final factor in the

sense-making process is the employees' perception of how fairly they were treated (Morrison et al. 244-245). Consequently, if the employees perceive formal procedures based on just assessments were predominant during the breach of contract, they are less likely to perceive the contract breach as a violation. Morrison et al. also note that employees often are very subjective and irrational during the sense-making process (243+246).

Furthermore a violation is more likely to be perceived by the employees when the breached contract was a relational rather than a transactional one (Morrison et al. 247). Rousseau, Morrison et al. and Lee define a transactional contract as short-termed, with little personal relation between the parties and a focus on monetary returns (Rousseau, *Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 91-92, Morrison et al. 229, Lee 2). The same authors describe a relational contract as rooted in a long-term relationship, based on trust, loyalty and mutual interdependence (Rousseau, *Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 91-92, Morrison et al. 229, Lee 2).

Considering the definitions of relational and transactional contracts, Robinson supports the theory of Morrison et al. that a violation is more likely to be perceived when the breached contract is a relational rather than a transactional one, by stating that an "employee's initial trust in his or her employer . . . will be negatively related to perceiving a contract breach by his or her employer" (577). Hence, Robinson and Morrison et al. state that the event of a perceived violation also depends on the amount of trust employees have in the organization they work for – the higher the trust, the less likely they are to perceive a violation because individuals always seek information that reinforces their current perception of the environment (Robinson 577, Rousseau, "Changing" 51, Rousseau, "Schema" 521). Accordingly, people who think of themselves as holding a relational contract with their employer will expect their employer to be more loyal than people holding a transactional contract. So the former are more likely to filter out information that is inconsistent with their expectations due to their need for cognitive consistency. And because they filter out information which in their eyes is negative, they are less likely to perceive a contract breach.

However, many employees perceive a violation of their psychological contracts in any case because promises they think have been made to them by their employers remain unfulfilled. For an organization it is crucial to be informed about potential employee reactions to a violated psychological contract. "Violated contracts promote mistrust, anger and attrition and change the way people behave in subsequent interactions. The aftermath of contract violation can be seen in declining corporate loyalty and increased litigation." (Rousseau, *Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 134) Turnley et al. back up this

statement by describing possible employee reactions to violated contracts as resulting in “increased turnover, reduced work performance, and reduced willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors” (376). Lee mentions that perceived violations “negatively affect work attitudes” (2) which will probably have a negative impact on productivity and customer satisfaction while Morrison et al. note that the experience of violation triggers “feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, indignation, and even outrage” (231). Considering the quotes of Lee, Rousseau and Turnley et al., psychological contract violation is seen as detrimental to the subsequent relationship between the organization and the employee and, consequently, to the organizational performance.

A company that was affected by the consequences of their employees’ violated psychological contracts is IBM. For decades IBM used to be a company that highly valued its employees and in return was highly valued by them. One of the things that made IBM such a good place to work at was IBM’s full employment policy. The policy guaranteed every IBM employee an employment possibility for life which meant that layoffs would never take place. “To its employees, IBM had guaranteed job security. Once a person had a job with IBM, he or she was set for life. Benefits were good; salaries competitive; and the working environment excellent” (Mills and Friesen 9). The existence of the no-layoff practice at IBM was well-known inside and outside the company (“The Transformation of IBM” 2). Only the no-layoff policy made it possible for IBM to attract and retain the most highly skilled people. “IBM’s well thought-out approach – rooted in values, articulated in an unwritten social contract, and expressed in specific policies and practices – was designed to create and maintain employee loyalty” (Mills and Friesen 65).

Due to its well-known employment policy, IBM also attracted many people who personally had a high need for security because they knew that it would be fulfilled at IBM (Mills and Friesen 12+65). Consequently, most IBM-employees had a psychological contract that included the perception that their jobs at IBM were “unsinkable.” The employees’ perception of ever-safe jobs came about through IBM’s unchanged policy over many years and the general high public opinion about IBM as an exemplary employer. Considering prior assessments about IBM’s no-layoff policy and expectations of people joining IBM as employees, it is obvious that IBM had a relational contract with its employees rather than a transactional one. Employment relationship at IBM had always been long-term (Sager) and implied a high degree of loyalty and trust (Mills and Friesen 65). IBM-employees were so convinced of the strength of the ties that bound them to the organization that they went so far as to say: “It [IBM] was one big family” (Hoerr 37).

Unfortunately in the early 1980s, IBM “made what turned out to be one of the largest miscalculations in business history” (Mills and Friesen 89). Due to revenue trend reviews, executives were convinced that by 1990 IBM would grow to \$100 billion in annual revenues and, therefore, hired tens of thousands of additional employees and added billions of dollars in plant and equipment to IBM’s balance sheets as a response to those forecasts (Mills and Friesen 89-90, “The Transformation of IBM” 5). But the estimates did not match reality at all.

By 1990 IBM’s annual sales were about \$68 billion, not \$100 billion, and the firm was struggling with resource imbalances among its business segments. The strategic plan of 1980 led IBM up a hill of additional capacity and down it again. First IBM spent money to build the capacity and add people; then IBM spent money to dismantle capacity and shed people. . . . Under the terms of IBM’s full employment practice, literally tens of thousands of staff hired into IBM’s mainframe operations had to be kept on or bought out with costly severance packages (Mills and Friesen 91).

Consequently, IBM was struggling because of its own strategic mistakes.

Still, Akers, IBM’s CEO at that point, tried to maintain the promise IBM had made to its employees: full employment and no layoffs. He tried to solve the problem of excessive human resources with voluntary-leave programs, attrition, early-retirement programs and redeployment (Kolbasuk McGee 22, Lord, “The Transformation of IBM” 8+10). Akers knew that the no-layoff policy was an important part of IBM’s culture and that to abolish the policy would have a negative impact on the whole business. “For employees, IBM’s job security was legendary. It wasn’t unusual to find two generations of the same family represented. There were never any layoffs. And this loyalty to employees buttressed the promise to customers: A happy and motivated workforce meant good service” (Sager). Akers understood that a downturn in employee morale triggered by layoffs would directly affect the customer relationship and, thus, harm IBM’s financial bottom line.

However, Akers could not get the financial situation at IBM under control, and so he was fired in 1992 and replaced by Louis V. Gerstner. Gerstner was the first non-IBMer to become CEO of the company, and it may have been for that reason that he did not hesitate to break with IBM’s no lay-off policy. Alone in 1995 122,000 employees were laid off (Adams et al.). This 180 degree turnaround in terms of company policy shocked a lot of IBM’s workers. “When the company suddenly and with little warning, abandoned its full employment practice and began to lay off employees, a huge wave of disillusionment and concern swept through the firm” (Mills and Friesen 66).

The employees' psychological contract had been broken by the unexpected layoffs. One could argue that in the strictest sense the psychological contract had already been broken through Akers' early retirement program but this breach was not perceived as one by the employees. It was one of the actions by an employer that sometimes are overlooked in relational contracts because people always look for information that reinforces their current view of their workplace. People, of course, knew that IBM was in trouble before the layoffs happened; but due to their psychological contract they believed that nothing would change. One might say that it was the employees' fault to ignore the warning signs for such a long time and not to look for new jobs. But can one blame the employees for believing in a policy that had been in existence for decades? In good economic times it is easy to keep a no-layoff policy. But the policy is made for bad times in the first place. "A downturn was exactly the situation for which full employment had been devised – providing employment security only for boom times doesn't mean much" (Mills and Friesen 82). Employees believed that they could trust their company because their psychological contract always consisted of 'if I am loyal to IBM, IBM will be loyal to me' (Mills and Friesen 65).

Furthermore, people might have developed an ignorance towards the fact that IBM was in real trouble due to self-serving or cognitive bias. Hence, they did not see the need to look for alternative jobs outside IBM. Finally, when IBM started laying off people, there was no chance for people to ignore what was really happening. The discrepancy between what had been promised to them and what they were getting was so great that they had no choice but to perceive this as a violation of their psychological contract. Moreover, employees were able to blame the loss of their jobs on the strategic mistakes IBM had made in the past. According to Morrison et al., being able to blame somebody else for the violated psychological contract increases the perception of a contract violation (243-244). And so the fact that the employees were in no way responsible for their fate made their perception of violation even greater.

Further questions that arise are if the layoffs happened in a "fair" manner, or if inconsistency was prevalent. In a sense, the layoffs were unfair. That is because during all the years that the no-layoff policy was in place, an atmosphere had developed in which – according to Mills and Friesen and Hoerr – the no-layoff policy became a no-performance policy instead (Mills and Friesen 92, Hoerr 38). At IBM, even poor performers had a guaranteed job for life. "In effect, the full employment practice began to mean that once hired, an employee had employment security so long as his or her performance was not totally unacceptable" (Mills and Friesen 94). So the layoffs became unfair at the point when top

performers were laid off along with poor performers just because IBM's "performance appraisal was not up to the task of ranking employees" (Mills and Friesen 94). IBM just could not tell who performed at what level. So employees were laid off arbitrarily (Mills and Friesen 93-94). Most employees probably perceived this as an unfair procedure which in turn reinforced their perception of a psychological contract violation.

Obviously, IBM was no longer loyal to its employees, no longer treated them as its most important asset but just as some number in its annual reports. The wife of a fired IBM employee said, for example, "now, it's a horrendous smack in the face to realize they [IBM employees] are a dime a dozen" (Hoerr 39). Disappointed employees carried their anger and resentment home into their families. "Jobless IBMers and their families were now experiencing problems that many thought existed only in ghettos: drunkenness, domestic violence, behavioral problems in school, bouts of depression" (Hoerr 39). So IBMers were not only confronted with the problem of being jobless – a state that due to their psychological contract they always thought of as impossible to be in one day – but also felt a high degree of betrayal. Their trust towards their employer had eroded from one day to the next because their employer had broken the promise of no layoffs. And this promise had been the cornerstone of the psychological contracts of many IBM employees (Mills and Friesen 65).

As Rousseau puts it, "violation is a trauma for a relationship and undermines good faith" (*Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 119). Rousseau's statement is valid not only for laid off employees, but also for the survivors who remain with the company. The survivors' psychological contracts had been violated indirectly. The layoffs did not affect the survivors right away, but they had to realize as well that their employer did not fulfill psychological contracts in the way they expected their employer to. The survivors' expectation was the maintenance of the no-layoff policy even in bad economical times. After the layoffs at IBM, attitude surveys found that "important employees [were] virtually paralyzed with the fear of losing their jobs" (Mills and Friesen 66). In particular at IBM, which attracted people with a high personal need for security, the realization by its employees that the no-layoff policy was gone, led to problems. Attitude surveys at IBM showed that morale went down, and that employees had a higher level of distrust towards their employer than before the layoffs (Mills and Friesen 66+82). Lower morale and higher distrust, of course, mean that the subsequent contribution by the employees to the company will be much lower (Lee 2, Robinson 577, Rousseau *Psychological Contracts in Organizations* 134, Turnley et al. 5).

The fact that a violated contract causes a great amount of anger and attrition can also be seen in the actions of Ex-IBMers. People felt so betrayed by the violation of their psychological contracts that they looked for ways to pay IBM back. One example is the website of a former IBM employee who not only complains about how the “new IBM” (all about money) is different from the “old IBM” (respect, care), but also encourages IBM employees to join unions in order to have more negotiation power over IBM (“IBM Workers Unite”). According to Thomas, a unionization movement is likely to happen if employees feel betrayed by their organization (3). Gazis, editor of *IBM Workers Unite* makes it clear that IBM, even though it was his employer for 34 years, is now worth fighting against. “IBM can no longer be trusted to keep its promises. There is one possible defense against IBM’s arbitrary decisions affecting its employees and retirees in the future, and that is UNIONIZATION” („IBM Workers Unite”). It is interesting to see that Gazis goes through all the trouble of maintaining a website and, due to posting his own personal e-mail address, probably answering numerous e-mails from other disappointed IBM employees; even though one might think that after leaving the company, he would break with the past. Disappointment and a feeling of having been treated wrong must be very deep-rooted to trigger this determination. Another example is the website ‘Alliance@IBM’ which also promotes unionization and is solely aimed at IBM employees.

These examples show that broken psychological contracts have far-reaching consequences. Employees, in some cases, experience these consequences by having to deal with life-long resentment and the feeling that they have been exploited by their employer – as seen in the example of Denis Gazis. The organization might suffer from declining loyalty in the workforce and, thus, deteriorating productivity or quality which in turn will affect the financial bottom line and customer relations negatively. So after the layoffs, such quotes from IBM customers as “I’ve noticed a depreciation in the level of service from IBM,” “We’ve found it harder to get things done with IBM,” or “Consistency in service has diminished” were easy to find in the business world (Mills and Friesen 146).

The psychological contract is a phenomenon that can have both positive and negative influences on employment relations. It is positive because it increases loyalty between the employer and the employee as long as the psychological contract is maintained by both parties. But the psychological contract has negative impacts on the employment relationship that can be rather long-lasting as soon as one party perceives that the other failed to fulfill its part of the psychological contract.



In IBM's case, the psychological contract violation by the organization was immense. IBM abolished the no-layoff policy that had been in place for decades and that their employees had believed in and relied upon. Even though abolishing the no-layoff policy may have been the only effective way to turn IBM around financially, the trust that was destroyed among Ex-IBMers, employees and potential future employees can probably never be restored. Most likely, employees will never be as loyal to IBM as they were before the layoffs. From being an exemplary employer, IBM – in the eyes of its employees – turned into a company that cannot be trusted. It is very questionable if people will ever make an effort and take the risk of trusting IBM again after IBM broke its promises in such a way as it did. Considering that former IBM employees now form the majority of the *National Organization of Downsized Employees* (Mills and Friesen 175), this becomes probably less likely.

IBM managers can be called naïve for thinking that “remaining IBMers’ concern for their jobs would lead them to renew their commitment to the firm and to treat customers better, not worse” (Mills and Friesen 174). People who feel betrayed by their employer and perceive their psychological contract as violated are more likely to work just enough to get by rather than with extra effort.

This dilemma of layoffs and eroding trust could have been avoided if IBM had only had a better appraisal system to rank its employees according to their performance, and if IBM had made sure that its no-layoff policy had not turned into a no-performance policy. Had IBM insured that the no-layoff policy was understood the way it was meant when it was implemented – i.e. employees who perform up to the standards will always have a job with IBM, underperformers do not have a right to stay, though – then IBM would not have built up as much excessive human resources as it did. Consequently, the layoffs would not have been as great either. Furthermore, with an adequate employee appraisal system, IBM could have increased the perceived fairness in the layoff process by laying off low performers first. So many employees might not have perceived the psychological contract breach as a violation because in their sense-making process, they would have at least judged the layoff process as fair.

IBM's example shows that managers should not try to rewrite social contracts without considering the potential long-term consequences. Psychological contracts are fragile creations and determine employee loyalty. It is fairly easy for managers to destroy their organization's future if they suddenly disrupt their employees' psychological contracts in pursuit of short-term profits. Thus, a careful weighing up of possible short and long term consequences should take place when a change in social contracts is considered.

## Works Cited

- Adams, Kathleen, Nick Catoggio. "Happy Labor Day." *Time* April 9, 1995: 21.  
[Alliance@IBM](http://www.allianceibm.org/why.html). November 30, 2002 <<http://www.allianceibm.org/why.html>>.
- Hoerr, John. "Big Blues for Laid Off IBM Work Force." *The American Prospect* Winter 1994: 35-42.
- IBM Workers Unite*. Ed. Denos Gazis. Pasha Industries, Inc. November 20, 2002  
 <[http://www.pasha.net/ibm\\_workers\\_unite/index.html](http://www.pasha.net/ibm_workers_unite/index.html)>.
- Kolbasuk McGee, Marianne. "Can IBM Retain its Full Employment Policy?" *Management Review* September 1991: 22-25.
- Lee, Gregory. "Towards a Contingent Model of Key Staff Retention: The New Psychological Contract Reconsidered." *South African Journal of Business Management* 32 (2001): 1-9.
- Levinson, H., C. Price, K. Munden, H. Mandl, C. Solley. *Men, Management and Mental Health*. Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1962.
- Lord, M. "Where You Can't Get Fired." *U.S. News and World Report* January 14, 1991: n.pag.
- Mills, Daniel Quinn, G. Bruce Friesen. *Broken Promises: An Unconventional View of What Went Wrong at IBM*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996.
- Morrison, Elizabeth Wolfe, Sandra L. Robinson. "When Employees Feel Betrayed: A Model of How Psychological Contract Violation Develops." *Academy Of Management Review* 22 (1997): 226-256.
- Paul, Robert J., Brian P. Niehoff, William H. Turnley. "Empowerment, Expectations, and the Psychological Contract – Managing the Dilemmas and Gaining the Advantages." *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 29 (2000): 471-485.
- Robinson, Sandra L. "Trust and Breach of the Psychological Contract." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41 (1996): 574-599.
- Rousseau, Denise M. "Changing the Deal while Keeping the People." *Academy of Management Executive* 10 (1996): 50-58.
- Rousseau, Denise M. *Psychological Contract Inventory Technical Report*. Version 2: February 2000. <[http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/rousseau/0\\_reports/PCI.pdf](http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/rousseau/0_reports/PCI.pdf)>.
- Rousseau, Denise M. "Schema, Promise and Mutuality: The Building Blocks of the Psychological Contract." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 74 (2001): 511-541.
- Rousseau, Denise M. *Psychological Contracts in Organizations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Arguments*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Sager, Ira. "IBM: History, But no Lesson." *BusinessWeek* 07/22/96. November 20, 2002  
 <<http://www.businessweek.com/1996/30/b348534.htm>>.
- Thomas, R. Roosevelt, Jr. "Note on Managing the Psychological Contract." *Harvard Business School* (1974): 1-11.
- Turnley, William H., Daniel C. Feldman. "A Discrepancy Model of Psychological Contract Violations." *Human Resource Management Review* 9 (1999): 367-386.
- N.a. "The Transformation of IBM." *Harvard Business Review* September 9, 1991: 1-22.

### **Abstract**

Today, managers need more than skills in leading and motivating people. With regard to the number of suits brought to court because of sexual harassment, a manager must take care not to harass any employee by the way he or she acts or speaks; otherwise, serious legal problems might arise. Political correctness (PC), a movement which emerged in the United States in the 1960s, was created to avoid discrimination of minorities by race, sex, physical condition, etc. In the 1980s PC became a matter of public interest not only in America but also in Germany. In particular, the impact of PC on language is obvious in everyday life. The PC movement has had to face a strong opposition and attack by opponents who stated that political correctness would violate personal rights of freedom. Despite all critique, the basic principle of PC, i.e. the respectful treatment of every person, is more important than ever before in today's multicultural world.

JEL-classification: A12, J15, J16, I28

Key words: communication, Civil Rights Movement, discrimination

### **Zusammenfassung**

#### *„Die Bedeutung von Political Correctness in den USA“*

Heutzutage gehen die Anforderungen, die an Manager gestellt werden, über das bloße Führen und Motivieren von Mitarbeitern hinaus. Angesichts der steigenden Klagen wegen sexueller Belästigung müssen Manager streng darauf bedacht sein, ihren Angestellten durch Worte oder Taten nicht in irgendeiner Form zu nahe zu treten. Political Correctness (PC), eine Bewegung die ihren Ursprung in den 60er Jahren in den USA hatte, entstand aus dem Bestreben heraus, jede Art von Diskriminierung gegenüber Minderheiten, sei es aufgrund von Rassenzugehörigkeit, Geschlecht, körperlicher Beschaffenheit usw., zu vermeiden. In den 80er Jahren wurde PC auch in Deutschland zum Thema der öffentlichen Diskussion. Insbesondere der Einfluss der PC Bewegung auf unsere Sprache ist allgegenwärtig. Die PC Bewegung wurde von Gegnern scharf angegriffen, da sie in deren Augen persönliche Freiheitsrechte unterdrücke. Trotz aller Kritik ist das Grundprinzip von Political Correctness, der respektvolle Umgang mit unseren Mitmenschen, in unserer heutigen multikulturellen Welt bedeutender als je zuvor.

JEL-Klassifikation: A12, J15, J16, I28

Schlagworte: Kommunikation, Menschenrechtsbewegung, Diskriminierung,

## 2 Political Correctness: Attack of the Thought Police or Creation of a Better World?

A journalist is sitting in a diner, reading an article about the Bill of Rights. The waitress does not know about the content of the article, all that she sees is that this man is looking into a magazine called *Playboy*. She is deeply shocked, describes herself as feeling sexually harassed, even raped. As a consequence, the guest has to leave the diner without getting anything for breakfast (Hughes 28). This story happened in Berkeley, California, in 1991. The journalist's behavior was regarded to be politically incorrect, and, therefore, had to be punished.

So what was wrong with his behavior and who determines what is correct and what is not? What does political correctness (PC) mean? Is it the way a person acts, the words a person uses in everyday speech or a person's ideas and attitudes towards the environment? What are the effects of PC, does it help to improve society or is it only a radical dogma of some left-wings who do not care about freedom of speech? Is PC finally an appropriate way to eliminate discrimination or does it create another kind of discrimination in and by itself?

This paper will not attempt to offer an absolute answer to the above questions, for the simple reason that due to the complexity of PC, a general Yes or No to those questions will not be possible. The intention of this paper is to provide a critical look at the phenomenon PC in order to reveal some of the prejudices and misunderstandings in connection with this movement.

As the topic is very complex, not everything in connection with PC can be discussed in this paper. For that reason the principles considered to be the most important ones will be looked at in detail: affirmative action and canons, feminism and the effects of PC on the American language with special regard to speech codes.

When trying to define the term "political correctness," one is confronted with some difficulties as PC not only refers to a specific way of speaking, but also includes different ideologies and reform movements (Schenz 23). For this reason, a universal definition of PC does not exist even today after more than 40 years of PC history.

In the *Little Oxford Dictionary* political correctness is defined as the "avoidance of language or action which excludes ethnic or cultural minorities" (489). This is supposed to be a quite narrow definition as it only takes into consideration a person's behavior and speaking, and not the ideas behind those articulations.

The fact that political correctness, to a large degree, causes negative associations becomes obvious in John Taylor's definition in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 1992 Book of the Year* where he describes PC as: "(a) pejorative term to describe a loose collection of feminists,

Marxists, multiculturalists, and deconstructionists together with their assorted left-wing positions on race, sexual orientation, gender, class, the environment, and related issues” (459).

It might be of interest at this point, to determine when and in which connection the term political correctness was first used. The oldest source found dates back to the 18th century when Justice James Wilson<sup>1</sup> in the Supreme Court Case *Chisholm v. Georgia* in 1793 stated that:

The states, rather than the People, for whose sakes the States exist, are frequently the objects which attract and arrest our principal attention .... Sentiments and expressions of this inaccurate kind prevail in our common, even in our convivial, language. Is a toast asked? 'The United States' instead of the 'People of the United States' is the toast given. This is not politically correct.”

According to this passage, Justice Wilson used the expression 'not politically correct' in order to reveal and criticize an inappropriate use of language.

The roots of PC in the 20<sup>th</sup> century cannot be traced easily. Some authors believe that the term arose among Marxists at the beginning of the last century and was adopted by left-wing groups by the end of the 1960s (Schenz 27). According to Berman, politically correct was introduced by “the Leninist Left to denote someone who steadfastly toed the party line” (5). And still others suppose the Chinese Communist Mao Zedong to have created this term in his Red Bible (Cummings 1).

Although the origin of the expression is not clear, all authors agree that Political Correctness in the United States developed within the context of the civil rights and reform movement in the 1960s. But it was not until the 1980s that PC gained real importance and became a question of public discussion.

The starting point of what is referred to as the PC movement today were the American universities in which students and professors demanded a stronger consideration and special treatment of minorities (Schenz 15). One must note that in 1960, only six percent of the college students were non-white (Wallach Scott 32). As America was confronted with drastic demographic changes (especially the numbers of immigrants from Latin America and Asia increased), PC supporters demanded a proportional representation of minorities at universities that reflects American society which led to the introduction of quota-systems (Schenz 31).

Soon the debate on political correctness left the university and became a topic of national interest; revealing itself in various movements for equality and against discrimination, e.g. the Women's Liberation Movement and the Lesbian and Gay Liberation Movement (Wierlemann

---

<sup>1</sup> This statement within the larger context can be looked up at: <http://vi.uh.edu/pages/alhmat/chisholm.html>

47). It is important to bear in mind that the common goal of all those movements was to create a free and democratic society where each individual, regardless of gender, race or sexual orientation, is given equal rights and (which goes beyond the definition of equality in the Constitution) equal chances in life and equal treatment in society. When the debate expanded from college campuses to become part of the more general political struggle, a second, conservative front rapidly developed taking over the term without its original meaning but identifying with it everything conservatives regarded as bad in society (Wierlemann 47). As a consequence, PC evolved into a swearword and became a political rather than a social question.

Affirmative action programs were established to abolish or at least reduce discrimination in everyday life. One important step into this direction was the 1964 Civil Rights Act directed at discrimination at work and in public institutions. Thus, minorities were to achieve the same positions as the “privileged whites.” Affirmative action is based on the assumption that minorities are faced with worse conditions of living, education and so on than the white majority and must, therefore, be given a preferential treatment. In his 1965 commencement speech at Harvard University, President Johnson gave the following justification for affirmative action programs:

You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you're free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates ... we seek not just equality as a right and a theory but also equality as a fact and equality as a result (Johnson).

As already mentioned above, PC proponents demanded the introduction of quotas within the context of university studies in connection with affirmative action programs. Consequently, some universities like Berkeley and Duke changed their entrance criteria which led to lower test scores for ethnic minorities in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (Wierlemann 57 and 58). As a result, the share of Hispanic and African-American students in 1987 was twice as high as in 1984 while the share of whites diminished by over 20%.<sup>2</sup>

The sense of such measures, especially of those quota-systems, is surely debatable. On the one hand, the old system of meritocracy was replaced by ethnic criteria. Hard work at school and a good result on the SAT were no longer the decisive requirements for being accepted at university, but belonging to a particular minority became of much higher importance. This

---

<sup>2</sup> The figures are taken from Schenz 33.

fact would inevitably lead to a reverse form of discrimination: students with better results would not get a place at university because they were of “white” descent. On the other hand, differences in the SAT results between the white population and the various minorities were usually based on differences in the quality of high school education (Wierlemann 57). The opponents of affirmative action and of PC in general call quota systems an unfair institution, but forget to consider the fact that American society before PC was not “fair and harmonious” (Choi/Murphy 21). As one can see, it seems impossible to support one social group without discriminating another.

After the introduction of quota rules, there was still another problem to solve: even though minorities were represented in larger numbers at universities, the old curricula were still orientated on Western culture, and much of the material used in class referred to European history and literature (referred to as Eurocentrism by PC supporters) (Schenz 44). African-American, Asian or Hispanic writers or philosophers were hardly given any attention, so PC’ers called for changes in the canon.

Until March 1988, Stanford University had a course class called “Western Culture” which had to be taken by all students (Searle 106). Within this subject, students were taught about history, literature and the arts, philosophy, and Western thought and technology. The required reading list contained the Bible, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, and Freud to name only a few. According to the changes in the “college population,” students at Stanford protested against this one-sided approach in teaching culture and demanded the replacement of this course with one that also includes non-Western elements (Wilson 64). In order to fulfill this demand, the Stanford Faculty Senate renamed the class “Cultures, Ideas, and Values” (CIV). Generally, the idea of learning about different cultures is supposed to be a good one; especially in a multicultural society like the American. In an interview, Dinesh D’Souza<sup>3</sup> states that young people should learn about Islamic fundamentalism, Japanese capitalism and Confucian ethic (D’Souza/MacNeil 31). What D’Souza criticizes is the fact that the classical works of non-Western cultures are not discussed at the surveyed universities; instead “a kind of ethnic cheerleading” has taken place.

Finally, just renaming the class CIV did not really lead to drastic changes at Stanford. The reading list stayed nearly unchanged, and the persons who taught CIV were generally the same who had taught Western Culture (Wilson 65) whereas at Johns Hopkins University,

---

<sup>3</sup> Dinesh D’Souza is the author of *Illiberal Education*, which has become the ‘bible’ of the PC opponents. In his book, D’Souza discusses the drastic changes and conflicts at six famous American Universities PC has produced. As D’Souza used even the most grotesque stories and anecdotes for his argumentation, the book is quite controversial. Nevertheless, it has met great response and even become a bestseller. And finally, this book has contributed much to making the problem of PC a matter of public interest.

Baltimore, changes in the curricula were recognizable. The reading list, required for Political Science in fall 1990, included authors like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X and dealt with topics like Racism, Feminism and the Vietnam War while one year earlier it had contained classical works of American policy and history.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, affirmative action also influenced other social areas. In 1971 the Department of Labor demanded contractors to employ a specific quota of minorities. This problem is quite obvious: Entrepreneurs employ people in order to perform a certain job as well as possible. Accordingly, employers will always hire the person they regard as most suitable. In order to meet the requirements of affirmative action programs, managers might be forced to employ someone less suitable, thus, making an uneconomical decision in the interest of the firm (Narveson 78).

Later, affirmative action programs not only refer to ethnic minorities, but also include women whose social status was shaped by discrimination for a long time. Concerning employment in the academic field, the facts indicate that: only 16.5% of tenured professors at American universities are women, and they earn an average \$3,000 less a year than their male counterparts in the same position (Schenz 45). Mostly, female professors were found in traditionally female disciplines with less influence and prestige like linguistic sciences. Thus, it is not astonishing that the PC movement regarded women as another potential victim of social inequality, and feminism became a very important catchword in connection with PC (Schenz 45).

The aim of feminist movements was to achieve greater equality of sexes by ending discrimination at work, reducing violence against women, increasing the representation of females in economy and government, etc. (Friedman 22). The so-called Women's Liberation Movement in the US was widely considered to be part of political correctness and had, therefore, to face almost the same arguments that are used by PC opponents.<sup>5</sup>

One important reform that took, and still takes, place within the context of the PC movement is a reformation of language. The purpose of this language reform is the avoidance of sexist, racist, and offensive or discriminatory remarks as well as the ban of such comments through 'speech codes.' Such speech codes, established at different universities like the Universities of Stanford, Michigan and Wisconsin, penalize students who use "hate speech"

---

<sup>4</sup> The reading lists of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, of 1990 and 1991 are depicted in Schenz, pp. 34 and 35.

<sup>5</sup> As sexual correctness (a new term for feminism in connection with PC) includes a wide range of different aspects, this paper will only concentrate on language aspects which will be examined within the context of the language reform to be discussed below. For more information about sexual correctness, *Sexual Correctness* by Wendy McElroy is recommended to the reader because this book deals with topics like affirmative action, sexual harassment and prostitution.



in order to insult other students (Friedmann 3). “Hate speech” consists to a large degree of fighting words; a category of expressions which has been defined by the US Supreme Court in 1941 as words that are “likely to provoke the average person to retaliation, and thereby cause a breach of the peace” (Fish 236).

Just like PC in general, speech codes have become a matter of discussion and faced strong opposition. Speech codes were attacked as censorship of free thought and free expression and considered a violation of the First Amendment to the US Constitution which states that “the Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press” (U. S. Embassy). Speech codes were regarded as a completely new invention of PC proponents, but in fact there was nothing new about them. There have always been disciplinary measures for violating speech at colleges (Wilson 91). The intention of speech codes was not to prohibit free speech and to establish a thought police; even though critics of speech codes brought forward such arguments. Moreover, no one has ever defined what speech codes stand for exactly and, thus, no one could say how many colleges have introduced them. Wilson states if speech codes mean that colleges are offered the opportunity to punish students for threatening, abusive or offensive expressions, then every college has and has always had a speech code (92). According to a study of 384 colleges, various kinds of behaviour are forbidden on campuses such as disruption (79.7 percent), sexual harassment (78.1 percent), threats of violence (53.9 percent) and also verbal abuse/harassment (60.1 percent).<sup>6</sup> These numbers indicate that nearly every college has set up some kind of disciplinary code.

How then have speech codes been put into practice? Considering the arguments of the opponents of speech codes, one could get the impression that every college student has to be afraid of being expelled from university just for laughing at the wrong time, reading the wrong newspaper or having the wrong opinion. This was not the case. A 1992 *Chronicle of Higher Education* investigation revealed that codes have rarely been used to penalize students and only few students really made complaints against others for disregarding the codes (Wilson 95).

Finally, speech codes did not fare well in court decisions. For example, the University of Wisconsin Speech Code was declared unconstitutional in 1991. The same happened to speech codes at the Universities of Michigan and Stanford. The problem of those codes was that they were formulated too vaguely and could, thus, be easily misused. But instead of pointing out the mistakes of speech codes, speech codes in general were attacked by the opponents of PC.

---

<sup>6</sup> These figures based on a study by the Freedom Forum only represent a small extract. The complete result of this study is available in Wilson 93.

Even members of minority groups who were to be protected by speech codes did not always support them. Thus, Gwen Thomas, a black community college administrator from Colorado, stated that young people have to learn how to manage life on college campuses and how to handle offensive verbal attacks and other adversarial situations (Hentoff 224). Furthermore, the following incident portrays that potential victims of violating speech might feel even more discriminated by speech codes than without those codes (Hentoff 219). There was a discussion at Harvard University whether speech codes should be introduced. A white student argued for it because otherwise black students would be driven away from colleges and not given the chance of a highly qualified education. As a reaction, a black student stated that he always had to live with racist speech and, therefore, could handle it. He felt more condescended by the idea that he had to be protected from racist terms: “It is more racist and insulting to say this to me than to call me a nigger.” However, such a negative attitude towards speech codes occurred rather seldom among African-American students.

So how can speech codes be judged? Are speech codes necessary, do they really lead to less discrimination and a less hostile atmosphere on campuses, or do they only limit the right of free speech without any justification? In fact, speech codes do restrict free expression, but they also help to preserve the right of free speech by offering minorities the chance to express their own values and ideas. If one had to fear verbal attacks or harassment for showing an attitude which does not meet the opinion of the majority, this person would refrain from taking up the wrong position.

As with the other components of PC, the language reform has not only taken place on college campuses. In fact, it has produced a great impact on everyday speech. The number of politically incorrect terms that should be removed from language grew within the past years and has, to date, reached an enormous dimension (Schenz 24). This is also illustrated in a quotation by Henry Beard and Christopher Cerf, editors of the *Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook*: “Welcome to the nineties. But you better watch what you say. If you’re not politically correct, not even your pet- oops, your animal companion - will love you anymore.”

In order to speak perfect politically correct language, which terms does one have to remove and how will those words be replaced? In general, the reformation concerned words that might in any way discriminate, violate or harass people (and even animals as shown above). Most of the following examples are taken from the *Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook* which was written by Beard and Cerf in cooperation with the American Hyphen

Society<sup>7</sup> and provides the reader with all necessary information about what to say to whom, and which concepts one should support or not.

Terms like *African American* and *Asian American* instead of *Black* and *Oriental* are not unusual anymore as are terms like *Chair* instead of *Chairman*, *Humankind* instead of *Mankind*, and *Senior* instead of *Old*. Many new, politically correct terms, however, may seem quite awkward at first sight as, for example, the following demonstrate: *cosmetically different* as a substitute for *ugly*, *person with an alternative body image* as a politically correct alternative for *obese person*, *temporarily misoriented* instead of *lost*, or *member of the mutant albino genetic-recessive global minority* as a substitute for *white person*. Furthermore, it is also very questionable if the term *autoeuthanasia* will ever succeed in replacing *suicide*, or if the terms *stolen nonhuman-animal sweetener* and *person with difficult-to-meet needs* will ever be used instead of *honey* and *serial killer*. It is probably very safe to presume that such terms, even though they are considered to be politically correct by some people, will most likely not become part of everyday speech as they are just too provocative, too euphemistic, or simply too grotesque as Viola Schenz notes (25).

According to the above examples, one is given the impression that by using politically correct language a person develops a different attitude toward a specific topic. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll wrote a dialog between Alice and Humpty Dumpty which impressively illustrates the vagueness of words (190):

‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.’

‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’

‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be the master – that’s all.’

So finally, one must observe how far there is a connection between language and reality, i.e. between the words people use to describe what they see and the way those people perceive the world. This question has preoccupied many scientists such as the linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. According to their theory, called the Sapir-Whorf-Hypothesis, the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of a social group. Hence, people growing up with different languages have different perceptions of the world (Fowler 64), and no two languages are so similar that they reflect the same reality. Consequently, thinking and perception is relative which has been summarized under the term linguistic relativity. Linguistic determinism, the other principle of the Sapir-Whorf-Theory,

---

<sup>7</sup> The American Hyphen Society is an alliance that seeks to remove any kind of pejorative or offensive language and to replace it by non-discriminatory speech (Beard/Cerf 176).

states that a person's thinking is determined by the language that person speaks (Chandler), not the other way round. It should be noted that the Sapir-Whorf-Hypothesis is not undisputed as it had not been verified. Nevertheless, this hypothesis offers a theoretical basis to justify the assumption of PC that changes in language can lead to changes in people's values, attitudes and behavior.

Another scientific basis for the influence of language on perception is provided by Fowler who states that language and social structures are interdependent, i.e. the power relationships of a society are reflected in its language: "Not only is [language] used to enforce and exploit existing positions of authority and privilege in the obvious ways ... the use of language continuously constitutes the statuses and roles upon which people base their claims to exercise power, and the statuses and roles which seem to require subservience" (61). Consequently, if power relationships in a society are to be changed, there have to be changes in language at the same time.

The lexicography for people of African Origin has experienced an interesting development. At times of slavery, the term *nigger* was generally used for slaves. It continued to be used until the middle of the last century. In order to abandon this discriminating expression, it was replaced by *Negro* which arose under the influence of Martin Luther King who repeatedly used this word in his famous "I have a dream" speech. Other designations for the black minority are *Colored*, *Non-Whites* or *Afro-Americans*. The politically correct names nowadays are *African-American* or *Person of African descent* (Wierlemann 71). It would seem reasonable that the proposition of Beard and Cerf to call African-Americans *Sun Persons* (72) is not likely to succeed in practical use.

What becomes apparent with the demonstrated example is that the abolition of the swearword *nigger* has obviously not led to the desired changes. Instead, every newly established term was replaced after a certain period of time. The necessity to do so lies in the fact that the negative image or prejudice related to a specific expression will be applied to the new term. Furthermore, there is another interesting fact to be taken into account. If an expression discriminates or harasses depends not only on the word itself, but also on the person using it. *Nigger*, for example, is widely used among African-Americans themselves as another term for friend or brother. This use of the word is also portrayed in the movies, e.g. in the movie *8 mile*.

Another important aspect of the language reform is the desire expressed by feminists to "change the patriarchal and sexist 'nature' of language ... [who] therefore engaged in various types of linguistic reform or language planning" (Pauwels). Feminist critical linguists

criticized that many job titles were not gender-neutral. As a response to this criticism, several job titles were replaced by non-discriminatory ones: instead of *airline steward* or *stewardess* one speaks of a *flight attendant*, a *fireman* is a *firefighter*, *policemen* are called *police officers* and what used to be a *housewife* is now entitled *house manager* (Goddard/Meân Patterson 74). Moreover, feminists expressed disapproval over the usage of the male pronoun he/his/him in neutral contexts. Studies revealed that masculine words used as generics make the decoder of the message believe that they contain a masculine-specific meaning (Goddard/Meân Patterson 66). As a result, it has become common to use ‘he or she’ or the plural pronoun ‘they.’ Consequently, the word *herstory*<sup>8</sup> instead of *history* has been created in order to emphasize the historical (or herstorical?) importance of women.

One question still needs to be answered: What sense does a reformation of language make? With regard to the Sapir-Whorf-Hypothesis and Fowler’s theory of the connection between language and power, one can hardly deny that language has a great impact on someone’s behavior. Moreover, it seems to make sense that a more conscious application of words and phrases might make people aware of social problems and inequalities. Though, a language reformation also contains risks that may negatively affect the purpose of PC or even worsen the situation. First of all, it is debatable if values that are firmly established in a person can be changed simply by forcing the person to use correct speech. Instead, intolerant or even hostile attitudes may become invisible and, therefore, not be discussed. Consequently, “racists” and “sexists” will remain undetected and no one will make them change their views.

In addition, the usage of euphemisms does not change the fact that women still earn less than men and that there are still too many hurdles *differently abled* have to face (Schenz 58). By calling a homeless person *involuntarily undomiciled*, this person’s social tragedy is only downplayed. But the situation for him or her does not improve at all. On the contrary, people might even lose social awareness of such problems.

And finally, one must always keep in mind the primary purpose of language: communication - not only of facts, but also of attitudes, convictions and emotions. By dictating a person which words he or she has to use, this natural function of language is violated. Moreover, the defenders of correct speech seem to forget that communication consists of more than oral expressions. One communicates by the clothes he or she wears, by mime and gesture and by the tone in his or her voice. Said with a condescending tone, the politically correct term *African-American* also reveals a negative attitude.

---

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the word *herstory* has actually been adopted by some English dictionaries such as *The American Heritage Dictionary*.

It should be clear that PC is no panacea against inequality, discrimination and unfairness. PC consists of a variety of facets pursuing different purposes, applying different means and experiencing different levels of acceptance in American society, so that a final conclusion cannot be made. Some proposals of the PC movement have been realized, some of them will surely never be taken seriously. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the fact that PC had and has influence on social life. It has caused more social awareness which is reflected in many sectors of everyday life, e.g. in the professional area. Many American firms have established “diversity training programs” in order to create a corporate culture of mutual tolerance in their multicultural workforce. Consulting companies have discovered this field as a “billion-dollar industry” by giving advice to employers in questions of avoiding racism, sexism and other potential discriminating behavior (Schenz 114).

One of the most interesting aspects of the whole discussion is the polarization and harshness of the debate: one is either pro-PC, and, therefore, a left-winged communist and feminist radical whose only wish is to destroy the existing social order, or a right-winged (white-male) racist and sexist. A reason for this polarization might be that at the peak of the PC movement there were many publications on this topic which were usually based on the personal, subjective views of their authors.

As everyone is living in a world of interaction and interdependence, mutual tolerance, solidarity and respect play an important role in every community which can be a small family, a team at work or all of society. The question how tolerance and respect can be achieved is difficult to answer; otherwise all people would already be living in a kind of “perfect world.” The basis for development towards mutual understanding and support is not to accept the status quo, but making efforts to improve situations. In order to do so, one need not take part in political demonstrations. It is much more important to observe one’s own behavior and treat others the way one wants to be treated.

## Appendix

James Finn Garner, the author of *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, rewrote some very old fairy tales politically correct. What becomes obvious in those stories is the fact that PC may easily appear ridiculous if it is used in an exaggerated manner. The following story is an excerpt from J. F. Garner's book *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*.

## The Three Little Pigs

Once there were three little pigs who lived together in mutual respect and in harmony with their environment. Using materials that were indigenous to the area, they each built a beautiful house. One pig built a house of straw, one a house of sticks, and one a house of dung, clay, and creeper vines shaped into bricks and baked in a small kiln. When they were finished, the pigs were satisfied with their work and settled back to live in peace and self-determination.

But their idyll was soon shattered. One day, along came a big, bad wolf with expansionist ideas. He saw the pigs and grew very hungry, in both the physical and ideological sense. When the pigs saw the wolf, they ran into the house of straw. The wolf ran up to the house and banged on the door, shouting, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!"

The pigs shouted back, "Your gunboat tactics hold no fear for pigs defending their homes and culture." But the wolf wasn't to be denied what he thought was his manifest destiny. So he huffed and he puffed and he blew down the house of straw. The frightened pigs ran into the house of sticks, with the wolf in hot pursuit. Where the house of straw had stood, other wolves bought up the land and started a banana plantation. At the house of sticks, the wolf again banged on the door and shouted; "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!"

The pigs shouted back, "Go to hell, you carnivorous imperialistic oppressor!" At this, the wolf chuckled condescendingly. He thought to himself: "They are so childlike in their ways. It will be a shame to see them go, but progress cannot be stopped."

So the wolf huffed and puffed and blew down the house of sticks. The pigs ran to the house of bricks, with the wolf close at their heels. Where the house of sticks had stood, other wolves built a time-share condo resort complex for vacationing wolves, with each unit a fiberglass reconstruction of the house of sticks, as well as native curio shops, snorkelling, and dolphin shows.

At the house of bricks, the wolf again banged on the door and shouted, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!" This time in response, the pigs sang songs of solidarity and wrote letters of protest to the United Nations. By now the wolf was getting angry at the pigs' refusal to see the situation from the carnivore's point of view. So he huffed and puffed, and huffed and

puffed, he grabbed his chest and fell over dead from a massive heart attack brought on from eating too many fatty foods.

The three little pigs rejoiced that justice had triumphed and did a little dance around the corpse of the wolf. Their next step was to liberate their homeland. They gathered together a band of other pigs who had been forced off their lands. Their new brigade of porcistas attacked the resort complex with machine guns and rocket launchers and slaughtered the cruel wolf oppressors, sending a clear signal to the rest of the hemisphere not to meddle in their internal affairs. Then the pigs set up a model socialist democracy with free education, universal health care, and affordable housing for everyone.

Please note: The wolf in this story was a metaphorical construct. No actual wolves were harmed in the writing of the story.



## Works Cited

- Beard, Henry, and Christopher Cerf. *The Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook*. New York: Villard Books, 1992.
- Berman, Paul. "Introduction: The Debate and Its Origins." Berman, Paul, ed. *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992, 1-26.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland – and – Through the Looking-Glass*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Chandler, Daniel. *The Sapir-Whorf-Hypothesis*. 8 January, 2003. <<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/whorf.html>>.
- Choi, Jung Min, and John W. Murphy. *The Politics and Philosophy of Political Correctness*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1992.
- Cummings, Michael S. *Beyond Political Correctness: Social Transformation in the United States*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- D'Souza, Dinesh. *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- D'Souza, Dinesh, and Robert MacNeil. "The Big Chill? Interview with Dinesh D'Souza." Berman, Paul, ed. *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992, 29-39.
- Fish, Stanley. "There's no such Thing as Free Speech and It's a Good Thing, Too." Berman, Paul, ed. *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992, 231-245.
- Fowler, Roger. "Power." Van Dijk, Teun A., ed. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis: Volume 4: Discourse Analysis in Society*. London: Academic Press, 1985, 61-82.
- Friedman, Marilyn. "Codes, Canons, Correctness and Feminism". Friedman, Marilyn and Jan Narveson, eds. *Political Correctness*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995, 1-45.
- Garner, James Finn. *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994.
- Goddard, Angela, and Lindsey Meân Patterson. *Language and Gender*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Hentoff, Nat. "'Speech Codes' on the Campus and Problems of Free Speech." Berman, Paul, ed. *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992, 215-224.
- Hughes, Robert. *Political Correctness oder Die Kunst, sich selbst das Denken zu verbieten*. Trans. Sabine Roth and Regina Rawlinson. München: Droemersch Verlagsgesellschaft Th. Knauer Nachf., 1995.
- Johnson, Lyndon B. 6 January, 2003. <<http://www.nyu.edu/classes/jackson/social.issues/AfActGrG.html>>.
- McElroy, Wendy. *Sexual Correctness: The Gender-Feminist Attack on Women*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996.
- Narveson, Jan. "Politics, Ethics, and Political Correctness." Friedman, Marilyn and Jan Narveson, eds. *Political Correctness*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995, 47-106.
- Pauwels, Anne. *Feminist Language Planning: Has It Been Worthwhile?* 3 January, 2003. <[http://www.linguistik-online.de/heft1\\_99/pauwels.htm](http://www.linguistik-online.de/heft1_99/pauwels.htm)>.
- Schenz, Viola. *Political Correctness: Eine Bewegung erobert Amerika*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1994.
- Searle, John. "The Storm over the University." Berman, Paul, ed. *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992, 85-123.

- Taylor, John. "Political Correctness". *Encyclopedia Britannica 1992 Book of the Year*. Chicago: 1992, 459-460.
- Waite, Maurice et al., eds. *The Little Oxford Dictionary*. Rev. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Wallach Scott, Joan. "The Campaign against Political Correctness: What's really at Stake." William, Jeffrey, ed. *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*. New York: Routledge, 1995, 22-43.
- Wierlemann, Sabine. *Political Correctness in den USA und in Deutschland*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2002.
- Wilson, John K. *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- n.a. *First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States*. 24 January, 2003. <<http://www.usembassy.de/usa/etexts/gov/consteng.htm>>.

### **Abstract**

Every individual on this planet communicates in some way because the interaction with other individuals is essential. Humans have evolved a complex means of expressing themselves to others through sounds, signs, and symbols. With the technical revolution at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new method of communication appeared: Communication via the computer and the internet. This paper focuses on computer mediated communication and its possible consequences for human communication.

JEL-classification: F00; L86; M14; O14; O33

Key words: Computer mediated communication, face-to-face communication, internet, culture, intercultural problems

### **Zusammenfassung**

*„Kann computer-vermittelte Kommunikation persönliche Kommunikation ersetzen?“*

Jedes Wesen auf dieser Erde kommuniziert auf irgendeine Art und Weise, weil der Austausch mit anderen Individuen lebenswichtig ist. Mit Lauten, Zeichen und Symbolen hat der Mensch eine komplexe Art des Ausdrucks entwickelt, um sich der Umwelt mitzuteilen, besonders anderen Menschen. Mit der technischen Revolution am Ende des 20ten Jahrhundert entstand eine neue Möglichkeit der Kommunikation: die Kommunikation per Computer und Internet. Dieses Arbeitspapier konzentriert sich auf die computer-vermittelte Kommunikation und deren mögliche Konsequenz der menschlichen Kommunikation.

JEL-Klassifikation: F00; L86; M14; O14; O33

Schlagworte: Computer-vermittelte Kommunikation, persönliche Kommunikation, Internet, Kultur, interkulturelle Probleme

### **3 Can Computer-Mediated Communication Supersede Face-to-Face Communication?**

Communication has been a necessity for human beings since the beginning of social interactions between individuals and has evolved along with social interaction in the history of human evolution. Starting with just making sounds and simple signs, language became more and more complex, adjusting to the needs of every individual as life itself got more complex over time. During the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new means of communication were developed with technical discoveries and changes. Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means living in a multi-media world with information-overflow. Technology is becoming more involved in everyday life, e.g. computer-controlled phones or banking, so that it is important and interesting to consider the possibilities those technologies bring into human lives and how they simplify and complicate human lives in general.

Today, talking with someone on the phone is taken for granted and with the technical development of the personal computer, communication has become even easier. It is not enough that with the help of the Internet people get connected to other individuals on the other side of the globe at nearly no cost, but the Internet connection is also rapidly transmitting data in almost no time or with only little delay. So, social networks between individual users are growing quickly to an immense complexity, and ways of communication seem to change into a casual style. Through the possibility of making computer-mediated-communication an ordinary, everyday occurrence, people get used to it and adopt this new means of communication into their everyday life.

Since this paper mainly includes aspects of written communication in the virtual dimension like Internet-Relay Chat (IRC), electronic mail (e-mail), bulletin-boards (BBS), forums, and Instant Messaging (IM), one should be aware that there are more possibilities of communication in the Internet. For example, such as voice messaging, which can be seen similar to communication over the telephone, or communication via a camera over the Internet, also called “web-cam,” and other possibilities. However, these other, non-written means of communication will not be the focus of this paper.

Communication is essential for getting information through the exchange of ideas and thoughts with other individuals. It is even possible to say that life without communicating for social needs is not possible because everybody has a desire for social relationships (Barnatt, 125). What then, is meant by communication? Finding a proper definition of communication is not easy. Communication between individuals can be broad and there seem to be as many definitions as there are ways to communicate. The following two definitions express communication quite clearly: “Communication is the process of conveying ideas,

information, feelings, desires, etc. encoded in symbols from one person to another” (Hinner) and “Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). Systems of symbols, signs and behaviour in face-to-face communication are not the same around the world and differ from culture to culture. Signs refer to a relationship between a word and the image of a concept and, therefore, do not display the same image globally. Symbols are endowed with a special meaning only by members of the same group and while they may appear to be similar around the globe, their meaning differs.

So when communicating, one should be aware of important factors which affect the way the sender encodes and the receiver decodes the message, and one should know that the medium used for transmission is important, too. Hence, diverse factors have an impact on the message such as the set of chosen symbols, i.e. the language, body-movement, eye contact, clothing, space and distance, time, and even the social background (Hinner). Consequently, one can say that communication not only has verbal elements, i.e. “consisting of or using words only and not involving action,” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*) but also non-verbal ones, i.e. “being other than verbal” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). Both, verbal and non-verbal communication have a great influence on the content and how the message will be encoded and afterwards received or understood by the recipient. But even when the sender and receiver have, for example, the same level of education, cultural background and the same view of the world, misunderstandings can appear due to the wrongly chosen medium.

Besides face-to-face communication, writing letters, talking on the phone, to name only a few of possible mediums the sender can use to convey a message, it is also possible to communicate with other individuals via a personal computer. In using the personal computer as a medium for communication, it is necessary to have a connection to the Internet or the World Wide Web (WWW) which are defined as large computer-networks with universal access to an extensive universe of documents. ”Most commonly, the emerging global computer communications network is referred to simply as the ‘Net’” (Barnatt, 144).

ARPANET, Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (Hauben), which was used for communication between US research institutes sponsored by the US Department of Defense to exchange information in the 1970s, was the first Internet (Rheingold, 18). From that time forward, the Internet has evolved to a large communication pool with more than one possibility to communicate, from UseNet over WELLS (Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link), with which the development of the Internet intensified during the 1980s (Rheingold, 154). Today

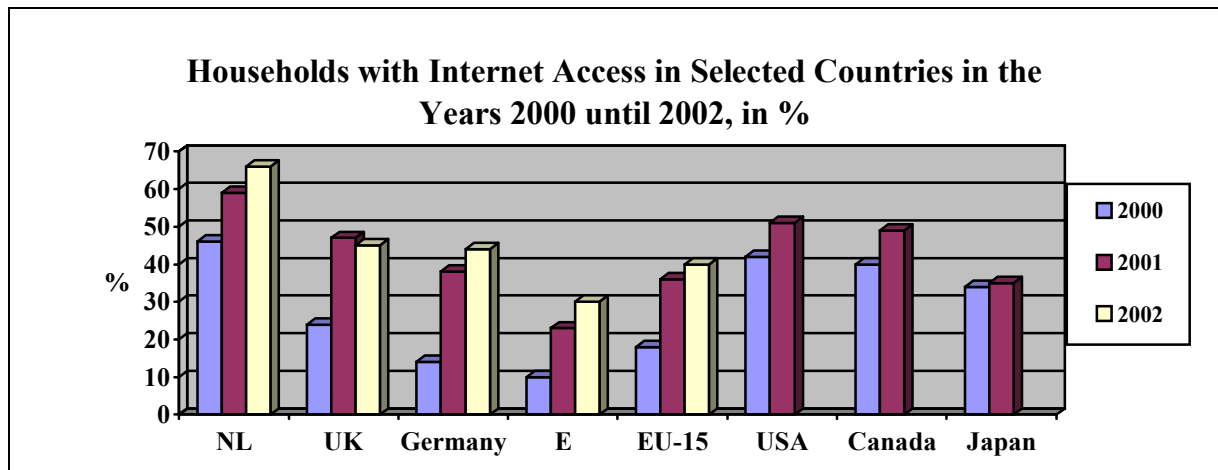
there are e-mails, web-site-forums, bulletin boards (BBS), Internet-Relay Chat (IRC), and Instant Messaging (IM) available as communication devices in the Internet, and people are able to communicate in a written language which is mostly English.

Recently, the term Cyberspace was formed which “may be a technological artefact, but virtual reality is a construct within the mind of a human being” (Reid, *Cultural Formations*). So, one could say that the Internet as a communication medium is a place which does not physically exist in the way that it could be touched or be visited in reality. The only things touchable are the hardware devices, e.g. personal computers.

With increasing computer sales, more and more people from all over the “real” world get connected to the “Virtual World” (Kollock and Smith). As already mentioned, the Internet is not only a pool for getting information but also a way to communicate. Besides being considered an end-user, everybody can become a participant in some way (Tapscott, 118). Either one is posting messages or information, or one reacts to other people’s thoughts or statements. That is the reason why “... computer networks are being used to connect people to people” (Kollock and Smith).

Almost anybody from any place in the world can become a member of this virtual community. Barry Wellmann states that “Personal Computers operate anywhere there is electricity” (Changing Connectivity, para. 4.1.). And in fact, not only does the percentage of users increase, but also the time spent online (Wellmann, Computer Networks). Just by looking at the development of Internet access in Europe, it is assured that computer-mediated communication is getting more attention in people’s lives as Illustration 1 shows below.

The illustration clearly displays the increased access to the Internet by private households in select countries, i.e. the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, the United States of America, Canada, Japan, and the 15 European Union countries together. However, the boost of getting an Internet connection seems to falter which can be explained with a saturation rate slowly being reached. This saturation does not mean that the development of Internet access is shifting backward, but that almost every household has a computer connected to the Internet by now.

**Illustration 1 : Households with Internet Access in Selected Countries**

Source: Eurobarometer / OECD, Statistisches Bundesamt 2003 – 15 – 0071, p. 10.

When people meet in the “Net” and have “social interaction with people who are not physically present,” it is called “virtual communication” or “computer-mediated communication” (Barnatt, 151) which is abbreviated as CMC. Computer-mediated communication can be miscellaneous; meaning, it can be “live”, real-time (Chat) as well as with a time delayed, i.e. electronic mail (e-mail), Voice mail, computer-conferences, black boards, web-sites: ”Digitale Kommunikation erfolgt sowohl live, in Echtzeit (Chat), als auch zeitverschoben (E-Mail, Voice Mail, Computerkonferenzen, schwarze Bretter, Web-Sites)“ (Tapscott, 98).

But what encourages people to meet in a virtual reality for communicating with other individuals, mostly strangers, knowing they may never really meet? Communicating face-to-face means that people actually meet physically and are facing the other individual they are talking to. Face-to-face communication is quite different to computer-mediated communication where the participants do not see one another.

There are two ways of computer-mediated communication, synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous communication is everything that happens in real-time whereas the term real-time refers to: ”Computersysteme, in denen sich Informationen unmittelbar vom Input zum Output bewegen“ (Tapscott, 111) meaning that information moves straight from input to output. This can be considered similar to face-to-face communication because the participants get direct and instantaneous feedback from the user on the other side.

Asynchronous communication takes place when a delay appears between the actual time the message was sent and the time it was received; meaning that the reply may occur minutes or months later (Kollock and Smith). Such types of communication with a delay can be found in bulletin-boards or forums (Tapscott, 89) where individuals can read and post

messages on the Internet giving other individuals the opportunity to post their opinion on the discussed topic at the same place in the Internet, i.e. mostly on a web-page. The most obvious form of asynchronous communication seems to be e-mail which can be considered as the modern way of writing letters.

In contrast to the fact that one cannot disguise oneself while communicating face-to-face, computer-mediated communication offers possibilities of playing with one's identity. As Rheingold states, the identity is one of the big variables in Cyberspace (Rheingold, 83). This proves to have advantages as well as disadvantages for the user.

The fact that the participants cannot see each other influences the behavior in the communication process. Howard Rheingold notes:

Kieslers Beobachtungen stützen die unter Online-Enthusiasten schon lange populäre Theorie, wonach Menschen, die Diskussionen im realen Leben aufgrund ihres Ranges oder ihres aggressiven Verhaltens oft dominieren, in einer Online-Konferenzen nicht stärker in Erscheinung treten als diejenigen, die in realen Diskussionen wenig oder gar nichts sagen, online dagegen viel beitragen (83).

The consequence of the fact that during an online conference or discussion it does not matter how the participants act in real life displays a big chance for shy individuals or those who had less success who can now participate in the discussion despite their lack of social skill or achievements in life. Hence, all users are in the same position when participating in a conversation via the Internet and are judged only by their ideas and involvement in the discussion itself.

It is common practice to use nicknames in the Internet which helps to hide the real personality. This causes limited disclosure and a rarely authenticated identity (Etzioni, 243). In contrast "f2f (face-to-face) communication ... relies on various personal identification markers, such as names, addresses, faces, and records" (Etzioni, 243). The lack of seeing one another makes people talk differently online than off-line, i.e. face-to-face. Consequently, people talk more freely while communicating on the Internet (Wellmann, *An Electronic Group*, 12).

In addition, in the Internet people who are usually shy can become outgoing and have the possibility to choose another identity. This can result in reviling and insulting other people. What follows is antisocial behaviour (Rheingold, 229). But in the same way, people can use their well developed use of language and verbalization to get attention and prestige while communicating in the Internet which they may never have been able to do before in their lives. This also includes the opportunity to manipulate feelings (Rheingold, 79, 193).



Altogether, it means that people are judged by the way they are able to use words rather than upon obvious visual signs, e.g. age and sex (Barnatt, 151).

Pretending to be someone else is a great advantage for those with “speech impediments, physical disabilities, disfigurements or perhaps with a fear of going out alone” (Barnatt, 151). Hence, those kind of people will be able to learn social skills in a non-threatening environment (Reid, *Electropolis*). Consequently “... individuals will be judged by the merit of their ideas, rather than by their gender, race, class, or age” (Kollock and Smith) leading to equal opportunities for every individual independent of their appearance.

Although one may have many friends on the Internet, one may never know who they are due to the question of their identity (Rheingold, 185). The identity, while being steady because users usually tend to keep the one “nickname” even though it is another name than their real name, will not give away something about the person’s personality unless this person wants to. Or as Howard Rheingold writes:

Mit künstlicher, aber stabiler Identität ist gemeint, dass niemand weiß, wer sich hinter den IRC-Spitznamen verbirgt, man aber vollkommen sicher sein kann, dass die Person mit einem bestimmten Spitznamen, mit der man heute kommuniziert, dieselbe ist, die den Namen gestern verwendet hat (219).

The fact that individuals are not able to see one another while communicating via computer leads to not knowing their real personality. Chances of meeting and even when meeting then not recognizing that very person one was talking to before for a long time on the Internet are very slim (Rheingold, 221). As a matter of fact, computer-mediated communication is mainly used for exchanging ideas, thoughts and opinions but not to meet in person. And because so little is really known of the user, it is almost impossible to recognize one another in reality. Mostly, only the nickname is known which does not reveal anything about the user. That is why even if two persons meet in the Internet, it is not likely that they will consciously see each other in real life.

But computer-mediated communication not only differs from face-to-face communication through the use of multiple identities and assuming different standpoints, but also in the way people communicate with one another. Thus, the way the participants use words and symbols has changed. One can even say, new types of languages and styles of communication have evolved in the Internet which seem to be more informal (Roberts). Computer-mediated communication clearly differs from the way people talk on the phone or write letters. Since the phone and the letter can be used for a very personal way to communicate, the Internet and the era of computer-mediated communication seems to crowd

out that personal touch. As a result, online communication appears to be informal. A conceivable reason of the more informal style of written communication online can be the fact that people have to actually type everything they want to say which takes much longer than actually saying it (Eric Jansen in Roberts). Accordingly, time is saved by writing all words without capital letters, using “made up” but in the community known abbreviations, and employing minimalist punctuation (Eisenberg). Even e-mail, which formerly was regarded as a more formal type of communication, is now turning into a “loose type of interaction” (Andreas Kathol in Roberts).

Another similarity but also difference to the face-to-face communication is the possibility to choose the availability or presence. One has the opportunity to choose whether to return a message or not when using e-mail or instant messaging (IM), as in “ICQ” or “Yahoo IM” which, by the way, all feature the ability to be “Away” or even “Do Not Disturb” (Bird). While one can choose whether to meet and talk to a person in real life or not, in the Internet this is possible, too. The difference to the face-to-face communication is that online one can actually be available but choose not to respond which cannot be done while communicating face-to-face without being disregarding.

With computer-mediated communication it is possible to communicate more regularly “without being in close proximity” (Etzioni, 242). That means even being miles apart, people can still stay in close contact. Since the distance between the two corresponding persons does not play an important role in the computer-mediated communication process, the quality of the individual’s social life can improve, and friendships across the globe can be established (Barnatt, 143-144).

Also, the nature of people’s relationships will alter by having contact to different characters and types of persons. With computer-mediated communication not only is there the possibility of maintaining an even larger number of relationships than probably with face-to-face communication, but it can also be easier to contact strangers “because there is less concern about rude intrusion or interpersonal risk” (Wellmann, *An Electronic Group*, 8-9). Knowing that there will always be somebody to talk to proves to be reassuring (Barnatt, 150). This is different to the face-to-face communication. Due to the fact that computer-mediated communication is global, there will be someone online and quasi available for communication at any moment due to the differing time zones whenever one feels like talking. Not only can more people be reached with computer-mediated communication, but they are also from all over the world and of different social and cultural backgrounds so that mental barriers can be dispersed by contacting people of different ethnic groups with whom one may or would not

have a chance to speak outside the Internet (Etzioni, 242; Barnatt, 151). Since communication goes across cultures, it enables people to develop “a sense of empathy and tolerance for differing cultures” (Reid, *Electropolis*).

However, in many cases a high level of computer-mediated communication can result in reducing the face-to-face and telephone contact and the participation in other social activities (Wellmann, *An Electronic Group*; Barnatt, 143) because it is much easier to just write an e-mail, for example, than to call or contact the individual in person (Mary-Kay Evans in Roberts). Thus, it appears that people are turning away from committing themselves to personal contact and relationships in public (Wellmann, *An Electronic Group*; Reid, *Electropolis*).

Another disadvantage of computer-based communication is the fact that sometimes the whole content which one wants to express is not fully received in the same sense the message was meant since some important message-conveying factors like emphasis and vocal accentuation are lost during the communication process (Bird). This happens because “words do not express the full extend of our cultural and interpersonal play” (Reid, *Cultural Formations*). One has to be aware of the fact that subconsciously people convey non-verbal messages with gestures or certain body movements which are understood differently depending on the cultural background. For example, in most countries nodding with the head is an expression of agreeing with someone. Therefore, nodding is an important feedback for the speaker but is not universal and can also lead to misunderstandings depending on the heritage of the listener or speaker.

Of course, there are some possibilities to overcome the disadvantages of computer-mediated communication. Consequently, for conveying feelings and expressions where there are no words “the online community has developed an array of symbols and shorthand to convey emotion through typing” (William K. Horton in Roberts). The use of those symbols and shorthand also display a time-saving, translation reducing and practical way of communication (Roberts) which “replace(s) many characteristics of speech, like pitch and tone” (Eisenberg). Pitch and tone can put different meanings to sentences, for example an ironic, serious or funny meaning. In the Internet a sentence is just an alignment of words. The reader, i.e. the receiver, has to figure out an appropriate meaning to the words. By using symbols and signs, the sender already adds a special meaning to the words which can be understood by the receiver in the same way. Assuming that the receiver is aware of the same signs, symbols and their meaning, misunderstandings can be prevented.

With smileys, also called emoticons can help, for example, people can express what cannot be said in any words. A „smiley“ refers to different ASCII-symbols (Tapscott, 99) which are “a sequence of characters on your computer keyboard. ... -- the colon represents the eyes, the dash represents the nose and the right parenthesis the mouth” (*Acronyms & Shorthand*). Table 1 below shows some examples of smileys. In fact, the number of possibilities is large because everybody can feel free to make up one’s own. Table 1 also shows acronyms which are another way of conveying emotions or to underline the meaning of a message.

**Table 1: Examples of “Smileys and Emoticons” and “Acronyms & Shorthand”**

Smileys and Emoticons				Acronyms & Shorthand	
@>-- ;--	A rose	o :-)	Angel	2B or not 2B	To Be Or Not To Be
o*-)	Angel	o ; -)	Angel	4ever	Forever
	winking		winking	AAMOF	As A Matter Of Fact
	- female		- male	AATK	Always At The Keyboard
d :-)	Baseball	: -)	Basic	ABT	About
: )	Basic	: ~- (	Bawling	ADN	Any Day Now
	Little Kid				

Source: <http://netlingo.com/smiley.cfm>, <http://www.netlingo.com/emailsh.cfm>

Acronyms have always been an integral part of computer culture and now they are popular on the Internet to represent common phrases that people say to one another. Part of the reason they are used so much is because it’s quicker and easier to type out a few letters, rather than typing out the full expression. (*Acronyms & Shorthand*)

As stated above, according to the informality and the easy use of the Internet, computer-based relationships can displace personal meetings. Nevertheless, some “e-mail and chat messages arrange face-to-face meetings” (Wellmann, Computer Networks). So, it depends on the user to overcome the informality of an Internet-based contact.

Despite the fact that it is not clear what will happen in the future of technological developments, some ideas may not be inevitable to consider. Some writers, like Christopher Barnatt, say since the “‘connectivity’ of individuals and organizations is proceeding so rapidly

that by early next century we are all likely to be interconnected into one global hardware platform” (144) as well as “the big change will come as homes (and automobiles) become networked internally and with the Internet” (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 5.3.). Already today, individuals get to choose “whom they wish to get messages from, about what, and when” (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 6.9.). For example, there are technical aids that can filter out certain types of e-mail before moving it forward into the mailbox. Moreover, it is a fact that people will be able to have Internet and, thus, communication access from almost any place in the world where they actually happen to be at any given moment in time:

Internet cafés in malls or main streets allow travellers to keep connected, road warriors use global phone/Internet access networks to connect from hotels or businesses they are visiting, cell-phones are just starting to have Internet capability, and ... people have higher speed wireless modems on their laptop computers (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 7.10).

As a result, individuals will no longer be connected to the momentary place they are at (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 6.9.). In the future, “the structure of relationships is moving from linking places to linking people” (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 7.7.) It will not matter anymore where the person is located at the moment of contact. As long as the person is connected to the Internet, this person can be contacted at any time.

Computer-mediated communication will become more intimate since one can choose how active one wishes to be with the help of a so called “buddy list” which reveals who else of the user’s friends, i.e. the “buddies”, are online and available for IM, e-mail, etc. (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 7.14.). Therefore, while being connected with the Internet and separated from outside social life, computer-mediated communication may lead to a society in which “no one knows anyone entirely anymore” (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 7.19.) resulting in “breeding alienation and insecurity” (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 7.19.). As a result, “it may lead to the paradox of people feeling lonely because of the lack of physically-present community members even as their stock of person-to-person online increases” (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 7.11.). This means that with an increasing number of online friends, one may miss the personal contact as it is one of the essential needs of every human being. This personal contact is as important for gaining information as it is for having a position in society. The lack of this personal social contact may lead to feelings of loneliness in spite of having friends around the world via the Internet.

When having friends around the globe, it is essential to overcome language barriers. That is why computer scientists keep on developing and improving translation software knowing that English is the standard language of the Internet. Most likely, this software will be used by non-English speaking users to translate their language into English, rather than by English speaking users to translate English into non-English languages (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 4.3.). So English will probably be the world-wide medium that makes the users move closer together. Considering English as the standard language used in the Internet, this language will motivate more people to learn English to extend their ability to communicate via the Internet with other individuals.

In addition, other communication appliances will be improved. So that “Internet video may become widely used for real-time chats as well as for leaving videomail messages. And physically-separated intimates can, should, and will do what exhibitionists already do: transmitting to each other continuous webcam images of their daily life” (Wellmann, *Changing Connectivity*, para. 4.7.). This results in a more specific computer-mediated communication turning into a near face-to-face communication and disguising or hiding one’s own character and playing with one’s identity will no longer be as easy as without the webcam in the Internet. By seeing and hearing the person one interacts with and by being seen and heard as well while communicating already reveals much more of one’s personality and character than only a (nick-) name and words. It will still be possible to fake feelings or not to let others get to know one closer, but no more or less than it is possible with face-to-face communication.

As Christopher Barnatt states, “...those with a Net connection are undoubtedly the best-informed group of people in the world“ (146) since using the Internet can open the door to an infinite universe of information. By being linked to many sources of different information and persons at almost any place on earth, it is possible to gain immense knowledge in fields of interest.

Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, communities as well as communication is located online. Accordingly, ways of communication have changed and are still constantly developing. Nowadays the most noticeable effect is the change of language. Written messages get more informal and no longer conform with correct spelling due to the attempt to write out non-verbal message elements. Those changes are transferred into the real-world as “Internet lingo is changing the way people communicate off-line because more people are aware of it, using it, and taking what they’ve learned or experienced online into the off-line world” (Roberts).

Personal meetings seem to be superseded by the computer-mediated communication. This may have a negative effect on the personal development of each individual according to the ability to interact personally with other individuals. But since using computer-mediated communication devices will never supersede the human need for closeness and physical contact, people should be able to mix their online and off-line communication because by pursuing only one of the mediums for communicating with others may lead to an incomplete lifestyle. The mix of online and off-line communication should contain contact with friends via modern technology and using it for arranging meetings in person. Thus, one has the opportunity to use the possibilities offered by the new technology, communicating with the world via Internet, and still stay in physical contact with the person one communicates with by maintaining face-to-face contact to individuals.

## Works Cited

- Acronyms & Shorthand*. June 3, 2003 <<http://www.netlingo.com/emailsh.cfm>>.
- Barnatt, Christopher. *Cyber Business : Mindset of a Wired Age*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1996.
- Bird, Drew. *Instant Messaging, Part I: Corporate Productivity Tool or Cool Toy*. 2003. June 2, 2003 <[http://www.intranetjournal.com/articles/200305/pij\\_05\\_01\\_03a.html](http://www.intranetjournal.com/articles/200305/pij_05_01_03a.html)>, <[http://www.intranetjournal.com/articles/200305/pij\\_05\\_01\\_03b.html](http://www.intranetjournal.com/articles/200305/pij_05_01_03b.html)>.
- Crystal, David. *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Dalton, Richard. "It's A Big World After All." *Byte*. 11/01/99, n.pag.
- Eisenberg, Anne. "Spontaneous, Unedited, Naked." *Scientific American*. 285 (2001): 96.
- Etzioni, Amitai and Oren. "Face-to-Face and Computer-Mediated Communities, A Comparative Analysis." *Information Society*. 15 (1999): 241 - 248.
- Hauben, Michael. *History of ARPANET*. June 3, 2003 <<http://www.dei.isep.ipp.pt/docs/arpa.html>>, <<http://www.dei.isep.ipp.pt/docs/arpa-Introduc.html>>.
- Hinner, Michael. B. "Business Communication Theory." Chair of Business English, Lecture WS 2002/2003, TU Bergakademie Freiberg, Saxony, Germany.
- Kollock, Peter and Marc Smith. *Communities in Cyberspace*. Working Draft, 1999, June 3, 2003 <[http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/kollock/papers/communities\\_01.htm](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/kollock/papers/communities_01.htm)>.
- Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Tenth edition, Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1993.
- Perrolle, Judith A. "Computer-Mediated Conversation." *National Forum*. 71 (1991): 3, 21.
- Reid, Elizabeth M. *Cultural Formations in Text-Based Virtual Realities*. January 1994, June 2, 2003 <<http://www.lastplace.com/page210.htm>>.
- . *Electropolis: Communication and Community On Internet Relay Chat*. 1991, June 2, 2003 <<http://www.lastplace.com/page210.htm>>.
- Rheingold, Howard. *Virtuelle Gemeinschaft: Soziale Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Computers*. Bonn: Addison-Wesley, 1994.
- Roberts, Glenn, Jr. *Internet Users Breed A Strange New Language*. Aug. 2002, June 2, 2003 <<http://www.netlingo.com/article4.cfm>>.
- Smileys and Emoticons*. June 2, 2003 <<http://netlingo.com/smiley.cfm>>.
- Statistisches Bundesamt. *Informationstechnologie in Haushalten*. Presseexemplar, 2003.
- Tapscott, Don. *Net Kids : Die Digitale Generation Erobert Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Wiesbaden: Gabler, 1998.
- Trillo, Néstor G. *Intercultural Computer-Mediated Communication*. January 1997, June 2, 2003 <<http://december.com/cmc/mag/1997/jan/trillo.html>>.
- Wellmann, Barry. *An Electronic Group is Virtually a Social Network*. September 1996, June 2, 2003 <<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/index.html>>.
- . "Changing Connectivity: A Future History of Y2.03K." 2000, *Sociological Research Online*. 4 no. 4 (2000), June 2, 2003 <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/4/wellmann.html>>.
- . "Computer Networks As Social Networks." *SCIENCE*. 293 (2001) <[www.sciencemag.org](http://www.sciencemag.org)>.