TEOPETUYECKAЯ, ПРИКЛАДНАЯ И СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЛИНГВИСТИКА / THEORETICAL, APPLIED AND COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS

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POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IN MEDIA DISCOURSE

Research article

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Abstract

Using a case study approach, this article explores the phenomenon of political correctness from the point of view of its implementation in the UK and US media discourse. After a brief discussion of the history and definition of the term PC, the article describes the very concept of political correctness, its effectiveness, as well as its methods into various spheres of society. Based on articles by British and American media (2015–2021) modern trends in political correctness have been studied and systematized. Considerable attention is paid to the analysis of politically correct language units used to prevent different forms of discrimination: physical and mental disabilities, racial discrimination, gender inequality, socio-political discrimination. The analysis reveals that the phenomenon of politically correct language is not only linguistic, and it is important to take into consideration its cultural aspect as well. The article concludes by stating that the very concept of PC belongs to the little-developed linguistic categories, requiring the most thorough consideration.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, euphemism, political correctness.

ПОЛИТКОРРЕКТНОСТЬ В МЕДИЙНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Используя подход к рассмотрению конкретных ситуаций, данная статья исследует феномен политкорректности с точки зрения его реализации в медиадискурсе Великобритании и США. После краткого обсуждения истории и определения термина политкорректность в статье описывается сама концепция политкорректности, ее эффективность, а также методы ее внедрения в различные сферы общества. На основе статей британских и американских СМИ (2015—2021 гг.) изучены и систематизированы современные тенденции политкорректности. Значительное внимание уделено анализу политкорректных языковых единиц, используемых для предотвращения различных форм дискриминации: физических и психических недостатков, расовой дискриминации, гендерного неравенства, социально-политической дискриминации. Анализ показывает, что феномен политкорректного языка является не только лингвистическим, и важно учитывать также его культурный аспект. В заключение статьи отмечается, что само понятие политкорректность относится к малоразработанным лингвистическим категориям, требующим самого тщательного рассмотрения.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация, эвфемизм, политкорректность.

Introduction

Nowadays, the problem of leadership, reluctance to make concessions and compromises provoke the development of tense international relations. We learn about all political feuds from the media. The role of the media in the modern world has increased so much that they begin to play on feelings and emotions of ordinary people, by imposing false stereotypes.

Political correctness implies caution in words and actions so as not to offend or humiliate one's feelings or dignity. Initially, this understandable and simple wording did not carry any negative meaning, but recently there has been a lot of controversy around the term "political correctness." Today, no one is indifferent to political correctness: its ideas are accepted either completely separate, or categorically condemned. Word perception and word usage are closely related to the processes of formation, formulation and design of thought by lexical means [3]. The article is devoted to studying the diversity of lexemes expressing the idea of political correctness in media discourse. To achieve the goal, we turned to influential British and American publications, such as BBC, The New York Times, The Guardian, The Week, The Observer, Evening Standard.

An attempt was made to prove that the use in the English-language media of certain morphological, syntactic and word-forming constructions alongside with expressive vocabulary allows forming public opinion in the intended direction. So, political correctness is a consequence of changing speech norms; it concerns not so much the content as the correction of the language code. The speech strategy of political correctness is aimed at the ability to discuss "complex topics," avoiding conflicts, but retaining the meaning of what was said. This strategy can be characterized by the intention of the speaker to

restrain the open expression of verbal aggression, which can lead to various conflicts [8]. In this regard, many scientists associate the concept of political correctness with the processes of euphemization.

Euphemisms, being "emotionally neutral words or expressions, are used instead of words synonymous with them or expressions that appear to the speaker indecent, rude or non-tactical" [12]. It is noteworthy that political euphemism differs from commonly known stylistic device, as its main objective is to avoid derogatory implication, conceal unpleasant events, replace specific concepts with general ones or completely distort information [14].

Thus, the object of the investigation is political correctness (PC) as a cultural, behavioural and lingual category. The subject of the detailed analysis are features of the use and functioning of the phenomenon of political correctness in the English-language media discourse.

The aim of our research is to study the features of PC and its influence on modern English through media discourse.

Research methods and principles

To achieve the purpose of our research, we made the following steps. On the first stage of our research, we got an insight into the history of PC and tried to analyze various approaches to its investigation. On the second stage of the research, we introduced the main ways of language representation of the category of PC in English. On the third stage we set a goal of revealing the cases of race, gender and socio-political correctness in the English-language media discourse.

Main results

The significance of PC is of particular importance in the process of intercultural communication, which implies careful and attentive attitude to the differences of the interlocutor and the manifestation of "communicative tolerance" [17]. In modern society whose members follow different religions, speak different languages and have other differences, PC makes it possible to avoid serious conflicts. Accordingly, it affects relations between different races, ethnic groups, religious groups, people of different affluence and social status. This phenomenon also imprints on gender relations, age differences, as well as sexual orientation. In this regard, neutral words and expressions came into existence to replace a direct word or phrase that could be considered as harsh, impolite or inappropriate due to a certain communicative situation.

The 60s are considered the era of the emergence of the PC, when not only white men, but also women, the Spanish-speaking population and African Americans began to enter American universities. Sectors of society that had previously been discriminated against now had a chance of self-realization. The change in the quality of universities has led to the fact that even in educational institutions curricula have begun to be revised, behavioural and speech codes have been introduced [15]. In most American universities certain norms of speech behaviour sprang to life, which the individual had to follow. "Sexist" and "racist" words and expressions had been banned. The scope of prohibitions began to include the use of offensive nicknames, inappropriate jokes, and even misdirected laughter. Different types of discrimination are listed in charters of many American colleges: ableism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, lookism, etc.

Today, PC addresses issues related to national minorities, the rights of women, persons with disabilities, people of non-traditional orientation and older persons.

PC as a cultural and behavioural category is a system of norms adopted in society, which are aimed at breaking down negative stereotypes in relation to discriminated groups of people and offer recognition of the equal rights of members of these groups.

Thus, it must be recognized that PC has appropriated the function of public censorship and is trying to normalize speech actions in modern society. The regulation of speech is necessary, but it should be carried out according to the rules since in the latter case there is a threat to the well-being of society itself. There is a misconception that PC is the correct method of political struggle and compliance with certain rules for conducting political discussions. It should be noted here that the language policy of PC requires a scientific approach, taking into account the special role that language plays in culture.

Undoubtedly, politically correct words and expressions constitute a separate layer of vocabulary that requires special attention of all participants in intercultural communication when transferring the text to a different linguistic and cultural environment. As a rule, the translation of politically correct vocabulary from English into Russian is carried out by selecting Russian euphemisms, equivalent to English words and phrases, searching for correspondences in bilingual dictionaries or by using translation transformations.

The PC category is considered not only as a system of cultural norms. Researchers also investigate this principle from a linguistic point of view for it is closely connected with the processes of euphemization. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in the media discourse, the main role of euphemistic vocabulary is yet in disguising reality and manipulating the mass audience. The ability of euphemisms to manipulate the recipient is determined by the fact that euphemisms hide the direct essence of the phenomenon by creating a neutral or positive connotation, and the recipient usually does not have time to distinguish euphemisms from the context and comprehend them due to the usual abundance of information in our society or is unable to identify taboo denotate. The euphemization mechanism is based on PC. It helps to understand the essence of language culture and the communication strategies. PC is rather a strategy, while euphemisms are only tactical tricks which help either to strike the balance of communication between individuals, groups, communities or to disturb it. Euphemisms are used in all spheres of human activity to change the meaning or emotional load of the text.

In the social sphere euphemisms are very popular, they are used for a more favorable formulation or to veil or conceal the truth. They can be found in the following spheres:

- military operations and armed conflicts: *air strike* or *air support* (instead of *bombardment*), *device* (instead of *bomb*), *conflict* (instead of *war*), e.g.:
- (1) Hours after President Trump announced that he is reneging on **America's involvement** in the Iran **nuclear deal**, Israel reportedly **sent missiles** into Syria, **hitting a military outpost** outside Damascus; Israel, per usual custom, did not confirm or deny **launching the attack** [1].
 - economic processes: period of economic adjustment (instead of economic crisis), e.g.:

- (2) "We are in a prolonged period of **economic adjustment** in the UK, we are adjusting to life outside the EU and it will not be as economically rosy as life inside the EU," he told the BBC's Today programme.
 - moral issues: to abuse sexually (instead of to rape), wrongdoing (instead of crime);
 - religious relations: *Muslim* (instead of *Moslem*);
 - designation of social groups: fugitive (instead of refugee), non-profit group (instead of the unemployed), e.g.:
- (3) Researchers said the results could be driven by factors including **low-income groups** spending more time in their local areas and being more reliant on these neighborhoods.
 - designation of ethnic group: *Israeli* (instead of *Jew*), ethnic cleansing (instead of genocide), e.g.:
- (4) He says it penalizes accusing Poles as a nation but not "someone who says that somewhere, in some village, some place, a Jewish family or one Jewish person was murdered" [1].
- another anti-moral phenomenon in society is crime. It is hard to believe that people who deliberately violate moral and social laws are also touched on PC. Let us study closely examples from the English-language press regarding it:
- (5) He was put to death by lethal injection at the William C Holman **Correctional Facility** in Atmore on Thursday evening [10].
- (6) "While Vernon was using the phone, he noticed that **the correctional officer** on duty had failed to properly secure one of the doors in the area of the jail he was in," officials said [13].

However, PC imposes its imprint not only on the lexical composition of the language, but also on syntax, morphology and word formation. Let's consider changes at these levels of the language system and give specific examples:

- on the word-formation level, the category of PC is represented by the suffixes -ism (ageism), -ron (waitron); prefixes: under-, un-, non-, (unwaged), word combinations like noun + noun (botanical companion); adjective + noun (environmental hygienist); adverb + passive participle (mentally challenged); adjective + adjective (African-American);
- in spelling, the word "woman" is more frequently spelled like womyn or wimmin to avoid associations with the sexist suffix -man;
- by analyzing media discourse, it is possible to identify innovations in English that appeared due to the struggle of feminists for equality. First of all, this affected the word "mankind." Now often in articles you can find: human, human being and humankind, humanity, e.g.:
 - (7) And elevated by love for all human beings [9].
- the replacement of the morpheme "man" with the sex-unmarked morpheme "person": businessperson, congressperson, spokesperson, etc. E.g.:
- (8) "His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh was admitted to King Edward VII Hospital in London this afternoon, for planned surgery on his hip which will take place tomorrow," a palace **spokesperson** said [13].
- in politically correct vocabulary, the concept of gender is erased when it comes to people as a whole. This helps to show community and integrity, to rally all people: "Every young **person** in America, regardless of where they come from, what they look like, have a chance to succeed";
- words with suffixes -ess, -ette are also corrected to avoid indicating the sex of a person. In this case, the suffixes are removed, and instead of them synonyms words are used that contain a different morpheme: *flight attendant* (instead of stewardess), headteacher (instead of headmistress), poet (instead of poetess), actor (instead of actress), heir (instead of heiress), camera operator (instead of cameraman), etc. E.g.:
- (9) But even then, I learned to let go, and I had Scott Sakamoto who is one of the masters of camera operating as my camera operator so I knew it was in good hands [6].

PC can also be represented on the syntactic level:

- replacement of the personal pronoun *he (his)* in sentences with a combination *he/she*, *she/he*: "Often, more value is placed on the age of the commentator than on the opinion **he or she** may hold."
- replacement of singular personal pronouns with plural forms: *they* or *we*. It is worth noting that constructions with *they* (or *we*) are used by politicians or other public figures to show the unity and significance of recipients, thereby emphasizing the fact that they are an integral part of solving problems, e.g.:
 - (10) If someone's at the door, we ask them what they want [8].
- impersonal constructions with the numeral "one" or indefinite sentences (*They say that...*, etc.), in which the gender of the noun is not indicated: "*They waved signs that read*, "*The Ambassador was Libya's friend*" and "Libya is sorry." *They chanted* "No to militias." *They marched*, unarmed, to the terrorist compound. Then **they** burned it to the ground."
- particular hurdles while translating are words that are often used as components for the formation of politically correct vocabulary, e.g. *challenged*, *inconvenienced*, *impaired*. These lingual units have no dictionary matches. Being components of a fairly large number of statements, these words can be translated in different ways. As a rule, the translation changes depending on the context.

The above-mentioned classification makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms of functioning of politically correct vocabulary in the language as a whole. In all fairness it has to be added that the idea of people's respect for each other, and, as a result, the attempt to create a language more sensitive to the traditionally oppressed segments of society, is positive. Obviously, many of the proposed politically correct terms not only became entrenched in the English language, but also penetrated other languages and cultures through it. In this respect, knowledge of politically correct vocabulary is necessary in modern society for successful cross-cultural communication. The abovementioned classification makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms of functioning of politically correct vocabulary in the language as a whole. It should be clarified that euphemia is the most common and effective means of implementing the category of PC. This fact is very clearly reflected in media discourse, which will be illustrated in the next paragraph.

3.1. PC and racial discrimination

Over the past thirty years, lots of expressions and words have appeared in English in order to prevent discrimination. In the context of PC, the following changes occurred: the emergence of gender-neutral lingual units, new terms and euphemisms. There is also a tendency to use plural in impersonal and indefinite sentences. PC being represented on the lexical, word-forming and syntactic levels of the language, serves as a means of changing the language code and, accordingly, affects the language norm.

In the English-language media discourse, politically correct expressions can often be found, especially when it comes to racism. Many people are familiar with this type of discrimination. Race is a social notion rather than biological. Today even scientists prefer to be politically correct and substitute the term "ancestry" for the term "race" to describe human diversity [17].

The XX century is known for its revolutions, wars and uprise of new ideologies. And the U.S. hasn't been free of conflict. Black people sought their rights as well as women, but the topic of feminism will be touched upon later.

Nowadays everyone has been accustomed to the expression "Afro-American". Quite often one can come across this word in the media. But there are really interesting innovations. For talking about black population one can now use the phrase "the member of the African diaspora". Currently, "nigger" is considered so offensive that the words "niggertoe" (the name of the grass), "niggerhead" (a type of chewing tobacco), "niggerfish" (a type of fish) and even "niggardly" (mean, greedy – a word of Scandinavian origin) fell into disfavour.

Another interesting case from linguistic point of view is: "the people of colour" or "person of colour." These expressions are used for representatives of any "non-white" nations. Native Americans also have their own phrases, such as: *Native American*, *indigenous person and American Indian*, but one can't say Red Indian anymore. The following lexemes are applied to indigenous Eskimos Native Alaskan and Alaskan Native. Immigrants from Asia are often called *Asian-American*, as well as *Chinese American*. *Latino*, *Latino person*, *Latino citizens* are widely used in relation to immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean.

All these innovations help to avoid conflicts between races and nations. Indeed, these expressions are devoid of negative connotations, but at the same time they indicate the origin of a person and his/her belonging to the race. These phrases are concise, specific and devoid of emotional colouring.

However, some innovations didn't get widespread responses in modern English. These include such phrases as *skin-melaninated*, *genetically oppressive*, *genetically dominant world majority*, *melanin impoverished*, *sun people*, *ice people* and some others. These lingual units are characterized by complexity and scientificity, and also contain positive or negative shades of value.

Consider specific cases of politically correct vocabulary in more detail:

(11) "My 8-year-old knows that slavery wasn't a choice," he said. "And by the way, she doesn't have to live with the culture and the stigma and the pain that **African-Americans** do" [6].

Here we see the use of the name of black people who come from Africa. As noted above, they are now commonly referred to as African Americans. They were called Negroes during slavery and in the days when they tried to obtain their fundamental human rights. Times have changed, the status of these people has also changed, the same fate has befallen the name of this ethnic group.

(12) Trump is correct that **African-American** unemployment hit a record low in December; what he neglects to mention is that the downward trend began well before he took office [1].

It has also been noted that there are such phrases as "person of colour", "women of colour", "people of colour", and "a member of African diaspora":

(13) Epara's founder, Ozohu Adoh, created the brand specifically to address the beauty concerns of **women of colour**, but she has noticed the product's appeal has extended beyond her target market [12].

Other ethnic groups were also mentioned in the English-language press: *Mexicans, Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, Indigenous peoples, First Nations, native Alaskans,* etc.

Thus, it can be seen from the examples, that ethnic groups are called in mass media in a new way. Due to the development of the PC movement in English-speaking society, the language itself is changing, and with it the attitude towards ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups of society.

3.2. PC and gender discrimination

Women were extremely outraged by linguistic discrimination. Their burning desire was to get rid of sexism in the language. Sexism can be defined as a discrimination of people on the basis of their sex or gender. There are numerous examples of this, not only in English, but also in other languages. It had become apparent that there were elements in the language that discriminated against women [4]. Therefore, they began to strive to eradicate sexism in the language. The equal status of women in society should be emphasized. By analysing newspaper and magazine articles, it is possible to bring some examples of inventing new concepts – names for professions of neuter gender: *police officer, fire fighter, camera operator, chairperson*, etc. E.g.:

(14) *In this case, firefighters and construction workers* say the move jeopardizes their health [2].

Nevertheless, not all innovations find application in modern English. Among them there are such lingual units as *hufem*, *humyn* (human), *wofem*, *womban*, *womon* (woman) and *wimmin*, *wimyn*, *womyn* (women), *person of gender* (man, woman), *efemcipated* (emancipated), *femtal* (mental), *femhole*, *personhole* (manhole), *herstory*, *hystery*, *his'n'herstory* (history), *womage* (manage), etc.

Discrimination in language is not limited to sexism and racism. There are other types of unjust and oppressive attitudes towards vulnerable groups. For example, there is such a new concept as "ageism", which means age discrimination [16]. Proponents of PC believe that it is impossible to distribute roles in society based on the age of a person, as it can hurt the dignity of a person. Analyzing newspaper articles, now more often it is possible to meet such phrases as: senior, the seniors, advanced age, the elderly (instead of old people). Interestingly, such lexemes as chronologically gifted, longer-living, seasoned, experimentally enhanced and golden age do not find wide use in the vocabulary of modern English.

In newspapers, one can also find the pronoun "they" instead of "he/she." So, journalists avoid indicating the gender in their articles, if it is not known who exactly commits the action.

3.3. PC and physical discrimination

One of the most vulnerable groups in any modern society is people with disabilities. In any social system, a mentally and physically healthy person is the norm, and everyone who has serious deviations from this norm cannot be perceived as equal to the rest of this society. There are even special terms that mean discrimination against people with mental or physical disabilities. The most common politically correct designations of people with disabilities are such phrases as differently abled, physically challenged or mentally challenged, person / people with special needs and person / people with learning difficulties:

(15) That may not be the term of choice these days – "differently abled" or "physically challenged" may be de rigueur – but as I touched my bloody face, feeling embedded chips of concrete in the wounds, "handicapped" sure seemed to fit.

Not all newly-composed word combinations have become part of the modern English language, one can mention such unsuccessful lexical units as exceptional, uniquely abled, inconvenienced, severely euphemized – in relation to people with disabilities of various kinds; *handi-capable*, *physically different* – to refer to people with disabilities; and *developmentally inconvenienced*, *cerebrally challenged*, *increasingly distracted* – to refer to people with intellectual impairment.

There is also discrimination of human external or other characteristics, in traditional society this is called defects [11]. Simple, but coarse words are replaced by complex euphemisms, that are more neutral and more acceptable analogues, e.g.: f at – big-boned / differently sized; bold – hair disadvantaged; cripple – physically different, differently abled; alcoholic – person of differing sobriety, substance abuse survivor.

In addition, in the press and in speech one can find euphemisms for the word '*dead*'. Here are some options for replacing a word that causes negative emotions: terminally inconvenienced, metabolically different.

Now consider the examples found directly in the English-language press:

- (16) In another inspiring story, over 70 differently-abled couples were married at a mass wedding in the southern city of Chennai on Wednesday.
- (17) Simple English Wikipedia was launched in 2003 as a resource for "people with different needs, such as students, children, adults with learning difficulties, and people who are trying to learn English".
- (18) Or musical chairs, where just when you started to enjoy the music, you had some big-boned kid hip-check you off the dance floor.

The last example clearly illustrates how hurtful words about a person's appearance are replaced by softer equivalents, since people do not like being spoken straightforwardly and rudely about their defects.

3.4. PC and socio-political discrimination

Changes in the socio-economic sphere can also upset society, especially when it comes to the negative consequences of economic crisis. Supporters of PC suggested using words that can smooth out existing problems of economic crisis, slump, depression, recession. Euphemisms have been suggested instead: period of economic adjustment, period of negative economic growth, meaningful downturn:

(19) "We are in a prolonged period of economic adjustment in the UK, we are adjusting to life outside the EU and it will not be as economically rosy as life inside the EU," he told the BBC's Today programme [6].

Employees are not fired or laid off anymore, they are reduced in number – downsized or rightsized. The word "poor" in the press is now increasingly replaced by euphemisms of the need, the ill-provided, socially deprived, the underprivileged, low-incomed.

Crime – is another serious social issue, which is fairly considered anti-moral. However, in the press one can notice the term correctional facilities instead of prison and jail, and instead of prison guards one can read custodial officials and correctional officials. Prisoners are also called differently, e.g.: *clients of correctional system*, *guests (or people) enabling temporarily hospitality from state*. It is difficult to argue that such politically correct expressions will be able to hurt, offend or insult someone's feelings.

Discussion

The findings of this research prove that PC is an important social, cultural and political phenomenon in modern society. It undoubtedly influenced the world outlook of English speakers, because the goal of PC is to avoid various conflicts, so easily ignited in modern world. The successful interaction of representatives of different ethnic groups and nations is of particular importance in the terms of cross-cultural communication. In addition, PC helps to eradicate numerous stereotypes about people and helps to look at them from a different angle. In modern society whose members follow different religions, speak different languages and have other differences, PC makes it possible to avoid serious conflicts. Accordingly, it affects relations between different races, ethnic groups, religious groups, people of different affluence and social status. This phenomenon also imprints on gender relations, age differences, as well as sexual orientation. In this regard, neutral words and expressions came into existence to replace a direct word or phrase that could be considered as harsh, impolite or inappropriate due to a certain communicative situation.

The linguistic aspect of this popular trend in the Western world, alongside with the connection of PC with language, discourse and intercultural communication in modern English-speaking society, deserve separate consideration. The PC movement has no equal to socio-political movements in terms of the successes achieved and the scope in the linguistic history of the English language.

According to another point of view, American activist and feminist Karen DeCrow – the president of the National Organization for Women declared that feminism has to develop in politically correct and intellectual direction [5]. Actually, all the above-mentioned trends need to be studied further in interdisciplinary aspects.

Conclusion

Thus, we conclude that PC helps to make the world safer for everyone. After all, it is stereotypes that prevent people from understanding each other and begin to actively develop all areas of human activity. The process of communication should take into account the socio-cultural and behavioural characteristics of members of different social groups, as well as their ethnic and national differences, age, sexual orientation, gender, physical or mental differences and religion.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the process of PC is rather ambiguous. Advocates of PC claim that our perception falls under the influence of the language we use. The success of cross-cultural communication largely depends on the communicative knowledge and skills of the interlocutors. There is an increasing need for background knowledge, both from the text sender and from the text recipient. Background knowledge promotes effective dialogue among cultures in speech communication. The choice of the best politically correct expressions in cross-cultural communication depends on many factors, and therefore requires careful analysis from participants in order to avoid possible conflicts or disagreements. Thus, the elimination of verbal aggression is considered to be one of the major goals of PC.

There are also those who consider that PC devalues the language, leads to confusion and distorts the reality.

Finally, PC is bringing transformation of human life. These drastic changes revolutionize how we understand political, social and economic issues. Social media, satellite and the digitization have become powerful tools for shaping public opinion. So, if we want to preserve our personal, cultural and social identity as well as freedom of thought and expression, we need to understand what PC really is.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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