

# PC or not PC: is that the question?

In recent months, a social-cum-linguistic controversy has been in progress in educational circles in the US, centring on what conservative observers scathingly call 'political correctness' or simply PC.

The argument appears to be that as leftwing politics retreats elsewhere in the world, on US campuses and in 'multiculturalist' circles a fellow-travelling movement is out to remove from speech, writing and even thought itself all traces of *ableism*, *ageism*, *classism*, *lookism*, *racism*, *sexism*, *weightism*, and any other ism that points to social discrimination and condemns such things as 'inappropriately directed laughter' (that is, biased jokes).

I now have a considerable file on PC and its usages, from which I hope to provide citations in *ET* 30, alongside an article by Jeff Johnson (see *Forthcoming*, p. 64). This topic, which raises all kinds of hackles, includes a tug-of-war between, on the one hand, perceived defenders of *Eurocentrism* and the heritage of *DWEMs* (Dead White European Males) and, on the other, such groups as radical feminists, ethnic and minority activists, and proponents of *Afrocentrism*. With this year's quinqucentenary of the first voyage of that ultimate DWEM, Christopher Columbus, the PC wrangle is likely to go on for some time yet.

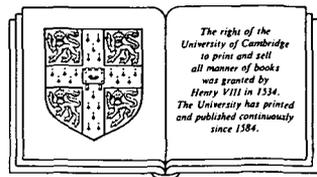
*ET* has no axe to grind for either side. Our aim remains to present a balanced picture of English wherever it is used, regardless of what may be favoured or rejected elsewhere. We have worked since 1984 (Orwell's year) to get that balance right, and this issue seems to be particularly representative. For example, our six features have eight writers: four women, four men (with two man and woman pairs working together, part of an unexpected and significant trend in the journal in 1991-92).

In addition, the world continues to be our non-centric oyster, from Cameroon and the Caribbean through our long-running debate on standards, dialects, and ELT, to advertising and publishing, and such matters as decaf, grumpies, buckyballs, a database for English poetry, doublespeak, the names of pop groups, Japanese students in the UK, feminist literary criticism, word origins, slips of the pen, and generic pronouns.

Such variety may or may not be politically correct, but it is certainly socially, geographically, historically, and linguistically comprehensive.

Tom McArthur

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