UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
Fakulta sociálních věd
Institut mezinárodních studií

PROTOKOL O HODNOCENÍ Magisterki PRÁCE
(Posudek oponenta)

Práci předložil(a) student(ka): Tatiana Hořavová
Název práce: "The Debate on Political Correctness with a Special Focus on Education: Intentions, Consequences and Controversies"

Oponoval (u externích oponentů uveďte též adresu a funkci v rámci instituce): György Tóth, PhD, Department of American Studies

I corrected and commented on the thesis in pencil in the bound hard copy thesis. Here I will only provide a list of my most substantive comments and critiques.

My evaluation of this thesis is based on the widely used and standard Anglo-American argumentative essay writing style and academic practice, which I have acquired in my training at Eötvös Loránd University of the Sciences in Budapest, Hungary (MA, 2003) and subsequently at The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, U.S.A. (MA, 2008, PhD, 2012).

1. OBSAH A CÍL PRÁCE (stručná informace o práci, formulace cíle):

From the Abstract: "The author asks *why* political correctness is criticized, focusing on the question of education and through literature research – both secondary and primary – comes to the conclusion that it is mainly due to unintended consequences of the phenomenon, chiefly through limitations imposed on the freedom of speech – either real or perceived, and also generally having a chilling effect on public discourse or lack of tolerance towards dissent."

From the Introduction: "This thesis will be interested in finding out *how* political correctness is criticized and *why* it attracts attention. It will therefore focus mainly on the debate about the phenomenon of political correctness, trying to answer the question of *what the debate includes*, *who takes part in it and how it has been developing* since the inception of political correctness. *Why is it important and what*, if anything, *does it show about the* [sic] *American society*.

The thesis will then hold that political correctness, attempting to "solve the problems" of society and establish a sensitive, inclusive environment, has actually become a problem in itself, as it is criticized and discussed mainly due to its unintended – either real or perceived – negative consequences, [the] chief role among which is played by the concern that political correctness stifles free speech.

Also, this work will argue that the intense way in which the debate has been developing might to a considerable extent be related to the polarization of American society on cultural issues."

(Emphases added by the reviewer)

2. VĚCNÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (náročnost, tvůrčí přístup, argumentace, logická struktura, teoretické a metodologické ukotvení, práce s prameny a literaturou, vhodnost příloh apod.):
MATERIAL PROCESSING (complexity, creativity, reasoning, logic, theoretical and methodological anchors, work with sources and literature, suitability attachments, etc.):

Thesis and central arguments

7 (also 14, 22) – "in various areas and issues in which *some believe* a group is being discriminated against" (emphasis from reviewer). Is discrimination only a matter of perception – or is it a historical and social reality for specific groups? Does PC as corrective practice have a justifiable basis in <u>reality</u>, or is it all an issue of rhetoric and (as you quote Merriam Webster), "political sensibilities"? In other words, in your analytical framework, what is the relationship between language use and human embodied practices? Is there such a thing

as *hate speech*, or is it 'PC run amok'? Why does it matter what words people use in a work meeting, in the classroom, or on a social occasion?

Methodology and sources

3 - "This thesis will be structured as a critical review and analysis of the literature that exists on the subject. The method of historical and interpretative analysis will also play a role in the work. Where applicable, the author will provide comparisons of secondary sources with primary materials, i.e. teaching standards, textbooks, test resources, student conduct codes etc. in order to either contradict or confirm the positions advanced by secondary sources."

5-6 – Of the major secondary sources you discuss, only one includes some pro-PC authors, while the rest seem to advocate anti-PC argumentative positions. Why is your literature so lop-sided, and how do you think your reliance on it influenced the outcome of your research?

23, 24, 26 – Since (as you observe), debate over PC has been going on for over 20 years, I assume that there has been some research done that actually measured the effects of PC: people's un/willingness to discuss "race", ethnicity, sexuality, gender and cultural differences in semi-public / educational settings; the reasons for their un/willingness to discuss such issues; their communicative strategies when discussing such issues. What such research did you consult for your thesis, and what does their hard data show about the effects of PC? It would be crucial for you to relate the debate to the results of such research. Otherwise, you are not able to make any informed scholarly conclusion about the PC debate's relationship to reality, and this is a real weakness of your thesis.

28 - Your methodology about examining textbooks, publishing and curricula is unclear.

29-30 – "To illustrate briefly what such codes stipulate on the level of publishing companies, we can look at the example of the so-called *Multicultural Guidelines* developed by the publisher Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley in 1996." Here you claim to be examining the primary source documents. Yet you only cite a secondary source – a scholarly – or is it polemical?! – book. This is misleading for the reader/reviewer, and it highlights a weakness in your methodology. Did you conduct your own textbook research and analysis?

Conceptual and structural organization

It is clear that you have invested a great deal of thinking, time and effort into conceptualizing your thesis. Yet it could have been improved by a different structuring. If you wanted to stay close to what you claim to do in your introduction, you could have done something like this:

> Introduction
>
> Political Correctness: Characteristics
>
> The Debate on PC: Main Points
>
> The Sides in the Debate over PC
> (The profiles of the groups/their representatives engaged in the debate over time)
>
> Why Criticize or Defend PC?
> (Your analysis of the reasons and motivations of the various sides in the debate over PC)
>
> Critiquing the Debate over PC
>
>> Research Evidence versus Debate Arguments
>>
>> What the PC Debate is Really About
>
> Special Focus: The Debate on PC in Relation to Education
>
>> Specific Arguments

Research Evidence

The Stakes of Debating PC in Education: Players, Reasons, Motivations

Conclusion

Comments on specific content/parts

"Introduction"

Since these are fundamentally important for the context of your research on the debate on PC, please briefly explain

1) what were the 1990s U.S. "culture wars";
2) how they were related to the movements of the 1960s and the subsequent rise of conservative politics in the U.S.;
3) how PC is related to the 1990s U.S. "culture wars."

"Special Focus: The Debate on Political Correctness in Relation to Education"

For your discussion of textbook writing, publishing, selection and curricular development, it would have been important for you to explain who controls this at what level in the U.S. – at federal, state, and local levels. Without at least a brief explanation of this, your discussion lacks context – it is up in the air, not giving the reader the major players in the educational 'game'.

"Conclusion"

Your hypo/thesis is a more moderate restatement of the conservative side of the debate over PC. Are you passing a scholarly judgment on who won this debate? Or are you making this claim based on <u>hard evidence</u> - such as quantitative research on the effects of PC across the U.S.?

Both in your introduction and in your conclusion, you make a reference to how the debate over PC may been rooted in wider or more general cultural anxieties, fears, chasms, or divisions in U.S. society. Yet you do not offer any specifics about what these may be. This is a promising line of thought, but you fail to push it in your writing and thinking.

3. FORMÁLNÍ A JAZYKOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (jazykový projev, správnost citace a odkazů na literaturu, grafická úprava, formální náležitosti práce apod.):
FORMAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING (language skills, accuracy quotations and references to literature, graphic design, formality work etc.):

I commend the author for her strong English language skills – the thesis is quite well written, mostly in academic language.

Like most U.S. Americans, you automatically refer to the United States of America as "America." Whether you like it or not – whether you consider this move as part of political correctness – there has been a movement among American Studies scholars to at least use the most specific term "U.S." The foremost reason for this is that "America" means countries on the continent of "the Americas." If you say "America/n" about your scholarship, you will be expected to give a comparative account of whatever you study in the countries of: Canada, and/or the U.S., and/or Mexico; and/or also likely, in at least one country in Central America, and/or in at least one country in South America. As long as you are unable to do this, please refer more accurately to "[the] U[nited] S[tates]".

4. STRUČNÝ KOMENTÁŘ HODNOTITELE (celkový dojem z bakalářské práce, silné a slabé stránky, originalita myšlenek, naplnění cíle apod.):
BRIEF COMMENTARY evaluators (overall impression of the thesis, strengths and weaknesses, originality of ideas, meet targets, etc.):

Review of the thesis questions/foci:

From the Abstract: "The author asks *why* political correctness is criticized"

From the Introduction: "This thesis will be interested in finding out *how* political correctness is criticized and *why* it attracts attention. It will therefore focus mainly on the debate about the phenomenon of political correctness, trying to answer the question of *what the debate includes*, *who takes part in it and how it has been developing* since the inception of political correctness. *Why is it important and what*, if anything, *does it show about the* [sic] *American society*.

In my assessment:

This thesis does not do all that its introduction promises to do.

The author succeeded in investigating "*how* political correctness is criticized" in the U.S., and "*what the debate includes*."

The thesis lacks a sense of chronology, thereby also failing to account for "*how the PC debate has been developing* since the inception of political correctness" – over 30 years ago.

While the author has some clues about it, due to weaknesses in editing/conceptual structure, her thesis does not give a systematic profile of the groups and representatives in the PC debate, thus failing to adequately answer her question of "*who takes part in it*."

While the thesis at several points touches on "*why* political correctness is criticized," due to weaknesses in editing/conceptual structure, it does not manage to give a deeper analysis of the motivations and underlying agendas of the sides in the PC debate.

The author does not elaborate on any suggestions she gives about "[w]*hy is the PC debate important and what*, if anything, *does it show about the* [sic] *American society*."

As it is (due to weaknesses of conceptual structure and methodology), the thesis amounts to little more than a review of the debate over political correctness. This is a perfectly legitimate topic / scope for a course assignment, or, with a specific goal, even for a term paper. Not for a thesis.

5. OTÁZKY A PŘIPOMÍNKY DOPORUČENÉ K BLIŽŠÍMU VYSVĚTLENÍ PŘI OBHAJOBĚ (jedna až tři):
QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS Recommendations for detailed explanation in the defense (one to three):

Since these are fundamentally important for the context of your research on the debate on PC, please briefly explain

1) what were the 1990s U.S. "culture wars";
2) how they were related to the movements of the 1960s and the subsequent rise of conservative politics in the U.S.;
3) how PC is related to the 1990s U.S. "culture wars."

- Please briefly profile the major groups in the PC debate, as well as their major motivations and goals for arguing for or against political correctness.

- Looking back at 20+ years of debates over PC, is there any difference in the intensity or nature of the arguments/discussion between the 1990s and the early 2010s?

23, 24, 26 – Since (as you observe), debate over PC has been going on for over 20 years, I assume that there has been some research done that actually measured the effects of PC: people's un/willingness to discuss "race", ethnicity, sexuality, gender and cultural differences in semi-public / educational settings; the reasons for their un/willingness to discuss such issues; their communicative strategies when discussing such issues. What such research did you consult for your thesis, and what does their hard data show about the effects of PC? It would be crucial for you to relate the debate to the results of such research. Otherwise, you are not able to make any

informed scholarly conclusion about the PC debate's relationship to reality, and this is a real weakness of your thesis.

Both in your introduction and in your conclusion, you make a reference to how the debate over PC may be rooted in wider or more general cultural anxieties, fears, chasms, or divisions in U.S. society. Yet you do not offer any specifics about what these may be. This is a promising line of thought, but you fail to push it in your writing and thinking. Can you elaborate on it now?

6. DOPORUČENÍ / NEDOPORUČENÍ K OBHAJOBĚ A NAVRHOVANÁ ZNÁMKA
    (výborně, velmi dobře, dobře, nevyhověl):
Recommended / not recommended for the defense and suggested grade (excellent, very good, good, failed):

The author's thesis is overall well-written. I recommend it for a defense, with a recommended grade of "very good" / "velmi dobře." Depending on the author's performance at the defense, I am open to lowering or raising the grade in an agreement with the other committee members.

Datum: August 20, 2013   Podpis: György Tóth

Pozn.: Hodnocení pište k jednotlivým bodům, pokud nepíšete v textovém editoru, použijte při nedostatku místa zadní stranu nebo přiložený list. V hodnocení práce se pokuste oddělit ty její nedostatky, které jsou, podle vašeho mínění, obhajobou neodstranitelné (např. chybí kritické zhodnocení pramenů a literatury), od těch věcí, které student může dobrou obhajobou napravit; poměr těchto dvou položek berte prosím v úvahu při stanovení konečné známky.

Note: please write reviews on individual items, if you're writing a text editor, use of space at the back or attached sheet. In the evaluation work, try to separate those weaknesses which are, in your opinion, defending unrecoverable (eg lack of critical evaluation of sources and literature), from the things that a good defense student may be corrected; ratio of these two items, please take into account when the final grade.