

DISCRIMINATORY INSTRUMENTALISATION OF LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The paper focuses on the description of language used as a tool of discrimination. We understand discrimination as a relationship between two subjects when ontological and axiological certainty is violated. In this sense discriminatory instrumentalisation of language is released at the level of harmful discrimination, unequal treatment and disadvantage. Language use plays a major role in creating a discourse which establishes certain ways of thinking and speaking. The research material is based on conversation about the advertisement for Absolut vodka. The conversation was held on Facebook.

**Key words:** discrimination, instrumentalisation of language, harmful discrimination, unequal treatment, disadvantaging

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Discriminatory instrumentalisation of language is a form of pragmatic language use that has a real impact on social culture. Discrimination poses a problem in a democratic society because it undermines the core principles of democracy, such as equality or fairness.

The aim of the paper is to describe the use of language as a tool and means of discrimination. By preferring a descriptive approach over an explanatory one, we only address a certain portion of the issue, which includes a brief theoretical account of both the instrumentalisation of language and discrimination. The interpretive part will focus on online cultural discrimination. This indeed is a very small probe into discriminatory discourse, which has certain specificities and limits on social media. However, it is by no means a negligible contribution in terms of its impact on society, as we are nowadays witnessing how verbal duels are being gradually transferred from the virtual realm to real life relationships.

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## 2. INSTRUMENTALISATION OF LANGUAGE

Although the idea of language as an instrument has been developed in linguistics for quite a long time, the notion of instrumentalism is associated with pragmatism and with the philosophy of John Dewey. Dewey was a representative of the now obsolete behaviourist approach to knowledge, however, some of his ideas are still quite inspirational today, for example, that knowledge is not the goal of human activity per se, but is instead a means (instrument) of successful human activity or action: “knowledge, on this view, is not a copy whose truth is to be judged by its fidelity to an original; it is an instrument or organ of successful action” (Dewey 1998, p. 346).<sup>2</sup> Successful activity in this sense is overcoming the obstacles presented by the surrounding world: “The obstacles which confront us are stimuli to variation, to novel response, and hence are occasions of progress. If a favor done us by the environment conceals a threat, so its disfavor is a potential means of hitherto unexperienced modes of success” (Dewey 1998, pp. 370–371).<sup>3</sup>

With the communicative and pragmatic turn in linguistics, language also began to be regarded not as the goal of cognition, but as a means of cognising the world, and its activity-related aspect began to be emphasized. What we understand by the instrumentalisation of language is the use of language as an instrument and means of creating a certain social reality. The instrumentalisation of language is based on the use of linguistic (lexical, grammatical, textual, etc.) means and communicative strategies that have become established in certain communicative situations and through which (language has an indirect influence here) certain social and cultural relations have been standardised.<sup>4</sup> The mediating role here is played by discourse, which is considered to be “(i) a linguistic text, spoken or written, (ii) a discursive practice (production of the text and its interpretation), (iii) a socio-cultural practice” (Fairclough 2010, p. 132).<sup>5</sup>

In short, knowledge helps us to overcome the obstacles we face as social beings in our interactions with other members of society. Language serves as

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<sup>2</sup> “poznanie podľa tohto názoru nie je kópia, ktorej pravda sa má posudzovať podľa jej vernosti originálu; je to inštrument alebo orgán úspešného konania”

<sup>3</sup> “Prekážky, ktoré sa nám stavajú do cesty, sú stimulmi k zmenenej novej reakcii, a teda aj príležitosťami k pokroku. Ak sa v priaznivých podmienkach skrýva hrozba, potom nepriaznivé podmienky sú potenciálnym prostriedkom doposiaľ nepoznaných podôb úspechu.”

<sup>4</sup> A brief explanation on linguistic instrumentalism can be found in a paper by Alena Bohunická *Ako niečo robiť slovami... a zarobiť (poznámky k jazykovednému inštrumentalizmu)* [*How to Do Things with Words... and Make Money (Notes on Linguistic Instrumentalism)*] (2014): “By instrumentalism, we refer here provisionally to a way of thinking about language that is built on the notion of language as an instrument – a tool or means with which selected kinds of communicative, cognitive, or social activities are associated” (Bohunická 2014, p. 151).

<sup>5</sup> The paper is not intended to be an account of discourse and the ways in which it fulfils its mediating role in the creation of social reality. Due to the limited scope, one can only refer to the papers by N. Fairclough or T. A. van Dijk.

a means of cognition; the use thereof is part of both creating and overcoming various problems. For example, if there is an increased level of exclusion of people or social groups manifested in society, this appears to be a problem that we create with language, but can also overcome with language. None the less, exclusion arises from how we think about people or groups, how we evaluate them, which translates into how we talk about them and vice versa. In discourse, the way of speaking (indirect experience) becomes the basis of cognition instead of direct experience: “The fact that a certain language or linguistic form can function as a means of exclusion or marginalisation is only a consequence of the existence of a certain prevailing discourse shaped by axiologically marked ways of speaking, which stabilizes certain ways of thinking as natural” (Bohunická 2014, p. 149).<sup>6</sup> This implies that one does not have to have direct experience with certain social groups or individuals in order to think about them in a certain way. Stereotypes and prejudices, whether positive or negative, play a major role here.

Another way of using language is when language itself becomes a characteristic on the basis of which people or groups of people are excluded: “It can function as a marginalising means because language can also be an evaluative parameter that excludes from the ‘good’ community those who treat it differently from its members, who participate in maintaining the dominance of a certain linguistic ideology” (Dolník 2013, p. 233).<sup>7</sup>

It appears that language is instrumentalised in three senses. Through empirical research we can investigate language as an instrument, i.e. the ways in which it is used, which leads us to the forms of its implementation in discourse. In addition, language is a means of establishing a person’s relations with the environment (i.e. relations with the cognised world, with other people, with society), but also with oneself. A distinct manifestation of the instrumentalisation of language is when language is an evaluative parameter, which again creates a certain type of social relations based on the relationship of the users to the given language. Due to the limited scope of the paper, the interpretation will be limited to a mere description of the phenomenon, which will allow for the observation of the use of language as an instrument of discrimination. A broadened view would then include a description of the formation of relations at different levels, but also an explanation of the deeper connections, using insights from different scientific disciplines.

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<sup>6</sup> “To, že istý jazyk či jazyková forma môže fungovať ako prostriedok exklúzie či marginalizácie, je len dôsledok existencie istého prevládajúceho diskurzu tvoreného axiologicky príznačnými spôsobmi hovorenia, ktoré stabilizuje isté spôsoby zmýšľania ako prirodzené.”

<sup>7</sup> “Ako marginalizačný prostriedok môže fungovať preto, lebo aj jazyk môže byť hodnotiacim parametrom, na základe ktorého sa z ‘dobrého’ spoločenstva vylučujú tí, ktorí zaobchádzajú s ním inak ako jeho členovia, ktorí sa podieľajú na udržiavaní dominancie istej jazykovej ideológie.”

### 3. DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is a phenomenon that is obvious at first sight. One knows how to use the term in communication and intuitively reveals the negative connotations associated with discriminatory practices. However, the definitions of discrimination vary in expert sources. For example, the primary lexicographic interpretation thereof refers to the cognitive side of discrimination, describing it as “a distinction that harms someone, not recognising their equality with others, denying and restricting the rights of certain categories of the population or of certain states, international organisations, etc.” (Balážová – Bosák 2005)<sup>8</sup> or as “harmful distinction, usually in the granting of rights or benefits (e.g. to a different race, gender, social class)” (Buzássyová – Jarošová 2006).<sup>9</sup> In this case, it is important to consider not only what it means to distinguish, but also when such distinction is harmful.

The sociological approach understands discrimination as “the fact and manner of restricting or impairing the rights and entitlements of certain social groups” (Linhart – Petrušek – Maříková – Vodáková 1996, p. 213).<sup>10</sup> Discrimination is part of social relations and social rules; it has its characteristic manifestations as well as a noticeable impact on the person or people concerned. Authors of the *Large sociological dictionary* (cf. Linhart – Petrušek – Maříková – Vodáková 1996, pp. 908–910) also emphasise the emotional aspect of discrimination, as extreme negative feelings are associated with it, e.g. in the case of racism, which they characterise as a hostile attitude towards members of another race or ethnicity. In this case, the subjective negative feelings of the persons discriminated against are not taken into consideration.

The legislative perspective is based on the principle of equal treatment, i.e. it emphasises the behavioural aspect of the concept: “Compliance with the principle of equal treatment shall consist in the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex, religion or belief, race, membership of a national or ethnic group, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status, colour, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, or on the grounds of notification of a crime or other antisocial activity” (so-called Anti-discrimination

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<sup>8</sup> “rozlišovanie poškodzujúce niekoho, neuznávanie jeho rovnosti s inými, popieranie a obmedzovanie práv určitých kategórií obyvateľstva al. určitým štátom, medzinárodným organizáciám a pod.” (*Slovník cudzích slov [Dictionary of Adopted Foreign Words]*)

<sup>9</sup> “poškodzujúce rozlišovanie, obyč. pri priznávaní práv al. výhod (napr. pre odlišnú rasu, pohlavie, spoločenskú triedu)” (*Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka [Dictionary of the Contemporary Slovak Language]*) Available at: <https://slovník.juls.savba.sk/?w=diskriminácia&s=exact&c=p84c&c-s=&d=kssj4&d=psp&d=sss&d=orter&d=scs&d=sss&d=peciar&d=hssjV&d=berolak&d=noun-db&d=orient&d=locutio&d=obce&d=priezviska&d=un&d=pskcs&d=psken#> [cit. 02-05-2022].

<sup>10</sup> “fakt a spôsob obmedzovania alebo poškodzovania určitých spoločenských skupín v ich právach a nárokoch”

Act).<sup>11</sup> Slovak legislation is also based on European Anti-Discrimination Law, which refers to the situational specifics of discrimination (social context, social conditions) and the purpose is to enable access to social benefits and available opportunities.

Contemporary social psychology abroad characterises discrimination as behaving differently toward people based on their membership in a social group (cf. Kite – Whitley 2016, p. 343).<sup>12</sup> The psychological definition expands the concept by not only building on negative connotations, as it can also be based on positive characteristics, e.g. women are characterised as the gentler sex, which indeed has an impact on their perception in society. However, this contributes to the reinforcement of inadequate stereotypes and prejudices.

It appears that discrimination has four aspects, namely cognitive, affective, behavioural and pragmatic. On the basis of the above definitions, it is evident that the concept of discrimination needs to be defined in terms of harmful distinction, unequal treatment and disadvantage, which constitute the pragmatic dimension of the phenomenon. The individual components of discriminatory behaviour are all present simultaneously, and are therefore defined only formally, for the purposes of interpretation.

When describing and explaining language as part of discriminatory practices used by individuals or groups, it should be mentioned that discrimination is an objectively existing, undeniable phenomenon in society. At the same time, it is a subjective phenomenon. It relates to the experience of that which makes us feel insecure. The feeling of security is a basic social and psychological need. However, the sense of security does not only relate to the need for safety or health protection, or the satisfying of basic human needs, but, as it turns out, feeling secure also relates to the need to belong somewhere, to have value both as a member of society and as an individual, i.e. to have human dignity. Therefore, (in the light of the above-mentioned literature), we have defined discrimination for the purposes of our paper as the relationship between two subjects (collective or individual) in which the ontological security (related to basic human needs, the very existence of a person in society) and the axiological security (related to basic human rights, the social value of a person and their personal dignity) are undermined.

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<sup>11</sup> “Dodržiavanie zásady rovnakého zaobchádzania spočíva v zákaze diskriminácie z dôvodu pohlavia, náboženského vyznania alebo viery, rasy, príslušnosti k národnosti alebo etnickej skupine, zdravotného postihnutia, veku, sexuálnej orientácie, manželského stavu a rodinného stavu, farby pleti, jazyka, politického alebo iného zmýšľania, národného alebo sociálneho pôvodu, majetku, rodu alebo iného postavenia alebo z dôvodu oznámenia kriminality alebo inej protispoločenskej činnosti.” Available at: <https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2004-365> [cit. 02-05-2022].

<sup>12</sup> “Discrimination consists of behaving differently toward people based on their membership in a social group” (Kite – Whitley 2016, p. 343).

#### 4. DISCRIMINATORY INSTRUMENTALISATION OF LANGUAGE

In simplified terms, we can regard the discriminatory instrumentalisation of language as both the use of language as an instrument and a means of discrimination, as well as a discriminatory ground (when language acts as an evaluative parameter). If discrimination is the erosion of certainties, it occurs in discourse. The language activity targets both individuals and entire social groups. Language is used directly but also indirectly, consciously or unconsciously (automatically) to impact the object of discrimination. To impact the object of discrimination means to behave linguistically in such a way, that situations are created which call into question the need for the object's existence or value, both individual and social. Entire discourses arise about whether the object in question (an individual or a group) has the right to be part of society (being), whether their presence is beneficial to society (value), and what this may cause, what influence it may have on the society in question. Although we do not have direct access to the subjective experience of discrimination through language, we can very easily observe strategies that are successful in eliminating the influence of certain individuals or groups within the reference group. Indirectly, this creates inequality between the groups with rights and the groups without rights within the community, which poses a problem for a democratic society. Discrimination and discriminatory use of language poses a problem to such an extent that some countries intervene in the form of various laws, rules or guidelines, e.g. in 2008 the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Labour issued in the form of materials for schools *Guidelines for non-discriminatory language use*.<sup>13</sup> The guidelines are aimed at achieving an understanding of discrimination in relation to the five categories (age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity) and also at achieving more sensitive linguistic behaviour. To this end, a number of negative examples are provided, as well as recommended terms and formulations that at the same time are politically correct. The said guidelines describe linguistic discrimination at the level of words and concepts, at the level of sentences and texts, at the level of argumentation, perspectivisation and in relation to the attribution of characteristics, not only in terms of what we do, but also in terms of what we say as well as what we do not say. Linguistic discrimination can be explicit but also implicit.

However, in order not to remain on the theoretical plane, or on the plane of a bare interpretation of concepts, we will demonstrate them using an example of cultural discrimination, pointing out the ways in which language is instrumentalised. M. E. Kite and B. E. Whitley Jr. (2016) distinguish between discrimination at different levels of society – discrimination between individuals, institutional discrimination, discrimination at the level of organisations, and discrimination at the level of culture. Cultural discrimination is the process of achieving one's own position at the top of the social hierarchy, whereby it is the group itself that

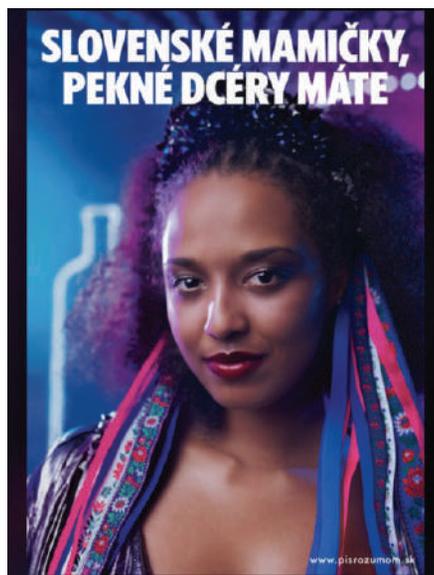
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<sup>13</sup> Leitfaden für einen nicht-diskriminierenden Sprachgebrauch (translated from the original)

determines the cultural value system. As a result, it is discrimination and inequality incorporated into literature, art, music, language, customs, beliefs, and ideologies (cf. Kite – Whitley 2016, pp. 21–22).

The example of cultural discrimination here is an alcoholic beverage advertisement that has provoked a storm of reaction. The advertisement thematises a scene from the nightlife of young people. At a disco party, a girl dressed in a traditional costume is walking through the crowd, singing an adapted version of a folk song in the lyrics: *Slovak mothers, pretty daughters you have*.<sup>14</sup> The same title of the song also served as the campaign's main slogan. There would have been nothing special about the scene if it had not been for the girl, who does not seem to fit into the generally accepted idea of a typical Slovak girl, because of the colour of her skin. On 14 September 2018, the producer of the alcoholic beverage posted the advertisement on the social network. The ensuing discussion revealed the deeply rooted attitudes and ideologies related to Slovak culture or, to be more precise, to Slovak traditional culture. The discussion stirred by the advertisement contains more than 2000 comments.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 1.** Post from Facebook<sup>16</sup>



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<sup>14</sup> In the original version of the folk song: *Slovak mothers, pretty sons you have*.

<sup>15</sup> In the discussion there were also posts that supported the advertisement, posts that cited negative posts in a challenging way, and also the posts of advertiser (Absolut). However, because of the limited range of the paper we focused on the negative and potentially discriminatory posts.

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/AbsolutVodkaSlovakia/photos/a.180315242045131/1842873872455918> [cit. 02-05-2022].

#### 4.1 Discrimination as harmful distinction

Discrimination is often characterised as harmful distinction. Although this is not a fully comprehensive definition, it captures important components of the phenomenon, the cognitive and axiological aspects, i.e. it arises from the cognitive and evaluative capacity of human beings, who need to orient themselves in a multifaceted world.

This orientation operates on the basis of the interpretive competence of a person who cognises the world and, in so doing, gets to know themselves. Here the anthropocreative power of interpretation and language, which, as J. Dolník says, is a bridge between the object and the subject, is revealed: “The resulting tension between the object and the emerging subject was that the subject’s induced need and interest to understand nature clashed with its [the object’s] otherness, resulting from the subject’s self-awareness, i.e. its [the subject’s] perception of the object as something other than itself. The evolutionary demand to understand this otherness necessitated the discovery of language to bridge the gap between object and subject” (Dolník 2019, p. 77).<sup>17</sup> Understanding the “language of nature” required interpreting it in some way, giving rise to human language. In that sense, language is a reflection of how one understands the world, and how one interprets it, thus uncovering its meanings and exploring what it brings to oneself, asking the questions: What is it? What message am I receiving? What is the meaning of this? What is the purpose of this?

Users actually did the same in the case of the above-mentioned advertisement, where the linguistic reactions are an expression of the said fundamental questions:

- (1) *Takto vyzerá slovenská mamička, alebo jej dcéra???* len zato, že má vo vlasoch folklórne stuhy??? **Čistá provokácia, nič proti Absolut vodke, ale toto..... Ako keby ste v Afrike dali reklamu s blondýnou a napísali africké mamičky krásne dcéry máte... Pozdravujem autora tejto reklamy**  
[Is this what a Slovak mother looks like, or her daughter??? just because she has folk ribbons in her hair??? **Pure provocation**, nothing against Absolut vodka, but this....Like if you ran an ad in Africa featuring a blonde and wrote: African mothers, beautiful daughters you have... Greetings to the author of this ad]
- (2) *Aspon by tam mohla byť slovenka keď už to tam pisete.....*  
[At least there could be a **Slovak woman**, if you already wrote it there.....]
- (3) *toto je vzorka väčšiny Slovenských mám ?*  
[is this a sample of the **majority** of Slovak moms?]

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<sup>17</sup> “Vzhádzajúce napätie medzi objektom a rodiacim sa subjektom spočívalo v tom, že navodzovaná potreba a záujem subjektu rozumieť prírode narážala na jej inakosť, vyplývajúcu z jeho sebauvedomovania, teda z vnímania objektu ako niečoho iného, ako je on sám. Evolučná požiadavka ‘rozumieť tomuto inakému’ si vynútila objavenie jazyka na premostenie priepasti medzi objektom a subjektom.”

(4) *Slovenka jak repa...*  
[Typical Slovak]<sup>18</sup>

Users interpret the advertisement as an image of Slovak daughters (and mothers). The key concept is the qualifier *Slovak* (or a *Slovak woman*), which is associated with both quantitative qualifiers (*majority*) and qualitative qualifiers (*jak repa – as beetroot* – an idiom, in this case used as irony). Cognising the world means not only acquiring information about it, but also sorting and remembering it in case of repeated future experience with a given phenomenon. However, it is important to remember that getting to know the world is not objective; one does not use rational thought, logic and objective cognitive processes (analysis, synthesis, classification, etc.). If we speak, for example, of human identification competence, we understand it as a process based on the discovery of so-called salient features, which are regularly repeated and on the basis of which we can classify a group of phenomena into relatively homogeneous units. According to scientists, recognising the salient characteristics of a phenomenon is limited to 5 – 9 elements in which they find certain regularity; they serve to establish order in the diverse world, i.e. to create a certain natural order. In the context of discrimination, these features have not only an identifying but also a distinctive function and serve to differentiate entities or groups of entities. Thus, based on the users' statements, it can be perceived that the identification and differentiation of objects is also related to one's own identity, because it is this way that they answer the question of what is Slovak:

- (5) *Ja nie som žiadny rasista a milujem rôznorodosť kultúr ktorá na svete je a preto sa budem zo všetkých síl túto zachovať, lebo aj tá naša je jednou z nich. A tvoja hlúpa úloha je len v tom, že provokuješ a polarizuješ spoločnosť a sonduješ či sme už dostatočne hlúpy.. a potom je nad slnko jasnejšie, že **to nieje žiadna slovenka a typická už vôbec nie!***

[I'm no racist and I love the diversity of cultures that exist in the world, and that's why I'm going to do my best to preserve this one, because ours is one of them as well. And your stupid role is just to provoke and polarize society and to check if we are already stupid enough... and then it's as clear as daylight that she's **no Slovak woman and certainly not a typical one!**]

- (6) *jedna vec je ucta k cloveku a druha prijat za normálne to co normálne nie je a nikdy nebude !!!!!*

[one thing is to respect a person and another **to accept as normal that which is not normal** and never will be !!!!!]

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<sup>18</sup> Translator's note: Irony. Literally: *As Slovak as beetroot...* potatoes and beetroot used to be the two root crops typically eaten by Slovaks.

- (7) *Na občianskom to možno napísane ma, ale **etnicky a geneticky nou nie je***  
 [It may be written on her ID card, but **ethnically and genetically she is not (Slovak)**]
- (8) *oblečiete černosku do kroju a napíšete že je slovenka. šak to je tak **úchylka vec ten kroj má takú tradíciu** že v tej dobe nikto nevedel že nejaký černocho existuje. naštudujte si **rozdelenie ras**.*  
 [dressing a black woman in a traditional costume and writing that she is Slovak. That's such a **sick thing**. The **tradition of the costume is so long** that at that time nobody knew black people existed. study the **division of the races**.]

Within their interpretive competence, users identify the object and at the same time differentiate it, distinguish it from other objects, while it turns out that the parameters for evaluating what is Slovak include *typicality*, *normality*, and *traditionality*. The criteria for evaluation are *ethnicity*, or *race*, *genetics*.

- (9) *nikdy mi nechutila ta vasa voda do ostrekovacov ale toto je moc. **slovenske zeny su biele, africke zeny su cierne**, neplette to dokopy*  
 [I've never liked your windshield washer fluid, but this is too much. **Slovak women are white, African women are black**, don't mix it up]
- (10) ***Slovak je len jeden a to je Biela rasa** to je proste fakt to nezmeníte. občianstvo môže dostať každý s tým to nemá čo spoločne absolutne*  
 [There is **only one Slovak (nation) and that's the White race** that's just a fact you can't change. Anyone can acquire citizenship, it has absolutely nothing to do with that]

Users try to characterize what defines a traditional, typical, normal Slovak woman. In the above case, the most distinctive characteristic is race, the manifestations of which (*white*, *black*) are in a disjunctive oppositional relationship. At the same time, race is perceived as a biological fact, although it is a social construct. For example, they characterize it geographically, although *Slovak* and *African* are not homogeneous terms from a lexical point of view, since one denotes a country, and the other denotes an entire continent. From a linguistic point of view, it is interesting how race, nationality and even religion correlate, and how in many places users use them as synonymous categories, that is, from a lexical point of view they are in a relation of semantic congruence, or in a relation of void opposition

- (11) *v popise je slovenske mamicky a nie černosske mamicky*  
 [the description mentions Slovak mothers and not black mothers]

- (12) *Neviem si to predstaviť medzi židmi a moslimami že by rabin nabehol do Palestíny a vykašli sa na predsudky ja som tiež Palestínčan!*  
[I can't imagine it between Jews and Muslims, like if a rabbi ran to Palestine and dropped all prejudice – and was like: I'm a Palestinian too!]

The vagueness of the concept of race is not at all surprising. The authors of the comprehensive collective monograph *Stereotypes, Prejudices, Discrimination* (Kite – Whitley 2016) point out that the categories of race, gender, and age most often influence our perceptions of people, explaining the unjustifiability of the concept of race from a historical perspective, which has proven to be very weak. A century ago, when Irish and Italian immigration was at its peak in the United States of America, even the Irish were not considered white. The categories of White and Non-white are social conventions. At one time, the word race was used to refer to practically any group of people, without making reference to biological characteristics. Over time, the term has been narrowed in correspondence with physical characteristics, especially in correspondence with the colour of skin, but not hair, eyes, etc. The authors argue that although race is a biological fiction, it is at the same time a social fact in the sense that it affects the hierarchisation of society. The perception of race, according to the above paper, is culturally influenced and is the result of stereotyping.

Here, the question of when a (non)distinction is harmful comes to the fore. Harmful distinction can be understood as a distinction that disturbs the normal state of being and functioning of a person. The normal state of being and functioning is what it should be in order for a person to exist smoothly in society, i.e. it ensures the security of survival and at the same time the person feels that they are part of society (assimilative security), and can satisfy their biogenic and sociogenic needs.<sup>19</sup> Discrimination as harmful (non)distinction manifests itself in different ways, i.e. the protagonist in the advertisement is associated with groups that are positioned outside or on the periphery of our society.

- (13) *Nájdi si niečo o haplogrupinách...okrem toho..chod' do Afriky...ked' sme všetci rovnakí, potom v tom nebudeš vidieť rozdiel...bude ti tam určite lepšie...*

[Look up something about haplogroups...and also...**go to Africa...if we are all the same, then you won't see the difference...you'll be better off there...**]

- (14) *chod' do Afriky, najlepšie JAR a povedz im tam, že sú aj bieli vraždia, znásilňujú a mučia tam beztrestne búrov...len chod'*

[you go to Africa, preferably RSA, and tell them there are also white people. **they murder, rape and torture Boers without punishment...just go**]

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<sup>19</sup> M. Nakonečný (2009, p. 179) writes about biogenic and sociogenic needs.

- (15) *tie útoky nožmi, autami, zapálené kostoly, autá, bordel v západnej Európe, znásilnenia bielych žien atď* hovoria o akej tolerancii? My musíme byť tolerantní podľa vás a keď nie sme tak sme rasisti ale tí, voči ktorým máme byť tolerantní **nič z nášho spôsobu života netolerujú** tak to je v poriadku podľa vás?

[those **attacks with knives and cars, churches and cars set on fire, the mess in Western Europe, rapes of white women**, etc., speak of what kind of tolerance? We have to be tolerant according to you and if we are not then we are racist but those we are supposed to tolerate **do not tolerate anything that is part of our way of life** - so that is ok according to you?]

- (16) *vam vsetkym by som dal zivit tych darmozracov co sedia doma na podpore.*  
[I'd have you all feed those **freeloaders** sitting at home on welfare.]

The protagonist is defined e.g. on the basis of stereotypes related to Africa or the African population, namely RAS or Kenya (although her father is from Congo), with which users associate threats to the health and life of especially the “white” people, indicating that Africans are not able to behave in a cultured manner.

It is further associated with immigrant groups who are described as *maladjusted*, *intolerant* and attributed with characteristics similar to those of Africans or South Africans. In addition, it is associated with the Roma, a minority living in Slovakia, whose maladjustment is reflected, according to them, in the use of social benefits subsidized (literally: *fed to them*) by the majority population.

In the extreme case, the protagonist is dehumanised and referred to not only as a different race, but a totally different species. An example of this is a metaphor that appears in several variants in many comments. The function thereof is to support a biological understanding of the concept of race, and it can thus be included among conceptual metaphors. The meaning of a particular metaphor can be interpreted as indicating that if someone is born in Slovakia, they are not necessarily Slovak:

- (17) *takže keď sa moja mačka narodila v akváriu tak je automaticky ryba ?*  
[so if my cat was born in an aquarium, it is automatically a fish?]

- (18) *Čiže každý kto sa narodí na Slovensku je Slovák? Hmm keď sa narodí myš v stajni je myš či Kôň?*  
[that is to say everyone born in Slovakia is Slovak? Hmm, when a mouse is born in a stable is it a mouse or a horse?]

- (19) *Osol narodený v konskej mastali ostane stále oslom*  
[A donkey born in a horse stall will always remain a donkey]

- (20) *ak sa potkan narodi v konskej stajni, to z neho este nerobi kona, alebo ano?*  
[if a rat is born in a horse stable, that doesn't make it a horse, does it?]
- (21) *a šteňa po slovenskom čuvačovi a africkom psovi bude stale čuvač .....*  
[and the puppy of a Slovak Cuvac and an African dog will still be a Cuvac....]

Users of the social network express the fact that the protagonist in the advertisement does not fit into the autostereotypical<sup>20</sup> idea of a traditional Slovak maiden in various ways, e.g. by describing her as exotic:

- (22) *Tiež ma to ako slovenku neurazilo, no predsa som sklamaná keď dá ktosi prednosť **exotickej kráse** pred tou ktorej máme doma dosť a vhodnejšej na reklamu DOMA! Sto ľudí sto chutí... v tomto prípade dosť prekvapených a dosť aj sklamaných*  
[I'm not offended as a Slovak woman either, but I'm still disappointed when someone prefers **exotic beauty** to the beauty of which we have plenty at home and which is more suitable for advertising AT HOME!! A hundred people have a hundred tastes<sup>21</sup> ... in this case, it's a surprise and a disappointment for quite a few]
- (23) *naše domáce ženy sú považované za najkrajšie a v slovenskej reklame máme **exotiku**???? Kde sme*  
[our domestic women are considered the most beautiful and we have **an exotic beauty** in a Slovak ad???? Is that where we stand now?]

The background of the advertisement is the combination of the traditional with the visually different, and the reaction of users rejecting (but also accepting) the strategy shows that it is the reaction to differentness that is surprising in the given context and to which they have to adapt. This brings us to the domain of xenology, where we have to talk about differentness and foreignness as a result of accommodation and assimilation processes in society, whereby what is foreign is understood as inassimilable (cf. Dolník et al. 2015). A particular emphasis of foreignness is the hyperbolisation thereof, which goes beyond cultural difference. The foreign is explained not only as different, but also as not normal, not familiar, as that which is not normally encountered. At the same time, it poses a threat, thereby provoking aggressive defensive reactions that contradict the idea of tolerance. In this case, the foreignness of the protagonist is extremised and her acceptability in the context of what is traditional Slovak is less probable than that of an alien being.

<sup>20</sup> Stereotypical attitude towards one's own (reference) group (the opposite is heterostereotype – stereotypical attitude towards other groups).

<sup>21</sup> Translator's note: Although the idiom is usually translated as "One man's death, another man's bread", the translation here is literal to convey that different people have different reactions.

(24) *to ste tam mohli radšej dat mimozemstana z alzy...*  
[you should have just used the **alien from the alza ad...**]

Discrimination undermines the other person's confidence by finding in them various qualities, or qualities that they experience and evaluate as negative, inadequate, while at the same time reinforcing the perception of one's own qualities as correct, identical with those of the collective, thus achieving the reinforcement of the self-image of the members of the society, but also of one's own position in the community (solidarizing function). In this way, one avoids social exclusion (being pushed to the periphery of the community or marginalised).

## 4.2 Discrimination as unequal treatment

The interactional aspect of discrimination takes place against the background of the induction and reproduction of social relations in which a person acts as a behaving and acting being. It is a person's social nature that determines them to form social relations at different levels, and in each social relation they occupy different social and communicative roles. Discrimination occurs at all levels of relationships, i.e. between individuals, at the level of organisations, at the level of institutions and at the level of culture. However, our understanding of discrimination stems from a harmful distinction based on the opposition of own versus foreign (different), which creates a kind of social radius, with the so-called "group privilege" at the core of society. It is an unearned privileged state conferred (metaphorically) on the basis of race, gender, social class or sexual orientation.<sup>22</sup> Belonging to a dominant group is related to opportunities and social advantages.

It is the dominant group that determines the value system of the society in order to stay on top of it. The users' statements express what "should be" in the advertisement, what a Slovak woman "should look like", or what "shouldn't be there". For example, ideas about the beauty of domestic women were often articulated; in some cases, users posted so-called image memes corresponding to their idea of a white Slovak girl in a traditional costume:

(25) *Raz ked su to slovenske mamicky a chcete tam niekoho obsadit aby to prezentoval, mal by to byt clovek, ktory ma oboch rodicov a podobne slovakov. Nemam nic proti rasam, sam ako som uz pisal mam kamaratov aj romov, ale proste ked slovak, tak poriadny a nie polovicny. Ako vyssie napisal m. k., ked sa narodis na pandore, neznamena, ze si avatar (papierovo ok, ale stale budes len pozemsky clovek, nebudes ani modry ani chvost mat nebudes ani nic)*  
[it clearly says Slovak mothers and if you want to cast someone to represent that, it should be a person whose **both parents, and so on, are Slovak**. I have

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<sup>22</sup> "Group privilege is an unearned favoured state conferred simply because of one's race, gender, social class, or sexual orientation" (McIntosch 1988 – cited by Kite – Whitley 2016, p. 9).

nothing against other races, as I have already written I also have friends who are Roma, but simply said, if it says Slovak, then a proper one and not a half one. As m. k. wrote above, when you are born on Pandora, it doesn't mean you are an Avatar (on paper, ok, but you will still be just a person from Earth, you won't be blue, you won't have a tail or anything)]

(26) *mne vobec nezalezi na tom aku ma clovek farbu, ale aky ten clovek je. Len raz ked ma niekto reprezentovat slovaka, tak tam nenasukam do kroja cernosku pre boha.... nech ma papiere akehokolvek obcianstva*

[I don't care at all what colour a person is, but what that person is like. but if someone is to represent a Slovak, don't put our traditional costume on a black woman for God's sake.... whatever her citizenship papers are.]

(27) *O akej podpore tolerancie tu dristate? Ja na Slovensku ziadne rasisticke nazory nevnimam tak tu nepodsuvajte svoje zvratene nazory a to co tu neexistuje.*

[What kind of crap are you talking here about supporting tolerance? I don't perceive any racist views in Slovakia so don't slide in your twisted views on what doesn't exist here.]

(28) *Jedine, co mi vadi na celom tom obrazku je ta slecna. Nie tak ani ona sama ako to, ze v popise je slovenske mamicky a nie cernoske mamicky, tak by tam mala byt klasicka poctiva slovenska deva a nie tato. Sam mam priatelov romov a podobne, nehanbim sa za to lebo su to slusny pracujuci ludia, co sa staraju o svoje rodiny. Ale uz ked pisem slovenske, tak slovenske!!*

[The only thing that bothers me about the whole image is the girl. Not so much her specifically as a person, as the fact that the description reads Slovak mothers and not black mothers, so there should be a classic Slovak maiden and not this one. I myself have friends who are Roma and the like, I am not ashamed of them because they are decent working people who take care of their families. But when it says Slovak, then Slovak it should be!!!]

(29) *Toto je moja zem a budú tu žiť iba bieli Slováci. Aj ja mám právo povedať ako si predstavujem svoju krajinu*

[This is my land and only white Slovaks will live here. I also have the right to say how I imagine my country]

Evaluation in the sense of "should be" is understood as part of the contradiction between the ideal (what should be) and the real (what is). Meanwhile, self-reflection of the privileged group's own discriminatory actions is either non-existent, i.e. the members thereof do not perceive themselves as discriminating (*I do not perceive any*

*racist views*), or the users are aware of their position in society as well as of the fact that possible discrimination against other members of the community would undermine their ideal self-image, which is why statements rejecting it often appear in the discussion (*I have nothing against races, but. ...; I have Roma friends myself, but...; I don't care at all what colour a person is, but...*). This way, they try to retroactively rationalise their attitudes. Alternatively, they invoke their rights (*I also have the right to say how I imagine my country*) in order to create the illusion of equality in society. The idea of equality is a fundamental principle of any democratic society. In Slovakia, this idea has been translated into Article 12 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. However, the idea of equality is still only an ideal, not a reality (cf. Debrecéniová 2008, p. 7), because unequal treatment is a social fact.

(30) *je rozdiel byt obcanom Slovenskej republiky, a je rozdiel byt prislusnikom Slovenskeho naroda... ktory je sucastou Slovanskeho naroda, a ludia tohoto naroda maju urcite vonkajsie znaky nesuce sa v ich genoch ..medzi inymi farba pleti ... ..holka je prislusnickou nejakeho etnika ... tak nech je na to hrda ..urcite ma toto etnikum vlastne kroje a zvyky, ... neodsudzujem na zaklade farby pleti ani nediskriminujem ci uz negativne alebo pozitivne ..ale toto ako koncept reklamy mi dvihlo zlc*

**[there is a difference between being a citizen of the Slovak Republic and being a member of the Slovak nation...** which is part of the Slavic nation, and the people of this nation have certain external features present in their genes..among other things-skin colour .. .... the girl is a member of an ethnic group ... so let her be proud of it...surely this ethnic group has its own costumes and customs, ... **I do not judge** on the basis of skin colour or **discriminate**, either negatively or positively ...**but** this as an advertising concept has just raised my hackles]

(31) *Na obcianskom to mozno napisane ma, ale etnicky a geneticky nou nie je*  
 [It may be written on her citizenship card, but **ethnically and genetically she is not** (Slovak)]

The privileged group can clearly define, rationalize why other members of society do not belong to the core of society. The above example shows that practical users are able to accept a person as a citizen of the Slovak Republic, who, however, always remains on the periphery of society in terms of ethnicity, culture, etc., which means their exclusion and the associated marginalisation.

Acceptance of otherness, or acceptance of the image of a non-ethnic Slovak in a traditional costume, only comes into consideration if she is the subject of amusement, be it indulgent humour or caricature. Again, with the emphasis that it is not discrimination.

(32) *V každom prípade je takéto dievča v slovenskom kroji prinajmensom raritou . Ja som taketo niečo este v živote nevidela, nie je to teda bezna vec tak ako sa to snaží reklama vykresliť. Ba ano videla som Ibiho, slovenskeho bacu - ale to nemalo tento odporný a spinavý rasistický podton, bolo to naopak veľmi milé, vtipné a spontánne-presne také aký je aj IBI ,ktoreho my Slováci milujeme bez ohľadu na to aké je farby pleti. A v tom to presne je! Uvedomte si vážená Absolut company že tu nejde o rasizmus zo strany našich pisateľov a Slovákov, **ide tu o viac, o vzorec kultúry, zvyky a obyčaje, na ktoré máme ako príslušníci tohto národa určiť názor a ide o veci , na ktoré sme bezne zvyknutí a hlavne o VASU NEUCTU K TOMUTO DEDICSTVU!** My si tiež nedávame na hlavy celenky z peria a nezachceme skakat okolo ohňa na námestí SNP s tým, že sme povedzme indiani alebo zulu....absolut zneuzila VSETKYCH, AJ tu dievčinku z reklamy AJ slovenskú kultúru. UCTA VAM NIC NEHOVORI VSAK? Je to naozaj veľká hanba !*

[In any case, such a girl in the Slovak traditional costume is at least a rarity. I have never seen such a thing in my life, so it is not a common thing as the advertisement tries to portray it. Yes, I've seen Ibi (Translator's note: Ibrahim Maiga is a Slovak singer and actor of Malian descent) as a Slovak shepherd – but it didn't have this disgusting and dirty racist undertone, on the contrary, it was very nice, funny and spontaneous – just like IBI, who we Slovaks love no matter what colour he is. And that's exactly what it is! Remember, dear Absolut company, that this is not about racism on the part of those who commented and Slovaks, **it is more than that, it is about the cultural pattern, customs, which we regard as members of this nation, and it is about the things we are used to** and especially about YOUR DISRESPECT FOR THAT HERITAGE!!! We don't put feather headbands on our heads and start jumping around the fire in the square of the Slovak National Uprising claiming that we are let's say Indians or Zulu ....Absolut has abused EVERYONE, EVEN the girl in the ad AND Slovak culture. RESPECT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU, DOES IT? It's really a big shame!]

Promoting diversity, inclusion, equality in society is seen as, at the very least, disrespectful of one's heritage or racist towards one's own "white" race.

(33) *rasistická reklama, rasisti obyčajní nič viac*

[a racist advertisement, plain racists, nothing more]

(34) *Toto je vysmech a plutie na Slovenský národ, naše korene a tradície a hlavne na našich potomkov, toto má čo zo Slovenskými mamickami??*

[This is a **mockery and spitting on the Slovak nation**, our roots and traditions and especially on our ancestors, what does this have to do with Slovak mothers??]

- (35) *Este sa budeme za chvíľu schovavat vo vlastnej krajine, lebo sme bieli.*  
[We'll be **hiding in our own country in a while**, because we're white.]
- (36) *váš postoj je skutočne rasistický lebo miešaním rás tá **naša rasa zanikne***  
[it is your attitude that is really racist because by mixing races **our race will disappear**]
- (37) *Teda ak ma byt bratislava tak uzasne rozmanita ako taky britsky birningham kde posledne **banda týchto uzasnych farebných ľudí dokopala obyčajneho parkovacieho inspektora na zemi tak to sa fakt super tesime.***  
[Well, if Bratislava is supposed to be as amazingly diverse as the British Birmingham, where a **bunch of these great colourful people kicked the shit out of a parking inspector on the ground** recently, then we are really super excited...]
- (38) *A aká tolerancia mne to už pripadá ako **“znasilnovanie” Európy** všetko by bolo v pohode keby stále nemal niekto potrebu hlasnejšie hulakat sprostosti.*  
[What tolerance, it just seems to me like the **“raping” of Europe**, everything would be fine if some people didn't feel the need to shout nonsense louder and louder.]
- (39) *demokracia sa stáva v tejto dobe a priestore „Európa“ väčšou hrozbou ako bola anarchia a možno sa demokracii časom **podarí prekonať aj holokaust***  
[democracy is becoming a greater threat than anarchy was in this time and space of 'Europe', and perhaps over time democracy **will even beat the Holocaust**]

Users activate a self-preservation instinct in order to preserve a reference group with which they feel solidarity and identify themselves as members. Discriminatory behaviour is not grounded in a real threat, but only in the sense of threat evoked by our perception of other people, i.e. any reason to discriminate is a feature of the discriminating behaviour rather than a characteristic of the person being discriminated against. The fear of the foreign, which we perceive as a threat to our existence, was also demonstrated in the above-mentioned users' statements, none of which were directly related to the actual protagonist in the advertisement; the narrative is considerably depersonalised so as not to speak specifically about her person. The result, however, is the marginalisation of the protagonist to a passive position as a member of society on the periphery.

However, it needs to be said that the discriminating subject may not even be aware of the unequal treatment for a number of reasons, e.g. (a) they are a member of the privileged society (a privileged group is a majority group whose characteristics

are considered to be without markers), (b) they behave and act on the basis of lived social norms, i.e. on the basis of lived standardisations, conventions, traditions, attitudes (stereotypes and prejudices), (c) discriminatory behaviour and actions do not interfere with their motivational world, do not pose a problem in achieving their own goals, or (d) are often a means used to achieve their own goals.

### **3.3 Discrimination as disadvantaging**

Harmful distinction and unequal treatment do not characterise discrimination in its entirety, e.g. because the ban on discrimination takes into consideration situations in which it indeed is desirable to positively distinguish (not to homogenise) and to treat differently, in the interests of creating a fair playing field in which every single member of society has the same “starting line” in their access to opportunities. The term discrimination is therefore extended so as to include the notion of disadvantage.

Disadvantage can be considered on several levels. First of all, it is the markedness of a negative evaluation to certain characteristics of the person being discriminated against. This aspect is related to harmful distinction and is more cognitive in its nature. Social advantages are characterized by social psychology as an unearned more advantageous status that is attributed on the basis of race, gender, social class, or sexual orientation, where the attribute “unearned” implies that these advantages are not based on ability, effort, or past achievements, but on being part of a privileged group (see Kite –Whitley 2016, p. 9). Advantages can be understood as passive values, they are characteristics that are attributed to people on the basis of (non)membership in a privileged group. Members of the privileged group are the bearers of unmarked characteristics, while non-privileged individuals or groups are the bearers of marked characteristics.

However, disadvantaging is mainly pragmatic, i.e. it is related to a person’s goals and motivations. A person’s motivational world is made up of needs, interests and values, whereby disadvantaging may not affect the whole spectrum of needs, but only some of the needs that a person has and the fulfilment of which is the aim of their behaviour and actions.

If we exclude that on the part of the discriminator there is a real threat to the existence of the individual or the entire privileged group, society, culture, we can see that in the analysed discussion there is a conflict between values (culture as a value, traditional values), or ideals (how traditional culture should look like) on the one hand and rights (the right to identity, the right to equal access to opportunities, resources, privileges), or the needs of a person on the other hand, i.e. on the part of the person being discriminated against (e.g. the need to belong, the need for self-fulfilment).

From the point of view of the subject being discriminated against, disadvantaging appears as the impossibility of taking advantage of one’s own abilities in achieving goals, enjoying human rights or satisfying needs. One of these

is the right to identity. It turns out that identity is not only a phenomenon that is subjective, but also a phenomenon that must be collectively accepted. Identity has been variously characterized, for example as “generally, a unity of inner psychic life and action, which is also referred to as authentic being” (Linhart – Petrusek – Maříková – Vodáková 1996, p. 414).<sup>23</sup> In humanistic psychology, identity is understood as the ability to “be what one really is”, that is oneself, and is associated with the pursuit of self-fulfilment (cf. *ibid.*). However, one cannot completely disregard the social influence on a person. In his psychosocial theory of personality development, E. Erikson emphasizes the “congruence between the inner sense of self and the externally given definition of identity ascribed to people by their social environment” (Blatný et al. 2010, p. 17).<sup>24</sup> Acceptance of the subject’s identity takes place against the background of collective values that determine the boundaries of culture:

(40) *ty si očividne presvedčený o všetkom možnom, len aby sa v človeku stratila akákoľvek identita. Ja nie som žiadny rasista a milujem rôznorodosť kultúr ktorá na svete je a preto sa budem zo všetkých síl túto zachovať, lebo aj tá naša je jednou z nich.*

[You are obviously convinced of all sorts of things, **only to get rid of any identity in a person**. I am no racist and I love the diversity of cultures that exist in the world and I will do my best to preserve this one because ours is also one of them.]

Cultures are perceived by users as complex entities with fixed boundaries, which may also be related to the perception of geopolitical boundaries as those that are manifest, salient. Even if these boundaries sometimes appear relative, they are also underpinned by natural boundaries separating larger territorial units, such as continents (*After all, she has an African father!*). The preservation of culture is understood as the establishment of fixed boundaries between different cultures. Here, boundaries are established on the basis of race, which is one of the characteristics that no single person can actually contribute to, but which is nevertheless the main reason for the privileging or exclusion of members of society.

Discrimination resulting from the collective rejection of a person’s identity in this sense poses a problem for the self-fulfilment of the members of society, because it puts them in a passive position, i.e. they cannot actively participate, for example, in the creation and reproduction of social (and traditional) culture. This passive position of the members of society also appears in language, as the users direct their disapproval not on the protagonist as a representative of culture, but instead towards

<sup>23</sup> “obecně jednota vnitřního psych. života a jednání, která bývá též nazývána autentickým bytím”

<sup>24</sup> “kongruenci mezi vnitřním pocitem Já a externě danou definicí identity přisouzenou lidem jejich sociálním prostředím”

the creators of the advertisement, who make explicit the theme of the diversity of society. The protagonist herself is thus perceived only as an object of exploitation for the benefit of ideology, and her real subjective identity is not perceived at all:

(41) *Vaše babky by z toho asi radosť nemali, akú SLOVENKU si prezentujete*  
[Your grandmothers probably wouldn't be happy about it, what **SLOVAK WOMAN** you are presenting here]

(42) *absolut zneuzila VSETKYCH, AJ tu dievcinu z reklamy AJ slovensku kulturu. UCTA VAM NIC NEHOVORI VSAK? Je to naozaj velka hanba!*  
[**Absolut abused EVERYONE, EVEN the girl in the advertisement AND** Slovak culture. **RESPECT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU, DOES IT?** It's really a big shame!]

A passive status means dependence on social acceptance, which translates into solidarity of the privileged group. J. Dolník understands solidarity as a sense of belonging interpreted by the phrase “we belong together” (Dolník 2021). It is a two-way relationship between the individual, who needs to belong somewhere (subjective need for self-preservation), and society, which provides security for the self-preservation of the collective through solidarity. The solidarity of the collective must accordingly respond to the differentiation of the members of society, which translates into tolerance, i.e. the ability of the group to accept a certain degree of otherness in the individual, i.e. that certain characteristics do not provoke a negative reaction from the collective. However, the degree of tolerance is a result of the collective ability to accommodate. The accommodation on the part of the collective is in fact the adaptation of the system to new conditions, new phenomena. At the same time, the individual must give up certain specific features in order to become a part of the group that does not pose a perception problem. Even an apparently marked characteristic can be understood neutrally, not a priori negatively. In this case, J. Dolník speaks of the neutralisation of markers in a certain context (not in general, as it would constitute assimilation). It is a two-sided, namely an accommodative and assimilative process. However, skin colour is impossible to change, so a problem-free perceptual state requires a greater degree of accommodation on the part of the privileged group. It requires going beyond the boundaries of the comfort zone, but it is a manifestation of cooperation, one of the universalities of human society.

The discussion reveals that the users do not approve of the self-fulfilment of the advertisement protagonist within the traditional Slovak culture, and at the same time they also restrict the satisfaction of her need for appreciation, recognition, approval from a certain part of the society, but also belonging. While the self-actualization need belongs to the so-called growth needs (meta-needs), the need for recognition is one of the basic sociogenic needs (cf. Nakonečný 2009, p. 179):

- (43) *Presne, si slovak len na papieri, v skutočnosti si iný, koho zaujíma nejaký papier a zákon, keď v skutočnosti máš proste iný talent, iný štýl, a cit. Myslím, to tak, že napríklad romovia sú skvelí muzikanti a speváci a majú to väčšinou vrodené, že sa im to ľahšie vymastruje atď.*  
 [Exactly, you are Slovak only on paper, in reality you are different, who cares about some paper and law act, when in reality you just have a different talent, a different style, and feeling. I mean, it's just that, for example, the Roma are great musicians and singers and it's mostly innate in them, it's easier for them to master such skills and so on.]
- (44) *Radšej zmaž tu reklamu lebo to nikdy nebude jej krajina tak ako absolut nie je naša vodka*  
 [Better delete that ad because **it will never be her country** just like Absolut is not our vodka]
- (45) *ona nie je Slovenka! Veď má otca afričana!*  
 [**she is not Slovak!** After all, she has an African father!]
- (46) In the extreme case, the violation of the autostereotype of a white Slovak is elevated to the level of violation of legal standards, which means that cultural norms are considered laws:
- (47) *Nie, nie, nie. Nevieam kto, čo? Ja osobne si myslím. Že dievčinka netuší čoho sa dopustila aj keď neznalosť neospravedlňuje.*  
 [No, no, no. I don't know who, what? Personally, I think the poor girl has no idea what she's done, although **ignorance is no excuse.**]

A thoughtful reader might argue that no intent to discriminate can be demonstrated in this way; these are the personal attitudes of social network users and language users that are expressed explicitly and may not even correlate with the actions of individuals in the real-life context of coming into contact with members of marginalised population groups. It is precisely here that it is important to recall the discourse in which we operate and that the virtual world provides a space for the expression of aggression, which, although it may not manifest itself in the real world, is part of the formation of a society-wide discourse, is the site of numerous confrontations, and is thus part of the formation of a collective consensus in many areas. It is this social consensus that is the basis of truth and knowledge in pragmatism.

## 5. SUMMARY

Discriminatory instrumentalisation of language is the use of language as an instrument and means of discrimination or a discriminatory ground. We have

characterized discrimination as a relationship between two subjects (collective or individual) in which ontological certainty (concerning basic human needs, the very existence of man in society) and axiological certainty (concerning basic human rights, the social value of man and his personal dignity) is undermined, which takes place (and is revealed by us) on three planes. On the level of harmful distinction (which constitutes the cognitive side of the concept), unequal treatment (the behavioural side) and on the level of disadvantage (the pragmatic side).

We have described the discriminative instrumentalisation of language mainly in its instrumental form. Language as an instrument of harmful distinction (cognitive level of the concept) is related to the interpretative competence of language users who identify an object and at the same time differentiate it, distinguish it from other objects, while it turns out that the parameters for evaluating what is Slovak are *typicality, normality, traditionality*. The evaluation criteria are *ethnicity, or race, genetics*.

Language as an instrument of unequal treatment (the behavioural or interactional aspect) operates against the background of the induction and reproduction of social relations. The dominant, so-called privileged group, which is characterised by unmarked characteristics and determines the value system of society in order to remain at the top, plays an important role here, which is linked to the undermining of the idea of equality, the basis of a democratic society. Users idealise their own reference group and may not be aware of discriminatory behaviour and actions.

Language as a tool of disadvantaging (pragmatic side) refers to the motivational world of a person. In the debate in question, it is mainly the conflict between values and ideals (on the part of the discriminator) and basic human needs (on the part of the discriminated against), while the protagonist is demonstrably denied an active participation in the creation or reproduction of traditional culture.

A probe into the discriminatory instrumentalisation of language focuses on the description of language as an instrument of discrimination. However, a thorough understanding of this phenomenon also requires a description of language as a means or parameter on the basis of which certain individuals or groups are discriminated against. It is also desirable to complement the interpretation with an explanatory approach that would explain the principles of discriminatory behaviour and action as manifestations of language use as behaviour and action, manifestation of the motivational world of the person, as well as the ways of limiting discriminatory action through language. In addition, it is also desirable to extend the language material to different kinds of communications or discourses, which would offer a more concise view of the issue under study. Despite this, the probe offers results that are not negligible, although they could be blamed on the virtual communication among social network users. However, given that we are now witnessing the transfer of moods and attitudes from virtual space to real life, it is important to research and monitor this sphere indeed.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Discrimination poses a problem in a democratic society. As a complex and long-term phenomenon, it is the cause of the suppression of the principles of equality and freedom and the repression of human rights. On an intersubjective level, it is the reason for causing insecurity in individuals or population groups, because it limits their opportunities to satisfy the needs that are the basis of a problem-free human existence (ontological insecurity) and, at the same time, it also attacks their value as human beings, their dignity (axiological insecurity).

However, a democratic society is characterised by social differentiation. The differentiation of society takes place in the political, economic, social or cultural spheres (including language), etc., which practically means the occurrence of variable ways of fulfilling political, economic, social or cultural and linguistic goals, as well as the variance in the demographic composition of the population. Variance in general (and also in language) is understood as a manifestation of the dynamics of the system, where phenomena with the same function or the same goal that they should fulfil coexist side by side. Finally, variance is also an aesthetic requirement in different types of texts.

In some contexts, however, variance is considered to be an undesirable phenomenon, especially when it concerns the fundamental values of society. Variance is then labelled as a problem. The fundamentality lies in the fact that society takes certain values as given, as immutable. These fundamental values may include health, family, traditions, language, etc. In these cases, a group of members of the collective points to the possibility of a threat to the existence of the values as well as to the entire society and its culture, which can be described as an effort to preserve them, to protect them from the influence of the external environment. As a result, a kind of an immune reaction occurs within that part of society, which is characterised by intolerance to variability. It is then the protection from external influences that is seen as a way of preserving, for example, culture. To preserve culture (and ultimately any phenomenon) practically means to reproduce it (it is also related to reinterpretation). However, the reproduction of culture is impossible if its creative potential is limited. In that case one can speak of sterilizing culture rather than preserving it.

But society and culture must evolve; their dynamics are a constitutive characteristic that cannot be taken away from them. The question, however, is how to achieve a state where the system is able to tolerate the influence of the environment and not react to non-native phenomena. The question relates to the productivity of human thinking, which is translated into human activity and reflected in originality that does not have to be based on innovation as a priority, but can be a creative combination of the traditional with the unconventional, or, different. Otherness, foreignness is a potential asset for the preservation of (also traditional) culture.

Perhaps this is also what J. Dewey had in mind when he talked about the obstacles that can be stimuli to novel response and the seemingly adverse conditions that can be the means to hitherto unexperienced modes of success.

Enabling a level playing field for self-fulfilment leads to creative overcoming of obstacles, the basis of which is cooperation, the collaboration of all members of society in achieving goals, because no matter what our characteristics are, our motivation to maintain and fulfil a problem-free existence with all its privileges is something we all share.

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### Resumé

## DISKRIMINAČNÁ INŠTRUMENTALIZÁCIA JAZYKA

Príspevok sa zameriava na opis používania jazyka ako nástroja a prostriedku diskriminácie. Diskrimináciu chápeme ako vzťah dvoch subjektov, v ktorom je narušená ontologická a axiologická istota. V tomto zmysle diskriminačná inštrumentalizácia jazyka realizuje v úrovni škodlivej diskriminácie, nerovnakého zaobchádzania a znevýhodňovania. Používanie jazyka hrá hlavnú úlohu pri vytváraní diskurzu, ktorý vytvára určité spôsoby myslenia a rozprávania. Ako výskumný materiál slúži diskusia o reklame na Absolut vodku, ktorá sa rozvinula na sociálnej sieti Facebook.