

How woke language distorts the world

Wokeness takes familiar words and fills them with a new ideological content.

Every word in the woke lexicon conceals activism. Every single one. To achieve activists' ambitions of deconstructing systems, terms must have dual meanings – a common, ordinary and reasonable meaning, and a specific, activist meaning. In a policy proposal, for example, the wokerati first make people believe they are using the term in a standard way. And then, once the proposed policy becomes adopted, the meaning of the term is turned into Wokeish.

'Inclusion', for instance, has the common meaning of 'all people are welcome'. But it also has the woke meaning of 'a space that restricts speech'. How can everyone feel included if speech is allowed that causes members to feel offended, and therefore excluded? Not everyone can, or so runs the woke logic. Therefore, to be truly inclusive, speech needs to be restricted. That would be crazy.

'Complicity' is another favourite of the wokerati. In common parlance it means active involvement in something, but in Wokeish it means benefitting from systems that oppress. American academic Barbara Applebaum provides a good example of this in *Being White, Being Good*: 'All white (and white-adjacent) people are complicit in the maintenance and harms of systemic racism and white supremacy.'

But the woke agenda runs into trouble as soon as a term is translated out of English, the mother tongue of the leading wokerati. When a woke term is translated from English, only one of its meanings is carried over. The activist agenda, which is fundamentally based on equivocating between the ordinary and the woke meaning of a term, is not imported with the translation. To try to do so, by providing the secondary woke meaning of the word, would expose the linguistic sleight of hand. And if there is no way to conceal this secondary meaning, activists cannot readily achieve their agenda of deconstruction.

For example, there is no specific word in Hungarian for '[gender](#)'. Consequently, Hungarians import and use the English word 'gender', and with it the woke discourse that accompanies the term. (When author and cultural critic Andrew Doyle's fantastic book, [Woke: A Guide to Social Justice](#), was translated into Hungarian, the publisher retained the English title.) The same thing has happened with other languages like Mandarin, where there is also no word for 'gender'. Indeed, woke English terms have made their way across the globe, from the present [sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India](#), who peppers his [lectures](#) with woke Anglicisms, to the 'inclusion'-packed [new Synod document](#), released by the Vatican last month. The ideological content of these words stands far more exposed in the foreign context.

That only English terms have so far been used to advance woke activism means that foreign nations have a clear method of defence. By disapproving or even mocking these English terms, they can stop woke's memetic incursion into their systems, cultures, jurisprudence, languages and, yes, [thoughts](#).

Think about it this way. Words can be translated, but discourses – the way people think and talk about ideas – cannot. The web of meanings and the relationships among words are not easily rendered into other languages. Take the word 'cow', which acquires its meaning through being embedded in a broader discourse. So in India, the cow is sacred. For the average American, it's likely a burger. Words have shades of meaning, and these vary from culture to culture, often widely. These shades of meaning cannot always be translated into even linguistically similar languages, such as the other Germanic tongues and Romance languages.

To influence discourse, one can translate a woke word literally, but the original meaning doesn't come along because the term is now embedded in a different meaning-making structure.

Australian documentary maker [Mike Nayna](#) refers to woke language manipulation as 'discourse engineering'. The wokerati think of it as a type of word magic and believe they can force change by controlling the meanings of words. Think of [anti-racism](#), [belonging](#), [decolonisation](#), [gender-affirmation surgery](#), [white fragility](#), etc. But they lose control once those terms are translated. If you introduce a term into a foreign language, you need to define it. And once you define it, and therefore provide the woke meaning, you give the game away.

Vague explanations of words – and thus equivocation, obfuscation and concealment – become impossible. In Wokeish, for example, 'equity' means 'adjusting shares' or, [more infamously](#), remedying past discrimination with present discrimination, and present discrimination with future discrimination. Activists are wannabe wizards who try to use discourse engineering to remake society in their own image.

But their magic works only in English. More specifically, the version of woke that works in English works only in English, although it would be possible to achieve a similar kind of linguistic duplicity in another language. Put another way, English is not unique among languages in being the only one in which Wokeish manoeuvres can work – but it is, for now, the language through which woke ideology invades. Woke is a universal solvent. It was specifically designed to [disrupt and destroy](#) anything and everything with which it comes into contact. If you live outside the Anglosphere and want to keep wokeism at bay and [maintain the integrity of your institutions](#), you must not allow non-translated English terms to enter your lexicon. How this is to be accomplished is unclear, as there is an ever-looming danger of leakage. What is clear, however, is that there is no better way to prevent activist agendas from corrupting a host's institutions than to maintain linguistic sovereignty.

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