tolerance

by Bilyana Todorova

Abstract:

Bulgarian: *Текстът представя ключовата дума "толерантност" в български и по-общ, предимно европейски контекст. Посочен е нейният латински произход, навлизането ѝ в българската реалност след Освобождението, употребата ѝ в различни контексти през последните повече от 100 години. На български обичайно е синонимна на думите "търпимост" и "снизходителност".*
В последните десетилетия засилва популярността си, от една страна, заради разпространението на либералните ценности в световен мащаб, от друга - става повод за множество дискусии както между привърженици на антилибералните възгледи, които не приемат културния релативизъм, така и между правозащитници, които смятат, че толерантното отношение към различните не е достатъчно, необходимо е нещо повече - приемане и уважение.

English: *The text introduces the keyword "tolerance" in the Bulgarian and European context. The word comes in Bulgarian at the end of the 19th century and becomes extremely popular in the last decades as it is one of the main values of the pluralist liberal democracy. It is used in political and media discourse and at the same time in everyday communication with sometimes controversial interpretations.*

Etymology:

The word *tolerance* in English is of Latin origin. In Bulgarian: "толерантност" (tolerantnost). “Tolerance” has Latin origin – the Latin word is *tolerantia* "a bearing, supporting, endurance." (According to Latdict "ability to bear/endure pain/adversity; patience, fortitude, tolerance"). In English, it comes from Old French *tolerance* (14c.). As Online Etymology Dictionary states, other meanings of the word become popular a little bit later – for example "tendency to be free from bigotry or severity in judging other," comes from 1765; "allowable amount of variation" dates from 1868, and physiological sense of "ability to take large doses" first recorded 1875.

Cultural specificity:

In the Bulgarian context, the word "толерантност" (tolerance) becomes popular relatively late – the first use of the root of the word is in 1883 when the adjective "толерантен"/ ‘tolerant’ is mentioned. The noun is used in 1890 in the *Balkan dawn* newspaper which is the first lasting daily Bulgarian newspaper published in Plovdiv from 1890 to 1894 and from 1 to 4 October 1900. The adjective was more popular in the first decades of the 20th century and it is the preferred word in dictionaries whereas the noun is presented as a derivative from the adjective. In Bulgarian, it has the same root as in other languages. However, the suffix in Bulgarian is the same as in the other East Slavic languages (-ост /- ost) and differs from the West Slavic and South Slavic languages (maybe because of the Russian influence in the period). (more in Todorova 2019)

Synonyms for **tolerance** in Bulgarian are: 'търпимост' и 'снизходителност' ('latitude' and 'leniency'). However, the word is not well explained and the definitions in Bulgarian dictionaries are the same.

Problematization:

The history of the use of the term is long and interesting, as it is used even at the time of the late Roman Republic. In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is said that ‘[i]n stoic writings, especially in Cicero, *tolerantia* is used as a term for a virtue of endurance, of suffering bad luck, pain and injustice of various kinds in a proper, steadfast manner. But

already in early Christian discourse, the term is applied to the challenge of coping with religious difference and conflict. The works of Tertullian and Cyprianus are most important in that respect." However, as Reill (2009: 3) states: “Tolerance, conceived as a positive general principle essential to the proper functioning of pluralistic democracy and contemporary Western civil society, is a child of the Enlightenment.”

The use of the word 'tolerance' is more frequent nowadays, as it is one of the main values of the pluralist liberal democracy. It may be seen in UNESCO's Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, where tolerance is defined as: “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human.” At the same time, it is outlined that “the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions."

In Bulgaria one of the valuable definitions of tolerance is the following: "Tolerance is considered in cases when the tolerated subject (1) does not approve of or like certain qualities or actions of the tolerated person, but (2) voluntarily refuses to pursue, restrict or terrorize the tolerated person." (Dobreva, 2009, p. 23). At the same time, some investigators mention that today it is not enough to accept or endure something; now we need to be active in our “appreciating and guaranteeing distinctness”, because “tolerance also entails acknowledging a free realm of action for the Other” (Bödeker 2009, p. 17). As tolerance is a result of a conscious decision, it is not necessarily naturally inherent in humans, it is an understanding related to the development of human civilization and the idea of human rights, pluralism, democracy and the rule of law. That is why it is used in contexts connected to the minority groups and their social inclusion.

Meanwhile, we have recently observed the growth of exclusion narratives and inclinations. The minority rights are contradicted to the need of the majority to save their own positions, traditions and privileges.

It is known that intolerant, racist and nationalistic statements are a part of the public discourse in many European countries and they gain more popularity. These attitudes have attracted the attention of a large number of researchers. At its centre is the *fear of others*, whose roots are often in the past, which is a reality at the present and is oriented to the future. As Arias & Bryla (2018, p. 2) said: “although the fear of the other which Shteyngart is writing about in his memoir is *felt* in the present, it is in fact located in the future, operating as an open-ended threat, or an always valid possibility, whose affective force is so strong that it refuses to be rationalized”. The fear of the others results in the so-called “hate speech” which is a part of Bulgarian public speech as well.

The word tolerance („толерантност“) is used in political and media discourse and at the same time in everyday communication. The informal public or private discourse is extremely interesting because official texts are usually more neutral and premeditated (politically correct) and informal discourses represent more specific meanings of the keyword. However, some media texts regularly use the so-called ‘hate speech’ and the social reaction to these examples is not strong enough, i.e. a lot of people tolerate intolerant speech.

The controversial tendency also gains popularity - the word 'tolerance' is replaced by other uses. According to Arat & Nunez (2017), "there is an asymmetrical relationship between the “tolerant” and the “tolerated", so they propose the use of "acceptance". Such a term use is not a new one, as in 2007 van Quaquebeke, Henrich & Eckloff discuss the terms tolerance, acceptance and respect, claiming that the last one is the most suitable.

Communication strategies:

As was said, the word tolerance („толерантност“) is used in different contexts - in political, educational, media discourse as well as in everyday communication.

Politics: Although tolerance is seen as a positive feature, its real representation is admitted as an overtolerance in the speech of some nationalistic parties and leaders. They usually said that overtolerated are Muslims (they are suspected to be easily radicalised), LGBT people, Roma people, etc. For example, the Bulgarian MEP Angel Dzhambazki says after the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting: “Това е сблъсък на цивилизациите. Не трябва да смесваме понятието толерантност с безотговорност. Не може да проявяваме търпимост срещу хора, които изобщо не са

търпими." (This is a clash of civilizations. We must not confuse the concept of tolerance with irresponsibility. We cannot be tolerant of people who are not tolerant at all.)
He has also public speeches against LGBT rights: „Тази сесия на Европейския парламент бе посветена на ЛГБТ пропагандата... Либералните болшевики използват понятия като дискриминация и толерантност, за да пробутват фалшивите си ценности." ("This session of the European Parliament was dedicated to LGBT propaganda. Liberal Bolsheviks use concepts such as discrimination and tolerance to promote their false values.")
Alexander Sidi from the same political party spoke against tolerance toward Roma people on March 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 threat, when some Roma quarters were closed. These actions were supported by nationalist party, a part of the Governing Coalition: "Заставам зад действията на полицията и не приемам никакви приказки за човешки права и толерантност към един единствен етнос" ("I stand behind the actions of the police and do not accept any talk of human rights and tolerance for a single ethnic group.")

The same rhetoric is often used in the speech of other far-right political leaders as well as in the speech of some populist parties. (Ding & Hlavac 2017, Charalambous & Christoforou 2018, Duina & Carson, 2020, etc.)

Education: Tolerance is a principle that is a part of the educational curriculum of most European countries. That is why the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC) aims to "prevent and combat racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other forms of intolerance". Van Driel, Darmody & Kerzil (2016) in their report prepared for the European Commission and concerning education policies and practices propose different steps to be made in the EU schools so as to inclusive classroom policy and tolerance promoting activities to be incorporated and respect for others to be taught.
In the document of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, the word "tolerance" is mentioned several times when the educational goals of the subjects as Bulgarian language, Geography and Economics, Philosophy, Music, Fine arts are described. The students are expected to be able to express respect for others and to learn to accept different points of view.

Media: Most of the Bulgarian media are relatively cautious when talking about tolerance and try to avoid overt intolerant speech. However, some popular media sites use the opposite rhetoric and express tolerance as a negative phenomenon that ruins the traditional Christian-based civilization. They often use anti-Muslim, anti-Roma, anti-globalist and eurosceptic language. It is interesting that such traditionally seen as conservative and far-right points of view are also presented in the pro-Russian media (for example, bultimes.bg), which are close to the former Bulgarian communist party. They present the popular belief that discrimination against white Christian people (especially men) exists.

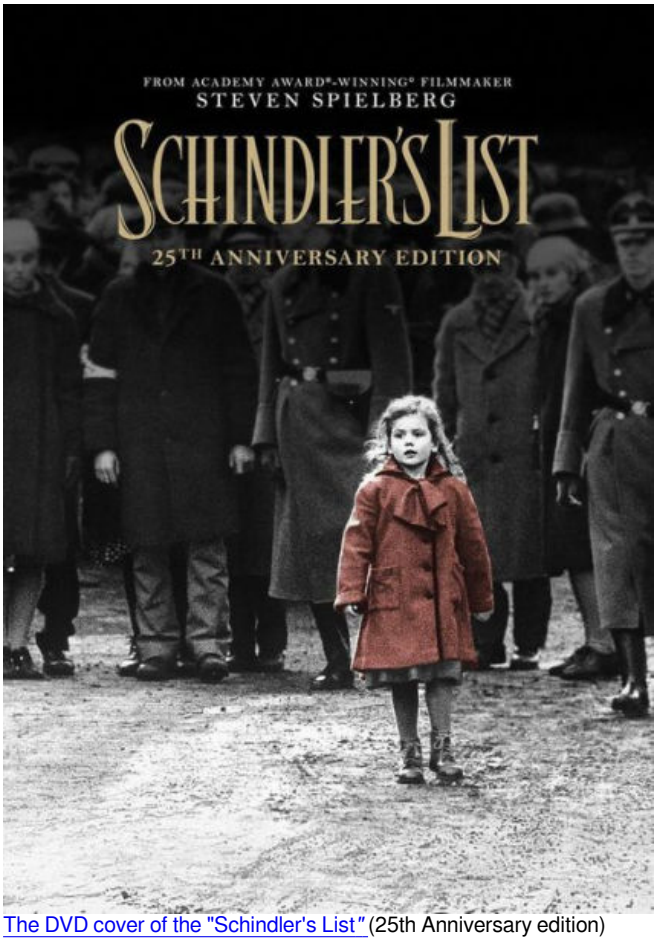
Social media: The so-called *Netiquette*, combining the words 'network' and 'etiquette' is a term, which presents the rules of acceptable communication on the Internet. People are supposed to respect each other as well as to refuse to empower abuse and harassment. However, intolerant behaviour is often available, especially in social media. That's why social media community standards are announced to reduce hate speech and violence online.

Subversion:

'Tolerance' has not been a common central topic in the arts. However, the relationships between people, the lack of tolerance and the opposite - the demonstration of respect and humanity have been always a part of the verses, the plots of the books or the screenplays.

One of the most famous Bulgarian poet Dimcho Debelyanov days before his death wrote at the time of the 1st World War the following verse "убитият не ни е враг" ("the killed is our enemy no more"), expressing the futility of war and the respect to his dead "enemy". Such examples could be found in any culture and they present the special feature of the art to express acceptance, respect and humanity.

When we talk about films, we have to mention the silent film "Intolerance", which shows the persistence of intolerance in human history. It is claimed to be one of the most influential films of the silent era.



The DVD cover of the "Schindler's List" (25th Anniversary edition)

A couple of books and films present personal stories concerning the Holocaust and how humanity may overcome prejudice and racism, for example, an Oscar-winning "Schindler's List" (based on the novel "Schindler's Ark" by T. Keneally), "The Boy in the Striped Pijamas" (a book by John Boyne, which was filmed two years later), the controversial one according to some critics, and many more.

Pop culture in general, and pop music in particular also presents the topic of acceptance and tolerance, for example, the song "Human" by Rag'n'Bone Man (2016), which refrain is: "... I'm only human after all. Don't put your blame on me!".



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3wKzyIN1yk

Discussion:

Some points for a critical discussion:

- Do you think people should be tolerant of intolerant behaviour?

- Which term do you find the most appropriate: tolerance, acceptance, or respect? Why?

- Has the idea of tolerance been changed over the centuries?

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