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LEXICOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF BARRIER-FREE LITERACY AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION: CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS¹

Abstract. *The article examines the lexicographic representation of barrier free literacy and inclusive communication in the contemporary scholarly landscape. It aims to identify conceptual and structural gaps in current lexicographic practices and to propose a model for their systematic integration. The research employs comparative lexicographic analysis to evaluate leading international resources, including the Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries, Merriam-Webster, and Collins English Dictionary. These sources demonstrate a high degree of responsiveness to socio-cultural change through the documentation and standardisation of inclusion-related terminology and contextualised usage examples that enhance pragmatic and sociolinguistic awareness.*

At the same time, the study demonstrates that, within the Ukrainian scholarly context, existing attempts to compile dictionaries and reference materials devoted to barrier-free literacy remain fragmented, insufficiently standardised, and limited in interdisciplinary scope and systemic coherence (including the Barrier Free Handbook and the Terminological Dictionary of Inclusive Education). The absence of a comprehensive lexicographic resource integrating linguistic, cultural, artistic, and media dimensions of inclusive communication highlights the need for further research in this field.

Within the framework of the research project "Barrier-Free Literacy and Inclusive Communication as Factors of Social Cohesion: Language, Literature, and Media," the study proposes the development of an

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innovative lexicographic model of inclusive communication incorporating intertextual references across literary texts, media discourse, and artistic practices. An English-language counterpart is also envisaged to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian scholarly experience into global academic discourse. Such a lexicographic resource is expected to promote inclusive communicative practices grounded in linguistic ethics, mutual respect, democratic values, and openness to inclusive social transformation.

Keywords: barrier-free literacy, inclusive communication, linguistic ethics, contemporary lexicography, dictionary of inclusive communication, Barrier-Free Handbook.

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ЛЕКСИКОГРАФІЧНА РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЯ БЕЗБАР'ЄРНОЇ ГРАМОТНОСТІ ТА ІНКЛЮЗИВНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ: СТАН І ПЕРСПЕКТИВА

Анотація. Статтю присвячено аналізу лексикографічної репрезентації безбар'єрної грамотності та інклюзивної комунікації в сучасному науковому просторі. Особливу увагу зосереджено на досвіді провідних світових лексикографічних видань, зокрема Оксфордського та Кембриджського словників, Merriam-Webster, Collins English Dictionary та ін., які оперативно реагують на соціокультурні зміни, фіксуючи й нормалізуючи мовний ресурс, пов'язаний з інклюзією та недискримінаційною комунікацією. У цих джерелах простежується системний підхід до тлумачення понять, що відображають нові етичні

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стандарти комунікації, а також надання контекстів уживання, які сприяють формуванню мовної чутливості користувачів.

Водночас у статті констатується, що в українському науковому просторі вже існують окремі спроби укладання словників і довідників із безбар'єрної грамотності, однак вони залишаються фрагментарними, недостатньо уніфікованими та обмеженими щодо міждисциплінарного охоплення і системності (ідеться про "Довідник безбар'єрності", "Термінологічний словник з інклюзивної освіти" та ін.). Відсутність комплексного словника, який би інтегрував мовні, культурно-мистецькі та медійні аспекти інклюзивної комунікації, зумовлює потребу в подальших дослідженнях і розробках у цій сфері.

У межах наукової теми "Безбар'єрна грамотність та інклюзивна комунікація як чинники соціальної єдності: мова, література, медіа" передбачено створення інноваційного словника коректної комунікації з розгалуженою системою інтертекстуальних зв'язків, що охоплюватимуть літературні тексти, медійні контексти та мистецькі практики. Паралельно планується розроблення його англomовного аналога, що сприятиме інтеграції українського досвіду в глобальний науковий простір. Очікується, що такий лексикографічний продукт стане ефективним фаховим інструментом формування нової культури публічної взаємодії, заснованої на принципах взаємоповаги, демократизації суспільства, дотримання мовної етики та відкритості українського суспільства до інклюзивних трансформацій.

Ключові слова: безбар'єрна грамотність, інклюзивна комунікація, мовна етика, сучасна лексикографія, словник коректної комунікації, "Довідник безбар'єрності".

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The study of barrier-free communication in contemporary linguistics remains one of the most challenging areas of inquiry, since "meaning is not something that exists in words themselves, but is constructed by participants in communication" [18, p. 12]. This complexity is determined both by the theoretical heterogeneity of the phenomenon itself and by the practical difficulties associated with its implementation and description from the perspectives of language

policy, social ethics, cultural traditions, and related dimensions. In modern scholarship, barrier-free communication is regarded as an interdisciplinary construct that integrates communicative, socio-political, and ethnocultural parameters, which, in turn, complicates its unambiguous linguistic interpretation and necessitates a comprehensive methodological approach.

Recent international research on inclusive communication demonstrates a growing tendency towards the systematisation and operationalisation of inclusive language practices across both human and computational domains. In particular, studies in healthcare communication propose structured lexicographic and terminological frameworks for inclusive language use in relation to LGBTQIA+ patients, emphasising the need for dictionaries of inclusive terminology as instruments for reducing exclusion and improving communicative accessibility (see [10]). This reflects a broader trend towards the codification of inclusive linguistic practices within professional discourse communities.

In parallel, recent developments in computational linguistics and artificial intelligence extend this paradigm by addressing gender bias in language generation systems. Research focusing on large language models demonstrates that structured prompt-based frameworks, combined with evaluation metrics such as gender assumption, gender neutrality, and content relevance, can significantly reduce biased outputs and promote more inclusive linguistic generation in both human- and machine-mediated communication systems (see [14]). These findings indicate that inclusive language is increasingly conceptualised not only as a sociolinguistic and ethical construct but also as a measurable and optimisable linguistic parameter.

In this context, the growing relevance of research into barrier-free communication is driven by the increasing societal demand for inclusivity, the strengthening of tendencies towards the humanisation of public discourse, and the dynamic development of the digital information space evolving in parallel with the processes of digitalisation and globalisation. Within this context, barrier-free communication emerges as a multilayered linguistic phenomenon that reflects the integration of cognitive, sociocultural, and ethical factors. It

embodies the normative and value-based principles underlying speech behaviour in an inclusively sensitive communicative environment and regulates the selection of linguistic means in accordance with the principles of ethicality, tolerance, and social relevance.

The status and conceptual scope of barrier-free communication have been partially outlined in scholarly literature from the perspectives of linguistics, philosophy, and pedagogy (O. Homoniuk, N. Danyliuk, H. Leshchuk, Yu. Makarets, O. Rohach, G. Bencini, M. Jeffress, I. Rink, among others). Certain studies have also addressed the linguistic-political, ethical-legal, and socio-cultural dimensions of inclusive communication (N. Kondratenko, Yu. Maslova, N. Mehesh, O. Taranenko, I. Yanchenko, M. Bucholtz, C. Hudley, among others). However, the lexicographic representation of this complex phenomenon remains largely indirect and requires further specification and analytical elaboration. Within the framework of this article, an attempt is made to analyse contemporary lexicography – both international and Ukrainian – that defines the concepts of *barrier-free literacy* and *inclusive communication* in their syncretic interconnections and interdependencies.

Thus, the *Oxford Dictionary* provides a semantically comprehensive definition of *barrier-free*, associating the concept with any form of design or adaptation intended for persons with disabilities, including the provision of alternative means of access (e.g. ramps, lifts, etc.), as well as with the openness of communication "without taboos" for all individuals. At the same time, the notion of *accessible communication* is defined as clear, direct, and easily understandable communication that may be presented in various formats in order to ensure equal access for all users [15].

A similar conceptual framework may be observed in the interpretation of the notion *inclusive*, which also incorporates the phenomenon of *inclusive communication* (see, for example, the *Cambridge Dictionary* [4]). This concept is frequently contrasted with *hate speech*, defined as "public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation" [4]. It should be emphasised that, within the global context, inclusivity is associated with the value

orientations of society and is therefore interpreted through the categories of social morality, democratic values, freedom of thought and expression, appropriate communication, and public ethics, etc.

As can be observed, the international scholarly discourse frequently correlates the concept of *barrier-free* with such notions as *inclusive space*, *barrier-free communication*, *tolerant society*, and *public ethics*, emphasising the significant role of linguistic communication in overcoming discriminatory barriers, including gender-, age-, cultural-, physical-, and cognitively based forms of discrimination.

In one of the authoritative lexicographic sources, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the concept *barrier-free* is defined as "free from obstacles or impediments; especially: accessible to people with disabilities" [2]. This definition primarily represents a physical and spatial interpretation of barrier-freeness, focused on the removal of material obstacles and the provision of accessibility for persons with disabilities. At the same time, the very semantics of the lexemes *obstacles* and *impediments* imply the possibility of a broader – even metaphorical – interpretation that extends beyond the exclusively physical environment. In this respect, the concept may also be considered within the framework of democratisation and social openness.

Reference to other authoritative lexicographic sources makes it possible to trace the gradual semantic expansion of the concept of *barrier-free*. Thus, the *Collins English Dictionary* defines it as "designed to be accessible to disabled people; without physical obstacles" [6]. In the present scholarly context, unlike the previous one, particular emphasis is placed on the intentionality of design (*designed to be accessible*), which shifts the focus from the passive absence of barriers to consciously organised accessibility. Such an approach implicitly introduces into academic discourse the idea of society's responsibility for creating conditions conducive to inclusion. Consequently, it should be noted that the concept of inclusivity broadens the semantic field of barrier-freeness at the linguistic-cognitive, socio-humanitarian, and ethical-legal levels alike.

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A similar tendency can be observed in the *Macmillan Dictionary*, where *barrier-free* is defined as "without physical features that make it difficult for people, especially those with disabilities, to enter or use something" [12]. Here, the emphasis shifts towards the experience of the communicant, allowing barrier-freeness to be interpreted not merely as a characteristic of an object, but rather as a feature of the interaction between the environment and the individual. Consequently, the concept begins to encompass elements of functionality, accessibility, and comprehensibility – categories that are likewise fundamental to communicative and artistic practices.

The lexicographic focus thus moves towards an integrated understanding of this concept within the frameworks of social communication, philosophy and ethics, linguistics, and, more broadly, the cognition of reality and the evolution of *Homo sapiens* within a globalised society. We likewise support this perspective when considering barrier-freeness as a new linguistic and social reality in which openness of communication and the absence of boundaries in the verbalisation of reality constitute the foundation of a democratised social space. This argument is further reinforced by the increasingly developed theory of the *ethics of digital accessibility* within contemporary scholarship, which incorporates freedom of thought and action as manifestations of the new digitalised space of the twenty-first century [8].

In the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, this meaning is specified through the definition "designed so that people with disabilities can use it easily" [3], which reinforces the component of ease of use. This aspect is conceptually significant for the transition from physical accessibility to cognitive and communicative accessibility, as it implies not merely formal access to a phenomenon (including a text), but rather a genuine opportunity for effective interaction with information and/or the environment.

Increasingly, contemporary communication practices employ the concepts of *accessibility*, *easy-to-read communication*, and *accessible communication* as semantic and stylistic transformations of the notion of *barrier-free* within a broader humanitarian and socio-cultural context. In this framework, these concepts are

understood as forms of communication that are accessible for comprehension and use by all social groups, regardless of their cognitive, physical, and/or linguistic characteristics.

In 2024, the collective monograph *Inclusion in Linguistics* [5] was published, in which the authors address inclusive language practices as a systemic factor in the formation of an accessible communicative space integrating the principles of barrier-free communication across all linguistic levels, from the lexical and phraseological to the discursive. It is argued that this approach significantly expands the analysis of barrier-freeness and inclusivity in contemporary linguistics, shifting the focus towards a more comprehensive conceptualisation of these phenomena within the socio-humanities domain.

Ukrainian lexicography, unfortunately, addresses the issues of barrier-free literacy and inclusive communication only superficially. This can be attributed to several factors. First, the concept of barrier-freeness as an integrative interdisciplinary phenomenon remains relatively new within the Ukrainian scholarly context. Second, the inertia of the lexicographic tradition has largely been oriented towards the documentation of established linguistic norms and conventions rather than their proactive re-evaluation in response to social change. Third, there remains an insufficient level of institutional and methodological development in approaches to the codification of inclusive and accessible language practices within lexicographic resources.

A significant step in this direction has been undertaken at the state level through the publication of the *Barrier-Free Handbook* [19], initiated by O. Zelenska as part of a nationwide initiative aimed at fostering a barrier-free environment. The handbook represents an important attempt to standardise the principles of inclusive and non-discriminatory communication within the public sphere.

In support of this policy, the *State Standard of Barrier-Free Language* [1] was also developed and introduced into implementation. The document encompasses more than 100 terms relating to the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities, veterans, parents with children, and other social groups that may

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encounter prejudice and exclusion within society. Consequently, it establishes fundamental requirements for the accessibility of information, communication, and services across both public and social sectors, thereby creating a normative framework for the practical implementation of inclusion principles.

Among the objectives outlined in the aforementioned handbook is the proposal of alternative nominations to replace discriminatory linguistic clichés; accordingly, it recommends "socially acceptable equivalents for words and phrases that demonstrate prejudiced, stereotypical, or discriminatory attitudes towards particular individuals or social groups" [19]. The vocabulary proposed in the handbook is declarative in nature and is presented as a means of adhering to the principle of communicative appropriateness. This includes prioritising a person-centred approach in all spheres of social interaction (person first), avoiding euphemistic or masking expressions, figurative meanings, and metaphors that arise from attempts to sound politically correct, limiting the use of generalised nominations and stereotypical representations of individuals in society, and favouring the use of feminine forms when referring to women. Evidently, such principles broaden the ethical, legal, and linguocultural parameters of communication and undoubtedly contribute to enhancing communicative appropriateness and inclusivity within society.

The acquisition and use of barrier-free language require greater effort and a higher level of awareness not only because of the need to overcome the inertia of previous linguistic practices and the increased structural complexity of such linguistic units, but also due to the growing number of emerging terms, particularly in the context of war and the post-war period. We are already addressing this gap through the development of a lexical database of linguistic units intended for subsequent lexicographic description, which will also encompass the conceptual field of "war / post-war experience". This includes notions related to military actions, traumatic experience, rehabilitation and reintegration, as well as the social and legal dimensions of societal recovery.

The acquisition and use of barrier-free language become particularly demanding in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, where communicative practices are shaped by large-scale displacement, trauma, and rapid social transformation, requiring lexically precise and ethically sensitive naming strategies. In such conditions, barrier-free communication functions as both a normative linguistic framework and an instrument for reducing discursive harm and ensuring respectful representation of affected groups. This is reflected in established inclusive terminological choices such as *internally displaced persons (IDPs)* instead of informal or reductive labels like *war refugees*, and *survivors of war trauma* rather than *war victims*, which foreground agency and psychological resilience. Official and media discourse increasingly prefers the term *full-scale invasion* over neutralising alternatives such as *conflict escalation*, as it more accurately encodes the asymmetry and intensity of violence. Similarly, the phrase *temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine* is used in place of ideologically ambiguous formulations, ensuring legal and political clarity, while civilian casualties replaces euphemistic expressions such as *collateral damage*, enhancing ethical transparency. In relation to military personnel and civic identity, inclusive formulations such as *Defenders of Ukraine* or *service members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine* replace generic or externally imposed labels like *Ukrainian troops*, thereby reinforcing respect and agency. These examples demonstrate that barrier-free communication in wartime discourse is not merely a matter of politeness, but a lexicographically significant and ethically grounded system of naming that regulates how conflict-related realities are conceptualised, standardised, and recorded in evolving linguistic practice.

The compilers of the dictionary of barrier-free language emphasise the need to reconsider the role of euphemism in everyday communication. As is well known, inclusivity implies the acceptance and normalisation of phenomena that were previously marginalised or excluded from linguistic representation through avoidance, particularly those associated with perceived "deviance", including social roles, medical conditions, gender self-identification, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and other aspects of identity. In this

regard, I. Makarets notes that "euphemisms stem from taboos and social prohibitions, and the purpose of barrier-free language is to detaboo and speak openly and neutrally about illnesses, disorders, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc., phenomena that are part of everyday life but still face hostility or stereotypical perception" [13, p. 77]. An inclusive society therefore seeks to detaboo these topics and to promote the formation of attitudes towards them, as well as corresponding linguistic means, as neutral and socially legitimate. Consequently, from a lexicographic perspective, key areas of development include the systematisation and codification of such vocabulary, the delineation of boundaries between euphemistic and direct naming units, and the formulation of usage recommendations regarding their appropriate deployment in different communicative contexts. This, in turn, contributes to the consolidation of language practices aligned with the principles of barrier-freeness, inclusivity, and ethical sensitivity in contemporary society.

We would like to emphasise that the *Barrier-Free Handbook* also defines the core concept of barrier-free language as a principle that "can be formulated in a single phrase: to respect another person's dignity" [19]. Such a formulation narrows the definitional scope of this complex phenomenon, foregrounding its ethical dimension while underrepresenting its systemic, cognitive, and socio-communicative characteristics, which calls for further elaboration in line with contemporary communicative practices.

The aforementioned initiatives, despite their conceptual and regulatory significance, remain predominantly applied in nature and are not yet fully integrated into lexicographic practice. This highlights the need for further theorisation and codification of the relevant terminological system within academic discourse. Moreover, the number of such linguistic units continues to increase, which in turn indicates a clear direction for future lexicographic development in the field of barrier-free literacy and inclusive communication.

At the same time, dictionaries oriented towards social and educational inclusion (see, for example, [11; 16]) present concepts that constitute the basic categorical apparatus of inclusive education

(such as *inclusion, adaptation, assistive technologies, special educational needs, inclusive upbringing*, etc.). However, their interpretation is predominantly focused on pedagogical and socio-ethical dimensions, while the broader communicative and linguistic aspects of barrier-freeness remain insufficiently addressed. Both works demonstrate an aspiration towards the standardisation of terminology and the systematisation of the conceptual field of inclusion; nevertheless, they also reveal a certain degree of descriptiveness and limited interdisciplinary integration. In particular, cognitive mechanisms of information perception, principles of easy-to-read communication, parameters of digital accessibility, and the pragmatic appropriateness of specialised terminology are largely underrepresented, as these aspects were not the primary focus of the studies.

In the context of ongoing democratisation and European integration processes in Ukrainian society, alongside the accumulation of collective wartime trauma in social consciousness, there is a growing need to further develop the conceptualisation of this phenomenon within lexicographic research. Contemporary inclusive practices – particularly those emerging in the arts and at the intersection of linguistics, sociology, psychology, and media communication – remain insufficiently represented in current lexicographic resources. This limitation, in turn, reduces their applicability as analytical tools for examining barrier-free communication within a broader socio-humanitarian framework. The role of media discourse in shaping and disseminating such inclusive linguistic practices has been systematically addressed within media linguistics, which conceptualises media language as a structured and norm-forming communicative system (cf. [17]), thereby providing a theoretical basis for integrating media-related phenomena into lexicographic modelling of inclusive communication.

A limited number of entries related to inclusion and barrier-freeness can also be observed in electronic encyclopaedias, such as the *Great Ukrainian Encyclopaedia* (e.g. *inclusion, inclusive education, inclusive policy*) [9] and the *Encyclopaedia of Modern Ukraine* [7]. We are currently working on the preparation of corresponding analytical entries for the latter source, in particular the

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 dictionary entry "*Barrier-Free Communication*", which highlights the relevance of a systematic scholarly conceptualisation of this phenomenon and the need for its precise lexicographic codification within the Ukrainian humanities. This work also emphasises the broader socio-humanitarian relevance of barrier-free communication as a developing interdisciplinary concept.

As can be observed, contemporary lexicography demonstrates a clear tendency towards the semantic expansion of the concepts under analysis, ranging from architectural accessibility to communicative, social, and cognitive inclusion. Researchers increasingly emphasise the discursive dimensions of inclusivity and barrier-freeness, which ensure equal access to meanings, participation in communication, and the interpretation of information. Consequently, these phenomena should be examined through the synergy of humanities disciplines, primarily linguistics, literary studies, media communication, and social ethics, which enables a more systematic conceptualisation of actual language use.

Against this background, the need arises for the development of an innovative dictionary of appropriate and inclusive communication, featuring an extensive system of intertextual links encompassing literary texts, media contexts, and artistic practices, aimed at demonstrating a synergistic understanding of linguistic practices related to social inclusion and barrier-free literacy. Within the framework of our research project No. 26BF044-01M "*Barrier-Free Literacy and Inclusive Communication as Factors of Social Unity: Language, Literature, and Media*," supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, this work is already underway: the conceptual framework of the dictionary has been designed, a textual corpus (including literary, media, and legal sources) is being compiled, and a lexicographic card index is being developed, which will facilitate the implementation of the project by 2027. In parallel, the development of an English-language counterpart is planned, which will contribute to the integration of Ukrainian scholarly experience into the global academic discourse.

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