

INTERPRETATION AND STUDY OF THE EUPHEMIA PHENOMENON

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Annotation. For a long time, euphemism has been a subject of such disciplines as stylistics, cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, as well as linguistics and cultural studies. The term «euphemism» is taken from the Greek language and means «to speak well». The history of the phenomenon of euphemism began long before the formation of linguistics, and even before the emergence of the term euphemism, there was a practice of replacing unpleasant and rude words with softer expressions. This phenomenon was widely used during the development of schools of rhetoric in ancient times as softening and replacing unpleasant, rude words.

Keywords: Euphemia, interpretation, linguistic phenomenon, euphemism, semantics, stylistics, cultural context, communication.

Introduction.

Since the 5th century BC, various written sources and treatises have appeared describing cases in which speakers avoided unpleasant words or even chose to remain silent [Russello, 2014: 17–18]. Ideas about words and expressions derived from a specific semantic sphere of softening and embellishing speech are found in the work *Rhetoric* by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, dating back to the 4th century BC.

Two centuries later, in the treatises of the Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero on the art of rhetoric, recommendations were given on avoiding coarse and inappropriate expressions, including the use of euphemisms: “*Among words with alternative meanings, the most acceptable (beautiful) should be chosen; in the choice of metaphors, one should prefer moderately suitable expressions. Thus, if a speech contains meaningless or improper, illogical, or somewhat ridiculous expressions, it deserves reproach; therefore, if phrases contain inappropriate, careless, rude, or incomprehensible expressions, they are to be condemned.*”

In the traditions of ancient rhetoric, it was common practice to replace unpleasant or harsh words with softer synonyms in order not to offend the audience or give a negative impression. Thus, the phenomenon of euphemism was initially formed not so much by the internal laws of language as by its close connection with the socio-cultural context.

In the Middle Ages, three main functions of euphemism were observed: firstly, replacing words considered associated with bad omens or evil forces (for example, instead of “died” using expressions like “breathed his last” or “gave his soul”); secondly, expressing modesty; and thirdly, modifying inappropriate words in order to comply with rules of etiquette [Russello, 2014: 35]. In the early stages, the primary function of euphemism was to adapt to socio-cultural norms and avoid potentially unpleasant situations. Thus, it is clear that the origin and development of euphemisms are directly linked not only to the internal structure of the language but also to the socio-cultural perspectives of society.

The second type of euphemisms was used to express morally taboo or inappropriate topics, particularly sexual desires and illnesses. Such euphemisms served to maintain respect



and delicacy in interpersonal communication, adapting to social standards of acceptance by employing softer and more indirect linguistic expressions.

During the era of the troubadours (11th century), the emergence of the third type of euphemism was associated with the strengthening of social and religious prohibitions. Although the theme of aristocratic love was widespread in literature, extramarital relationships were condemned. Therefore, euphemisms were employed to avoid awkwardness and prevent social disapproval when referring to such subjects [Russello, 2014: 18]. This situation demonstrates that euphemisms are connected not only to moral considerations but also to the socio-political context.

Thus, medieval euphemisms were mainly associated with the concept of taboo, and their formation was significantly influenced by social and cultural factors. However, the existence of certain lexical-semantic fields within different types of euphemisms also proves their connection with the internal structure of language. Hence, the development of euphemisms is a complex process that emerges as a result of the interaction between social, cultural, and linguistic factors.

“At present, there are narrow and broad approaches to the interpretation of the euphemism phenomenon. Within the narrow approach, euphemisms are defined as words or expressions used by the speaker instead of taboo words.” According to A.A. Reformatskiy, euphemisms are words or expressions employed as alternatives to taboo words (phrases) [Reformatskiy, 2005: 51].

The word “*taboo*” is borrowed from the Tongan language of Polynesia and means “to prohibit, to forbid.” It refers to prohibition on religious, superstitious, or undesirable grounds [Omonturdiyev, 2006: 14]. For instance, in a religious context, shaking one’s hand after washing it is forbidden — this is a taboo. Similarly, ethnographic taboos exist, such as sitting on the threshold, cutting nails at night, or placing a broom upright. Taboos are divided into two types: ethnographic and linguistic.

According to N. Ismatullayev, some linguists fail to distinguish taboo from its related derivatives [Ismatullayev, 1964: 6]. That is, apart from taboo, there are also “prohibited” words in communication that are avoided so as not to create an inappropriate effect on the interlocutor. These are linguistic units similar to taboos but not religiously, superstitiously, or politically forbidden. For example, the word “liar” conveys a negative meaning, and its euphemistic equivalent could be “storyteller.” However, this word does not constitute a taboo phenomenon.

“Within the broad approach, euphemisms include words and expressions that replace taboo names as well as those used to substitute certain inappropriate, indecent, or overly harsh words under particular circumstances.”

This study adheres to the broad approach in understanding euphemisms. Indeed, to view euphemism only within the narrow approach is inaccurate, since euphemism is not limited merely to replacing tabooed words with other expressions. The scope of this phenomenon is much wider.

Another factor in the emergence of euphemisms is the formation of traditional communicative culture and its influence on the choice of linguistic means. As communicative culture developed, people realized that using coarse words and expressions contradicted moral norms, and thus preferred to replace them with positive or at least neutral words and synonyms. For example, in English, the coarse or impolite word “*toilet*” was replaced by “*rest room*,” while in Uzbek it was substituted with words like “*xalajha*” or “*chet*.”

In Uzbek linguistics, euphemisms began to be studied mainly in the second half of the 20th century. For instance, the first research was N. Ismatullayev’s candidate dissertation “*Euphemisms in the Modern Uzbek Language*” (1964). A. Omonturdiyev’s studies focused on euphemisms in the speech of herdsmen, which also encompassed euphemisms referring to animal bones. Later, the author published the monographs “*Professional Speech Euphemisms*” and “*Fundamentals of Uzbek Euphemistic Speech*” [Omonturdiyev, 2006: 23].

In his book *“Semasiology of the Uzbek Language”* (2010), M. Mirtojiev considered euphemism as a derivative meaning assigned to an existing word. In defining the term euphemism, the author uses the word *“naming.”* He emphasizes that euphemism should not be understood as renaming, but rather as attributing a euphemistic meaning to an existing coarse word in the language. According to him, euphemism represents an additional meaning of an existing word, and therefore euphemism is a semantic phenomenon [Mirtojiev, 2010: 120].

M.K. Hakimova, in her study of the cultural characteristics of euphemisms, concludes that another important aspect of euphemisms is that they reflect the high culture of the people to which the speaker belongs, as well as their ethnocultural and ethical norms. For example, instead of saying *“An elderly person’s beauty has faded,”* the use of the expression *“You have matured”* demonstrates the speaker’s cultured background and unwillingness to employ words deemed inappropriate [Hakimova, 2021: 33].

“Uttering words associated with good omens, avoiding those with bad omens (especially during sacrificial rites), and maintaining silence as a sign of respect” are among the cultural functions of euphemistic practices.

L.P. Krysin, the author of several works devoted to the study of euphemization, not only provided a detailed account of euphemisms as a speech technique but also offered his own interpretation of the phenomenon, describing their main functions and identifying the themes and domains of euphemization. He defines a euphemism as *“an indirect method of naming an object, property, or action through paraphrase and, at the same time, mitigation”* [Krysin, 1994: 35].

In Sh.S. Safarov’s *Dictionary of Linguistic Terms*, euphemism is defined as *“a mild linguistic unit used instead of one with a coarse meaning”* [Safarov, 2023: 100]. “From their emergence to the present day, euphemisms have represented linguistic means that help avoid the use of words considered to have a ‘bad’ omen. Euphemisms are emotionally neutral words or expressions used in place of synonyms or phrases that appear impolite to the speaker.”

Since the early 21st century, with the emergence of new forms of communication, the growing influence of mass media, and the tendency of euphemistic vocabulary to permeate various branches of linguistics, studying the nature of euphemisms, refining their definitions, and simplifying their classifications have become primary objectives of linguistic science.

Euphemism is not only a socio-cultural but also a psychological phenomenon, as it reflects the role of language in social life, norms of speech etiquette, and human attitudes toward the world. The choice between harsh or mild expressions is closely tied to a speaker’s psychological state. For instance, when quarreling with her husband, a woman might say, *“I quarreled with my husband.”* In Uzbek linguoculture, however, it is considered inappropriate (though not taboo) for a woman to refer to her spouse simply as *“my husband” (erim)*. Instead, euphemistic alternatives such as *“my spouse,” “the father (of the children),”* or *“these (bular)”* are preferred. Yet, in a negative psychological state, such as during anger, saying *“I quarreled with their father”* is also deemed inappropriate.

The phenomenon of euphemism has also been studied within sociolinguistics, focusing on how euphemisms are used among specific social groups, age categories, and professional communities.

“Euphemisms differ not only in their social nature and semantic equivalence but also in their functional and linguistic characteristics. Their functional aspects have been studied by several scholars.” The scope of these studies encompasses not only the primary function of

euphemisms (mitigation and neutralization) but also their additional functions, which in certain contexts may even dominate the mitigating function.

A.M. Katsev, from a functional perspective, classifies euphemisms into three types: obsolete euphemisms, genuine euphemisms, and genuine euphemisms with stylistic effect [Katsev, 1988].

Discussion and results.

1. Obsolete euphemisms

The term is usually applied in relation to metonymy and metaphor. A conventionalized or lexicalized metaphor/metonymy is perceived as a familiar phenomenon, where the transferred meanings are barely noticeable (*er – husband*). By contrast, genuine or stylistic metaphor/metonymy is distinguished by special expressiveness and imagery (*consumption – tuberculosis*).

Obsolete euphemisms are used as habitual expressions and are widely employed within a speech community. Due to their repetitive use in similar contexts, recipients cease to perceive their mitigating nature as their primary characteristic; instead, their nominative function comes to the forefront. In other words, obsolete euphemisms are understood as natural, traditional, nominative devices most suitable for the context.

Among the range of obsolete euphemisms shaped by linguistic tradition are those replacing names associated with demons, death, crimes, diseases, sins, body parts, and others.

2. Genuine Euphemisms

The author uses euphemisms not only because they are commonly employed by individuals or members of social groups, but also with the aim of softening speech through the process of thinking (e.g., *he fought* → *he argued* or *he disputed*). Such euphemisms are based on the speaker's emotional state and logical reasoning. These units contribute more to modeling assumptions, conclusions, and attitudes toward the accepted text within the discourse, while also expressing the author's pragmatic stance.

3. Genuine Euphemisms with Stylistic Effect

Euphemia is often conveyed in the form of irony or humor. Consider the following example: *Today, the "saints" also came to class*. The word "saints", placed in quotation marks, actually denotes *truants* (students who skip classes).

The main functions of euphemisms that become active in the process of speech are defined as follows:

- exerting influence through abstraction;
- expression of political correctness (cautious precision);
- creating a comic effect, humorous function;
- expression of evaluative action;
- formation of a specific speech image;
- replacing a word or phrase with another softer, neutral, or abstract meaning.

In the 20th century, the term "*political correctness*" was borrowed from English. Although its literal translation is "*siyosiy to'g'rilik*" (*political correctness*), the concept of "*politic*" here does not refer to politics, but rather conveys the meanings of *cautious, polite, thoughtful, considerate, tactful, shrewd*. In fact, "*political correctness*" should be understood as "*communicative correctness*" or "*linguistic politeness*."

Euphemism is regarded as a speech act. In support of this interpretation, euphemisms are characterized as follows:

- a linguistic factor aimed at speech communication;

a speech device whose semantics consists of the relationship between the speaker, the sign, and meaning;

a means used to perform a particular act – softening speech;

metonymically, a unit of speech act and interpreted as such;

a word or expression used to convey an indirect, hidden meaning.

When analyzed as a speech act, particularly from the aspect of linguistic pragmatics, euphemism can be described from several perspectives: semiotically (as what is “*implied*”), semantically (as what is “*explained*”), and pragmatically (as what is “*expressed*”). A number of scholars emphasize the need to study euphemism based on a *synthetic approach to language* [Arutyunova, Paducheva 1985: 4; Kovshova 2007: 46].

N.N. Fayziyeva, based on English and Uzbek materials, examined the pragmatic-communicative features of euphemisms and concluded that their emergence is related to taboo, politeness, creating convenience for all participants in the process of speech activity, political management, and the concealment of negative content in communication [Fayziyeva, 2023: 126]. From this it follows that the essence of euphemism is determined not only by the social and linguistic features of a language but also by pragmatic and discursive aspects [Casas Gómez, 1986: 35–36]. Thus, in a comprehensive study of euphemism, it is necessary to consider its place in the communicative situation, its communicative purposes, and discursive features.

It is important to emphasize that there are several other perspectives in analyzing this phenomenon:

There are no restrictions on the use of euphemisms; they can be actively used in texts belonging to any functional style.

The difference between linguistic euphemisms (in language) and speech euphemisms (in discourse/context) lies in the varying properties of language and speech. Speech euphemisms exist in discourse and arise regularly, while linguistic euphemisms have passed the test of time, are recorded in dictionaries, and their number is limited [Potapova, 2008: 10].

In addition to their main function – mitigating and neutralizing negative or unpleasant meanings – euphemisms also possess a number of defining characteristics:

Firstly, a euphemism denotes an object or phenomenon with a negative evaluation or meaning [Senichkina, 2012: 15]. This negative evaluation is subjective and may only reflect the speaker’s viewpoint. It is connected to the speaker’s desire to avoid direct naming in a particular speech situation.

Secondly, the semantic ambiguity of euphemisms allows for a reduction in the degree of negative evaluation and softening. The substituted word undergoes semantic reduction compared to the original. Thus, compared to direct naming, euphemisms carry less information and fewer distinguishing features.

Thirdly, a euphemism highlights the positive aspects of the object or phenomenon relative to the replaced word or phrase.

Fourthly, emphasizing the positive aspects of an object is considered a formal characteristic of euphemisms. The addressee understands which topic the speaker refers to precisely due to this characteristic [Senichkina, 2012: 15].

Conclusion.

In conclusion, euphemism is a multifaceted concept that serves as a basis for the systematization of euphemistic words and expressions as well as for various models of classification. Euphemisms are active units of language, used for different purposes, including



contributing to the integrity of the text. Studying their pragmatic and discursive functions remains one of the most relevant issues of modern linguistics. In short, euphemism, through the effective use of a language's rich resources, has contributed to the elevation of speech culture.

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