

# THE ROLE OF EUPHEMISMS IN DIPLOMATIC DISCOURSE IN COVERING ARMED CONFLICTS (BASED ON ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGE MATERIAL)

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## Abstract

Diplomatic discourse represents an institutional type of communication which is characterized by a high degree of formality, neutrality, and adherence to protocol norms. One of its key linguistic tools is euphemization. The research materials consisted of official statements by state officials, documents of diplomatic agencies, and international organizations. The study employed methods of comparative, semantic, contextual, and discourse analysis.

The results of the research show that diplomatic euphemisms perform not only the function of moderating an utterance but also serve as an effective tool of political communication, both influencing the interpretation of international events and the formation of public opinion. A comparative analysis based on two different languages revealed both universal models of euphemization, which is determined by the norms of diplomatic communication, and nationally and culturally specific features of their functioning in English and Russian.

## Introduction

In the context of contemporary international conflicts, the language of diplomacy acquires special significance as an instrument for regulating international relations, shaping public opinion, and preventing the escalation of political tension. One of the most characteristic linguistic tools of diplomatic discourse is euphemisms, making it possible to soften the negative evaluation of events, avoid direct nominations, and ensure flexibility in terms of communication, when discussing issues related to armed conflicts, policy of sanctions, humanitarian crises, and international security.

Euphemization represents a universal linguistic mechanism based on replacing a direct or socially undesirable designation<sup>i</sup> with a more neutral or indirect expression. As Stephen Ullmann noted, euphemisms arise from the desire to avoid expressions, which are capable to provoke negative emotions, offending the interlocutor<sup>ii</sup>, or violating existing cultural taboos. Developing this concept further, Kate Burridge and Keith Allan regard euphemization as a universal strategy for communication, that allows to soften and adapt the content of an utterance to the social expectations or norms of the recipient.

From the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson link euphemization to the mechanisms of conceptual metaphor, through which people recognize complex and socially sensitive phenomena. Within the pragmatic approach, Penelope Brown, Stephen C. Levinson, and Geoffrey Leech emphasize that the use of euphemisms contributes to the realization of the politeness principle and assists prevent communicative conflicts.

Euphemization acquires particular significance in political and diplomatic discourse: Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk consider it as a means of ideological influence and public opinion shaping.

## Characteristics of diplomatic discourse

Diplomatic discourse represents an institutional type of communication, which is oriented toward maintaining international relations and adhering to protocol norms. Its specific feature is the usage of terminologically precise yet simultaneously neutral formulations, which make it possible to discuss controversial issues without direct confrontation. In this regard, euphemisms become an important instrument of diplomatic communication.

The role of euphemisms is especially noticeable in the coverage of issues of war and armed conflict. Official statements by states and international organizations widely use expressions such as military operation, security measures, collateral damage, kinetic action, neutralization of targets, while Russian diplomatic discourse uses военная операция (military operation), меры безопасности (security measures), сопутствующий ущерб (collateral damage), эскалация (escalation), вооружённый конфликт (armed conflict). These units replace direct nominations related to war, human death, destruction, and the use of force, forming a more neutral perception of events.

The relevance of the study is determined by the growing role of diplomatic discourse in the global information space, where official statements by state leaders and international organizations instantly become the subject of public discussion. Analysis of the mechanisms of euphemization makes it possible to identify the ways in which political reality is linguistically constructed (is constructed within linguistic discourse) and to determine how the choice of linguistic influences the interpretation of armed conflicts. Moreover, despite the considerable number of studies devoted to euphemisms in general, the problem of their functioning in contemporary diplomatic discourse based on English and Russian language material remains insufficiently studied (vice versa). Particular focus is demanded for a comparative analysis of the practical and communicative functions of euphemisms in texts, devoted to international conflicts.

The aim of this article is to study the role of euphemisms in modern diplomatic discourse based on English and Russian language material, as well as to identify their semantic, pragmatic, and communicative functions in the representation (demonstration, illustration) of armed conflicts. To achieve this goal, the article is intended to analyze the most widespread euphemistic models used in official diplomatic statements and to determine their role in the implementation of political communication strategies.

## Analysis of Euphemistic means in English and Russian diplomatic discourse

In the course of the study, a comparative analysis was conducted of euphemistic units extracted from official statements by ministries of foreign affairs, documents of the UN, NATO, the EU, along with texts of resolutions and communiqués<sup>iii</sup>. The material covers the period from 2014 to 2026, which made it possible to trace the dynamics of euphemization in the context of major armed conflicts.

## Main Body

|                       |           |                 |               |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>Classification</b> | <b>by</b> | <b>Semantic</b> | <b>Groups</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|

All the euphemisms identified can be divided into several thematic groups, each of which performs a specific pragmatic task.

## 1. Designation of the armed confrontation itself.

In English discourse, nominations such as conflict, crisis, operation, campaign, mission, police action, peace enforcement predominate.

In Russian – вооружённый конфликт (armed conflict), специальная военная операция (СВО) (special military operation, SVO), контртеррористическая операция (counter-terrorist operation), миротворческая операция (peacekeeping operation), наведение конституционного порядка (restoration of constitutional order), урегулирование кризиса (crisis settlement).

Here a clear tendency toward the de-actualization of the word "war" (война) and its sprouts (outgrowth, derivatives) can be observed. Thus, in NATO statements, military operations were designated as Operation Unified Protector or Operation Inherent Resolve, which shifts the focus from the aggressive nature of the action to its organizational and technical aspects.

## 2. Designation of military actions and the use of force English euphemisms:

kinetic action (instead of "attack"), air support (instead of "bombing"), collateral damage (instead of "death of civilians"), neutralization (instead of "killing"), deconfliction (instead of "coordination of strikes"), stabilization (instead of "occupation").

Russian equivalents: точечные удары (precision strikes), авиационная поддержка (air support), сопутствующий ущерб (collateral damage), нейтрализация целей (neutralization of targets), зачистка территории (clearing of territory), стабилизация обстановки (stabilization of the situation), активные фазы операции (active phases of the operation).

It is notable that both languages actively employ medical and technological metaphors, such as: surgical strike – хирургический удар (surgical strike), clean sweep – чистка (cleansing). This tendency is cognate in both languages, because these neutral analogues are referring to general context, depriving these metaphors emotional weight and generalizing the particular situation.

## 3. Designation of consequences – casualties and destruction.

In this group, euphemisms are aimed at depersonalizing suffering. English examples: casualties (instead of "killed and wounded"), collateral damage (instead of "death of civilians"), humanitarian consequences (instead of "humanitarian catastrophe"), friendly fire (instead of "shelling of one's own troops").

Russian discourse uses similar models: потери (losses, instead of "the dead"), санитарные потери (sanitary losses), непреднамеренные потери (unintentional losses), сопутствующие жертвы (collateral victims), as well as bureaucratized codes such as груз 200, груз 300 ("cargo 200," "cargo 300" – unofficial but penetrating into public speech). However, official documents are dominated by the abstract terms ущерб (damage), разрушения (destruction), гуманитарная ситуация (humanitarian situation).

## 4. Designation of parties to the conflict and participants English euphemisms:

forces, personnel, troops instead of "soldiers"; ally, partner, coalition forces instead of "allies"; opponents, militants, insurgents instead of "enemies" or "rebels."

Russian: личный состав (personnel), кадры (cadres), военнослужащие (servicemen), миротворцы (peacekeepers), союзники (allies), партнёры (partners); for the opposing side – боевики (militants), незаконные вооружённые формирования (illegal armed formations), экстремисты (extremists), террористы (terrorists) – the latter are clear dysphemisms, but in the diplomatic context they also perform a euphemistic function, substituting for the direct names of opposing states.

## 5. Political and legal euphemisms.



These include designations of territorial changes. In English: reunification (instead "annexation"), incorporation – вхождение (instead of "expansion" or "invasion"). Also included here are euphemisms relating to regimes and political processes: regime change (instead of "government changing") democratization, transition period (instead of "social and economic changes").

In Russian: воссоединение (instead "annexation"), вхождение, включение (instead of "expansion" or "invasion"), смена режима (instead of "government changing", "change of power") демократизация (instead of "imposition new regime or ideology") переходный период (instead of "social and economic changes").

### **6. Medical and technical euphemisms.**

In English: surgical strike ("used for creating the image of a precise, controlled impact") collateral damage, ("used for concealment specific figures about number of destroyed constructions, equipment or people") neutralize (instead of "killing"). In Russian: точечный удар, ("used for creating the image of a precise, controlled impact") сопутствующий ущерб, ("used for concealment specific figures about number of destroyed constructions, equipment or people"), нейтрализовать (instead of "killing"). These euphemisms based on the lesser evil principle: replacing "attack" with "retaliatory measures", "invasion" with "entry" or "incursion." These mechanisms function in both languages, which testifies to the universality of the institutional requirements of diplomatic protocol.

### **National and Cultural Features**

Despite this commonality of euphemisms models in both languages, significant differences were also identified.

1. Degree of ideologization. In Russian diplomatic discourse, euphemisms often carry a strong evaluative connotation that legitimizes state actions through appealing to historical patriotic narratives and concepts. For example, воссоединение (reunification) activates the concept of restoring justice, while защита соотечественников (protection of compatriots) activates humanitarian discourse. In English discourse, the pragmatic vocabulary of international law predominates (self-defense, humanitarian intervention, responsibility to protect), which also include euphemization, but through appealing to universally recognized norms or concepts.
2. Attitude toward victims. In English-language documents, passive constructions (were killed, have been displaced) are more frequently used, which softens responsibility. Russian texts also use passive constructions, but there is a noticeable tendency toward the personification of military losses through codes (двухсотые, трёхсотые — "two-hundreds," "three-hundreds"), which, however, belongs more to internal corporate speech than to official statements.
3. Cultural taboos. In the Russian language there exists a stricter taboo on directly naming war in certain contexts, which leads to the emergence of occasional euphemisms such as известная операция (the well-known operation), хорошо известные события (the well-known events). In the English language the taboo is not as categorical, but the lexeme war is also actively avoided in official documents.

### **Functions of Euphemisms in Diplomatic Discourse**

The analysis conducted makes it possible to identify the following main functions of euphemisms in the material studied:

Contact-establishing – helps maintain diplomatic communication without escalation, preserving space for compromise and negotiation.

Protective – softening traumatic information for the population both of one's own country and of the international audience.

Regulatory – observance of the norms of diplomatic etiquette and international law, avoidance of accusations of aggression.

### **Conclusion**

The study conducted allows us to conclude that euphemisms are an integral element of contemporary diplomatic discourse, performing a complex pragmatic and ideological function. Based on English and Russian language stuff, it has been established that euphemization serves not only as a means of mitigating rhetoric of conflict, but also as a powerful instrument for constructing political reality through linguistic, influencing the interpretation of events at both the national and international levels.

The comparative analysis revealed both universal strategies (nominalization, metaphorization, bureaucratization) and nationally and culturally specific differences. English discourse is dominated by legal and technical terminology appealing to the norms of international law, whereas Russian discourse shows a more pronounced ideological and historical-patriotic coloring of euphemisms, as well as active usage of abbreviations and formal clichés.

Euphemisms gain particular significance in the context of covering armed conflicts, where they make possible to substitute direct nominations of war, violence, and death with neutral or even positively connotated expressions. This not only facilitates diplomatic communication but also contributes to the managing public perception, which makes the study of euphemistic mechanisms relevant to political linguistics, discourse analysis, and the theory of international relations.

Prospects for further research are connected with expanding the empirical base through the analysis of non-verbal components of diplomatic communication, as well as through the study of the dynamics of euphemization under conditions of hybrid warfare and information confrontation. It also seems worthwhile to consider the reverse process, that is dysphemization, which in diplomatic discourse often accompanies euphemization, especially in rhetoric, which is aimed to condemn the actions of an opponent. Overall, the study of euphemisms in diplomatic discourse opens broad opportunities for understanding how language participates in shaping the peace and conflicts of the contemporary world.

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<sup>i</sup> The designations which are carrying the negative connotation and commonly accepted as undesirable for application.

<sup>ii</sup> The companion, collocutor.

<sup>iii</sup> An official announcement or statement, typically issued by a government, international organization, or diplomatic mission to inform the public and the press.

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