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War Euphemisms in the Military Discourse

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Abstract

This research paper revolves around the use of euphemisms for the description of war representations in the military discourse, which are intended to mitigate the harsh and violent effects of direct statements in this respect. Besides, politicians and secretaries of 'war' and defense usually avoid direct expressions lest they should be accused of being terrorists, for the dishonesty of expressions points to the dishonesty of the speaker concerned. Hence, they usually resort to euphemisms concerning offensive and dishonest expressions in an attempt to pretend that they are honest politicians and militants having the right to attack and offend at the time they appear to be what they are not.

What prompts the production of this paper is the fact that the Middle East has been suffering from wars on many and various levels, which requires the offenders to use euphemisms describing war news so as to appear innocent people and cautious helpers for the warred countries that have been smitten by them.

This paper hypothesizes that the more wars are launched against helpless nations and countries, the more new euphemisms figure out in the dictionary of euphemisms; and the more dishonest and offensive politicians and militants are, the more euphemisms are used and devised.

المستخلص

يدور البحث حول استخدام العبارات التلطيفية لوصف المعطيات الحربية في الخطاب العسكري، والتي تهدف إلى تخفيف التأثيرات الحادة والعنيفة التي تسببها التصريحات المباشرة في هذا المجال، وإلى جانب ذلك نبين بان السياسيين ووزراء (الحرب) والدفاع عادة ما يتجنبون العبارة المباشرة كيما لا يتم اتهامهم بالأرهاب وذلك لأن العبارات غير اللائقة تدل على عدم كياسة المتكلم، ولذلك نراهم عادة ما يلجأون إلى العبارات التلطيفية فيما يخص التعابير الخادشة وغير اللائقة في محاولة منهم بالتظاهر على انهم سياسيين وعسكريين نزيهين ومحتشمين لهم حق الهجوم والاصطدام والانتهاك في الوقت الذي يظهرون فيه خلافا لذلك.

ومما دفع الباحث إلى إخراج هذا البحث هو الحقيقة التي تشير إلى ان الشرق الاوسط قد عانى ويعاني من ويلات الحروب على مختلف الأصعدة مما يتطلب من المعتدين استخدام الكلام التلطيفي لوصف اخبار الحروب ليظهروا بمظهر الإناس الأبرياء والمساعدين بعناية واهتمام للبلدان التي يقع عليها العدوان من قبلهم. يفترض هذا البحث بانه كلما ازداد شن الحروب ضد الشعوب والدول الضعيفة كلما ازداد ظهور لطف الكلام في قاموس العبارات التلطيفية، وكلما كان السياسيين والعسكريين أكثر صداما وكذبا كلما ازداد استخدام وأستنباط العبارات التلطيفية.



Preaching Epilogue مقدمة واعظة

وَهَدُّوْا إِلَى الطَّيِّبِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَهَدُّوْا إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْحَمِيدِ

They were guided to purity of speech. They were guided to the path of the Most Praised.

القرآن الكريم: سورة الحج، الآية: 24

وعن أبي هريرة أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: "والكلمة الطيبة صدقة" ((متفق عليه)) وهو بعض حديث تقدم بطوله.

Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

) said, "It is also charity to utter a good word." The Prophet (ﷺ)

[Al- Bukhari and Muslim].

٣ ٤ اذْهَبَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى

43 Go to Pharaoh. He has tyrannized.

٤ ٤ فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لِّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى

44 But speak to him nicely. Perhaps he will remember, or have some fear."

القرآن الكريم: سورة طه، الآيتين: 43 و 44

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًا إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ وَالَّذِينَ يَمْكُرُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَكْرُ أُولَئِكَ هُوَ يَبُورُ.

Whoever desires honor-all honor belongs to God. To Him ascends speech that is pure, and He elevates righteous conduct. As for those who plot evil, a terrible punishment awaits them, and the planning of these will fail.

القرآن الكريم: سورة فاطر، الآية: 10

War Euphemisms in the Military Discourse

Introduction

Euphemisms are part and parcel of any language, for not every idea must be verbally yet conspicuously expressed; there are those words and expressions that may in one way or another socially and psychologically offend the hearer, especially those ideas directly related to death and war. The human ear is incapable of accepting harsh, unpleasant and offensive expressions when they are frankly said, which can be softened by euphemisms able to dismiss social disapprobation. As to war euphemisms, they are intentionally employed to obscure and hide the truth. Such euphemisms are driving at mitigating violence and distorting reality for one reason or another—now as psychological mitigation, now as a stratagem against the enemy, now as disclaiming something dangerous. It is generally accepted that there are military euphemisms used in newspapers whatsoever.



Key Words

Euphemism: is an expression devised to mitigate offenses, to make the unpleasant look pleasant, to make the criminal look innocent, to make the offender look offended, to make lies look truthful; in a word, a euphemism expresses a meaning that is not what it is: it is the opposite of what really it is. Euphemisms are intended to obliterate the truth. Obliteration of the truth is needed by the media in certain social and economic, political and military situations, which should impair concrete truths for the public, so that the latter will be less shocked when they are directly expressed.

Geoffrey Leech's maxims of politeness: they are those principles taken into account in conversations, so that the latter look very polite. They are the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Hence, the euphemisms referred to in this research paper can be measured against these criteria.

War euphemisms: expressions employed to soften the harsh effects of hearing news concerning destruction and killing on all levels, which have been caused by war.

It is generally accepted that euphemisms have long been existent in language, which when becoming very familiar may then turn to be dysphemisms and require the speaker to resort to more mitigating expressions. For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s, the term "disabled" was used to refer to handicapped people, but nowadays the latter are referred to as people with special needs to soften the effect of the term "disabled," which is no longer used. Hence, euphemisms are prone to change and can be replaced with other ones according to what society considers to be eligible in this regard.

Usually, military communiqués are euphemism-bound because bitter facts and news sound harsh and offensive to people when they are frankly and openly expressed. Military leaders resort to the use euphemistic expressions for their harsh and bitter attacks that may have been unjustly made so as to achieve politeness and be mild in the eye of the public. They wrap their wild behavior by a mild cloak. Besides, political and military media use euphemisms for other purposes in order to satisfy their needs. For instance, the expression "9/11 event" is a euphemistic expression to impair the tremendous amount of destruction to the American public and at the same time to dismiss any accusation of shame that the most powerful country in the world has been severely and ferociously beaten. Therefore, the malevolent, barbarous and harmful effects have turned into a mere date and a mere event, simply the "9/11 event," so as to avoid any sense of shame in this matter. For bitter words attach bitter attitudes towards the speaker who will then be accused of dishonesty. Due to the use of euphemisms, many and various war crimes adopted by the US military attacks in the Middle East and Africa have been mitigated to the extent that the public become insensible to them, for they have been intended "to take the sting out of America's wars back home" (William J. Astore 2016).

Particular specimens are taken from the military discourse to be analyzed in terms of euphemism. Military spokesmen tend to use euphemistic expressions inasmuch as they do not want to offend the feelings and emotions of the public. They mitigate the harshness of their attacks, especially when they are transgressors so as to appear of a high level of honesty and innocence. Hence, they are very careful in choosing the euphemistic expressions in order to serve their purposes, which can by one way or another be approbated by the hearers. Besides, the extent to which an expression is euphemistic reflects the personality of the military spokesman, a secretary of defense or a president having the post of a general military leader:



At the time when US military troops started their ongoing military offensive in Mosul on the 21st of February 2009, the US Ministry of Defence called this invasion Operation New Hope. Other US military actions that had been carried out in the name of the War on Terror were labelled with such illustrious names like Operation Iraqi Liberation, Operation Spring Cleanup, Operation Justice League, Operation Spring Break, Operation New Dawn or Operation Desert Storm. These examples are illustrating vividly how integral euphemisms still are to modern warfare. Modern wars are prosecuted by means of surges, operations, and tactical strikes. (Taugerbeck, 2013, p. 8)

The choice of the euphemistic expression is indicative of the kind of meaning the speaker wants to express, and this is shown, for instance, in Barak Obama's expressions concerning the war against the Islamic State (ISIS), for instance. Euphemisms then can be considered a parameter for one's refinement of personality and purpose as well. During the US campaign against (ISIS) troops in Iraq and Syria, Obama presents a public speech in which he describes the air attacks against them as an effort of mere air strikes and the spread of his military advisers in Iraq; hence, the president and his advisers have wittingly and purposefully avoided the use of the word "war" in their speeches that is representative of the US measures against their enemies. Hence, he has denounced the condition of being prepared to undertake and maintain war and has not approved his administration's recommendation to expand any US military actions overseas.

During World War II, the US military bombed Nagasaki and Hiroshima with that damned atomic bomb which killed more than one hundred thousand innocent people and completely destroyed the two cities. In political and military media, that kind of weapon has been simply described as a thing or a gadget thrown on the two cities, so that the effect of the attack and its aftermaths have been obliterated and made obscure. The US appears to be making a simple action, and therefore the entire destruction has been impaired by the use of a euphemistic expression. Therefore euphemisms are frequently used in many languages so as to avert terms and phrases that look troublesome for their unpleasant and embarrassing effects. Furthermore, the expression "Collateral Damages" is usually used to describe the kind of damages that have caused hundred deaths, destruction of complete villages and a great part of a city and hundreds of injured victims at the time that the term "collateral" means ancillary, subordinate or subsidiary, but as a matter of fact the size of destruction is very huge. This is one way of hiding the truth about a dangerous attack.

On the other hand, Obama uses the term "effort" instead of war when trying to fight (ISIS) that implies deaths, injuries and destruction. He says that the US is preparing a campaign against (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria which he describes as being an effort including air strikes. He adds that he is going to send military advisers to Iraq. Hence, the term "war" has never been uttered in this respect. He uses the term only when he states that he is not going to "get dragged into another ground war in Iraq," in order to disparage the idea of war.

It can be suggested that the speech style can be regarded as a measure of one's personality and attitudes toward things and people. It can be said that what one says is what one is. Socrates tells somebody: "speak so that I may see you." Usually, people used to avoid dysphemism, so that they would not be aggressive when saying something, which of course can be interpreted according to the shared information between the speaker and the recipient.

The main domain of this study is limited to the analysis of social and political euphemistic expressions. Almost all educated people, especially politicians who are in direct contact with



the public—locally and globally—endeavor to avoid tabooed expressions lest they should be accused of impoliteness. As to euphemisms, they are words of comfort, which mitigate tension while conversing. They soften the harsh and soothe the tough.

Euphemistic expressions are diplomatic whose magic transfers the negative into positive. In a word, they eliminate dysphemism which is considered insulting. Words should be carefully chosen by speakers and writers, otherwise they will be criticized, especially when indulging in conversations related to racism, fanaticism, death, intimate relations and other crucial and critical matters. Libelous words should be avoided, especially those related to the unmentionables and taboos, which definitely seem to be aggressive. In consequence, there are certain criteria—maybe, metaphorical, symbolical, and rhetorical—to govern the choice of expressions. Words are not chosen haphazardly. To mitigate the offense of certain tabooed words, synonyms and ambiguous expressions, or even dots in a written context or pauses in a spoken dialogue cannot be exempted in this respect, for their exact meanings can be discerned from the context in which they occur.

The importance of this subject matter is found in the fact that it illustrates the mechanism used by politicians to formulate euphemisms. However, euphemisms of one culture may or may not be applicable to another. Here is the problem that obliges the respective researchers to deal with this subject matter. The euphemisms and dysphemisms are very significant to the learners of a language, so that they can attain a better understanding. The frequent occurrence of euphemisms in a language is a phenomenon and therefore it “requires a scholarly research and attention.” (Kasparas Varzinskas, 2013: p.4), for the avoidance of dysphemisms by speakers, be whatever they may, should be the aim of any user of language in any media. Hence, awareness of the euphemisms of a language is conducive to sound communications.

In times of war, governments used to mitigate their political statements to appear mild and less offensive. For instance, they wrap their bestiality with an innocent mask as is the case with the political and military communiqués concerning the war launched by America and its allies against Afghanistan and Iraq. They portrayed to the world the notion that they were going to create a better state for nations by means of warring them.

Aggressive attacks and holocausts have been folded by white clothes of innocence, which were the cause for millions of demises, destruction of houses, widows and orphans, not to mention the destruction of the infrastructure and the subsequent calamities and bad psychological states on the part of the innocent nation and the miserable state of Iraq at the present time—the result is millions of thieves, financial deficit, corruption on all levels, disputed sectarians and the like. I myself heard President W. B. Bush the junior on radio masking all these catastrophes by saying that he was going to build up “the modern Iraqi country.” Eighteen years passed and Iraq is a waste land still despite the fact that it is productive of many rich resources, whose fortunes were, are and will be stolen still. There is not even a weak light at the end of the tunnel. He destroyed Iraq in the name of democracy to cheat the public opinion. Hence, the unpleasantness of fraud is masked by the pleasantness of democracy. After 2003, more catastrophes had afflicted the Iraqi nation. Is this “the creation of modern Iraqi country, President Bush the son? Is this the meaning of democracy, President Bush the son?

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