

Euphemism in Social and Political Discourse

By

Prof. Dr. AbdulSattar Awad Ibrahim

Department of English

Al-Turath University College

Abstract

Communication whose main means is language may consist of impolite, harsh, or even offensive expressions unwanted on the part of the listener, the reader, or even the speaker. People in general try as far as possible to avoid them by using mild expressions in an attempt to give a sense of politeness or mitigate the effect of direct yet unwelcome messages. Hence, there appears the exigency of using euphemism highly approved by humans, especially when expressing social and political representations. People approbate the use of certain expressions in order to give the sense of pleasantness and avoid the sense of unpleasantness when speaking or writing. Hence, euphemistic expressions are used to replace the inappropriate ones. For instance, the expression "special needs" is used to refer to people physically or mentally "disabled." Therefore, the purpose of euphemism is to replace an unpleasant expression with a pleasant one. More examples show that the expression "passed away" is used instead of "died" and "redaction" instead of "censorship." The ultimate respective declaration is Allah's decision to approve euphemistic expressions even when addressed to his enemies when exigencies dictate as set in The Holy Qur'an and shown on the Preaching Page of this research paper. The euphemistic expressions set in this research paper are measured against Geoffrey Leech's maxims of politeness, which are similar to Robert Paul Grice's cooperative principle.

المستخلص

قد يتضمن التواصل الذي وسيلته الرئيسة اللغة عبارات غير مهذبة وخشنة وحتى عدوانية أو قبيحة المعنى فيما يخص المستمع والقاريء للحديث أو الكاتب والمتكلم. عموماً، يحاول الناس قدر الامكان تجنبها باستخدام عبارات لطيفة في محاولة منهم لاطفاء الشعور بالكياسة والتعذيب أو لتخفيف تأثير الكلام المباشر من غير المرجح به. لذا برزت الضرورة لاستخدام العبارات التلطيفية التي تلقى استحسان الناس، سيما عند التعبير عن المعطيات الاجتماعية والسياسية. يستحسن الناس استخدام عبارات محددة كيما يعطوا شعوراً بالتعذيب والكياسة باستخدامهم العبارات المسرة تجنباً للعبارات غير المسرة أثناء الكلام أو الكتابة. لذا تستخدم العبارات التلطيفية لتحل محل العبارات غير اللائقة، فعلى سبيل المثال فقد استخدمت عبارة "الاحتياجات الخاصة" للإشارة إلى الإنسان المعوقين فكرياً وجسدياً. يستنتج من ذلك أن الغرض من استخدام لطف التعبير هو إحلال العبارة اللطيفة محل العبارة القاسية. هناك أمثلة أخرى تبين استخدام عبارة "رحل"

بدلاً من "مات" واستخدام عبارة "تنقيح" بدلاً من "مراقبة" فيما يخص المطبوعات. أن القول الفصل في هذا المجال هو الله سبحانه وتعالى لاستحسانه العبارات التلطيفية أو الطيب من القول حتى مع الإعداء عندما تستدعي الضرورة وكما جاء في القرآن الكريم وكما هو موضح في المقدمة الواعظة في مستهل هذا البحث. لقد قيست العبارات التلطيفية في هذا البحث وفق مبادئ الآداب الموضوعية من قبل العالم اللغوي جيفري ليج والتي تتشابه مع المبادئ الموضوعية من قبل العالم اللغوي روبرت بول كرايس فيما يخص مبدأ التعاون.

Preaching Epilogue

مقدمة واعظة

وَهَدُوا إِلَى الطَّيِّبِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَهَدُوا إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْخَيْرِ

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 (

[Al- Bukhari and Muslim].

٣٠ اذْهَبَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ

43 Go to Pharaoh. He has tyrannized.

٤٤ قُلْ لَّهٗ قَوْلًا لِّئَلَّا تُفَكَّرَ وَلَا تَنُكَّرَ وَلَا يَنُكَّرَ وَلَا يَنُكَّرَ

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

القرآن الكريم: سورة طه، الآية ٢٠ و ٤٤

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

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 :

Introduction

Selected samples taken from political discourse are analyzed in terms of euphemism. Humans find it necessary to resort to this kind of expression due to the fact that they do not want their expressions hurt or anguish the emotions of people and they thusly use polite and refined expressions. Speakers are very cautious when using expressions, so that what they say or write is approved and accepted by the hearer. Hence, the speech style can be regarded as a measure of one's personality and attitudes towards 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 whose exact meanings can be discerned from the context in which they occur.

The importance of this subject matter lies 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 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." Seventeen 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?

Definitions of Significant Terms:

i) **Euphemism**: a word or expression used in place of another to avoid offensive, indecent or condemnation, and the like (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*). The etymology of the word euphemism indicates that it is originated in Greek and having two parts—"eu," which means "good" and "phem" which means speaking (*online Etymology Dictionary*, 2012). ii) **Unmentionables**: those are expressions too offensive, shocking, or embarrassing to talk about or mention. iii) **Taboo**: not accepted to talk about or do. iv) **Metaphor**: a word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar. v) **Symbol**: a letter, group of letters, character, or picture that is used instead of a word or group of words. vi) **Synonym**: a word that has the same meaning as another word in the same language. vii) **Prevarication**: avoiding telling the truth by not directly answering the question. viii) **Equivocation**: to use unclear language especially to deceive or mislead someone (the definitions of the aforementioned terms are based on *Merriam Webster Dictionary*).

Euphemisms point to the mental search for mild words to give a sense of politeness. They are modified words whose effect is approbated. It protects the speaker from being accused of audacity and insolence. Euphemisms may act as a moral justification for a crime. For instance, the twentieth century massacre committed by the Cambodian regime when killing two million people being considered "enemies of the people" was modified by the expression genocide lest the regime should be accused of dictatorship and criminality. One synonym for this massacre is "ethnic cleansing" which is a euphemistic expression distancing the real meaning of a mass killing and the deliberate killing of a people or nation on a wide scale. Hence, this is an example of a deceiving euphemistic expression.

Interestingly enough, euphemisms contribute to devising new vocabulary to enrich language, though essentially deceiving and misleading people who do not get the real meaning. Ambiguous euphemisms are intended to deceive the public when used by politicians whose main aim is equivocation and procrastination. Such euphemisms are used as substitutes for other expressions in the language and "displace the dominant emotional element..., offer a new interpretation of certain phenomena and carry its new moral and ethical evaluation" (Y. S. Pravdivtseva and M. A. Bulavin, 2014: 104). Moreover, due to the phenomenon of euphemisms there appear new changes in the contexts of language on many levels—social, ethical, economic and political, for instance.

Decent people are always conscious of the moral responsibility concerning their verbal actions, so that they may appear to be humane: "People do not ordinarily engage in reprehensible conduct until they have justified to themselves the morality of their actions. What is culpable can be made honorable through cognitive reconstruction. In this process, destructive conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it in the service of moral purpose" (Bandura, 1990: 3). Addressees appear to be content and calm by euphemisms; otherwise they are enraged when hearing direct dysphemisms. For instance the expression "the September 11th events" is a euphemism invented to distance shame and defeat on the part of the US, for the attacks and the tremendous casualties are a matter of abuse. Hence they are made mere events, producing good aims and intentions.

Interestingly, road signs are all regarded as euphemisms, for they indirectly refer to the dangers brought about by ignoring traffic regulations. They connote to the meanings of demises, destructions and calamities and profound sadness to be remembered by the passersby. Besides, Socrates' death is regarded as "good death" since he died from having hemlock.

In the Iraqi culture, one may say that it is a good death when one dies in a sacred month such as *Ramadan* (the sacred month of fasting for the Muslims) or on a sacred day such as *Aljum'a* (Good Friday). This kind of euphemism lessens sadness and creates a sense of content. Further, the reduction of a good number of employees may be referred to by the word "downsizing" to mitigate the sense of sadness. Hence, smooth expressions make smooth meanings. Thus, the expression "marriage bed" in a lawsuit in a court indicates the intimate relation between husband and wife. Camps for imprisoned civilians "prisons" are referred to by "filtration Camps." As to euphemisms related to using a lavatory, a community may agree upon one expression such as "I have to go to the bathroom" or "I want to wash my hands." The expression "right sizing" is used instead of "firing people."

Intimate Relations

Intimate relations, legal and illegal, are referred to by pleasant words to give them a tinge of pleasantness and to distance dirty ideas from their domain. For instance, the old man making an illegal intimate relation with a young girl whom he gives money and presents is called a "sugar daddy." This is a mask hiding unpleasantness. Besides, politicians may get bribes from their sugar daddies. Further, the intimate relation may be referred to as an "act of darkness," or "afternoon delight," or "amorous congress." The choice of the euphemisms in this respect depends on the culture of the users of a language. Moreover, ethical scandals can be masked or framed by pleasant expressions to mitigate their effects on people and to lessen the psychological state of the person concerned. Sexual crimes, for instance, may be referred to by the expression "the damned action," or "the actual act of sin," or "the sin," or "the cheap desire of the flesh"

when discussed in a court or in an organization. This indicates that human language is capable of hiding unpleasant pejorative human meanings.

Rhetoric

Rhetoric representations play a great role in the formation of euphemisms, whose meaning can be inferred from the social context in which they appear. They vary from one culture to another. This is the reason why they sometimes seem too difficult to understand. The function of rhetoric is to persuade people and motivate them to give a certain response. Shared social knowledge is one strategy among others that helps understand the intended meaning of a rhetorical element. Politicians tend to use rhetoric to persuade the public. The following rhetorical questions can be an example to illustrate this point: "Who can possibly oppose the 'Patriot Act'? And: Who can remember or understand the 'Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Political Language. www.economist.com)?" Another example of rhetoric, this time an ambiguous statement made by Dick Cheney: "I was and remain a strong opponent of our enhanced interrogation program" (Dick Cheney in Jonathan Charteris-Black, 2011: 2). He means he opposes the bad treatment of prisoners when interrogated.

A significant factor in the domain of euphemism is the use of metaphors—indirect comparisons—a clever way of hiding the truth or of mitigating the effect of some unwanted fact. For instance, the word "journey" displaces the word "death" for the sake of mitigation. Besides, the expression "death with dignity" mitigates the effect of the word "suicide," for the latter indicates a bad meaning on the part of the person who kills himself/herself that may be accused of lack of mentality or of being drug-addicted. The expression "He passed away" is used instead of "died."

A daring expression such as "collateral damage" has been used to replace huge destructions that may occur during a war. It is used to impair the sense of damages caused by air raids and other military attacks causing a great deal of demise, destruction and bloodshed. This is made in order to "distance ourselves from the horror that actually happened: the killing and wounding of non-combatants during an act of war" (Welsey J. Smith, 2013).

Rhetorical devices are used to achieve a mild impression. For instance, an example of oxymoron such as the term "euthanasia" (mercy killing or assisted suicide or painless death) is used to describe the innocence of those who kill a person or a living being suffering from irrecoverable pains and disease. The killers are modified as being merciful instead of being inimical who are thusly distanced from the scene of crime. Hence, dictionaries are enriched with new entries because of the need for euphemisms devised according to what offensive, harsh and unwelcome effects may be impaired.

Euphemisms are as inventive as rhetorical devices, which are all created by users of the language to satisfy the needs for certain meanings. Hence, the

meanings of words can by no means be regarded as being fixed and unchanging, whose euphemistic and rhetorical meanings and effects can rarely be found in dictionaries. Humans tend to create them accordingly. Verily, they are socially and emotionally developed, so that they will not offend the listeners or readers, and at the same time they give the meanings intended to be conveyed, especially when moral criteria are taken into account.

It should be indicated that politicians use the word "killing" when referring to their casualties during war, but they use a euphemistic expression to express the idea of killing such as "lethal action." Used by President Obama when referring to killing a group of Al-Qaeda soldiers (Jonathan Charteris-Black, 2011: 2). Insolent terms are replaced with euphemisms to erase the offence. "Underprivileged" and "disadvantaged" are replaced with the term "poverty." Since the term "race" is often collocated with "discrimination," it has been replaced with the mild term "ethnic." Hence "ethnic cleansing" is used for the distancing and dismissal of certain ethnic groups. The term "war" in the Western culture is horrible, and therefore the term "defense" is used instead in the expression "Ministry of Defense," for instance. The expression "heart attack" becomes a dysphemism and is thusly replaced with "cardiac arrest." Therefore, the bad appear to be good. For example, the expression "tax increase" may seem unkind and unacceptable, and it is thusly replaced with an acceptable one such as "revenue enhancement," or "money collected for social welfare."

Political Euphemism

Throughout examining the media, it has been realized that politicians always tend to use euphemisms, for smooth communication preserve ideal yet refined interrelationships, which are powerful factors in avoiding violence and wars. In this regard, we can quote the Prophet's tradition that reads as follows: "a good word is a charity." Indirectness of speech is of high eligibility in politics. This is referred to by William Shakespeare in the voice of Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain of King Claudius in *Hamlet* who advises his son, saying "Find direction by indirection out."

Mild illusions are often created by politicians to mask their aggressive aspirations in a way that they do not show complete clarity. Hence, negative truths are masked by euphemisms. Ugly, disgusting and dirty terms are made beautiful, palatable and clean respectively. Preparations for war are referred to by "challenges," prisoners are called "detainees" and a harsh investigation of prisoners forced to give confessions is called "intense interrogation." Besides, inimical attitudes are replaced with mild expressions. For instance the expression "to re-establish power" means an invasion and the expression "some sort of military involvement" is a euphemism for deaths, destructions and bloodshed.

Politicians prefer to lie to the public, so that they can persuade people and mitigate any unwanted terms, and at the same time they appear to be good yet humane politicians. George Orwell has his say in this regard in his 1946 essay

entitled "Politics and the English Language" : "political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (<http://www.goodreads.com> > work >65). Politicians usually give indirect expressions on purpose in that they may create an obscure meaning. Serious meanings and actions are masked by trivial meanings to avoid scandals and accusations. For instance, the nuclear bombs that destroyed two big Japan cities and killed more than one hundred thousand people is referred to by a minor word such as "the gadget," or "the small useful device" or "an appliance" or "the thing." From the linguistic point of view there is no discretionary relationship between the signifier and the signified. Hence, politicians, when required, replace "black" with "white," or "life" with "death." President Donald Regan calls a serious missile "peacekeeper." A serious military expenditure going to kill thousand innocent people and destroy big towns or even an entire country is called a "rescue mission." Mitigation and neutralization are made on purpose by governments to serve their purposes. In this way they distance themselves from serious accusations. The Great War launched against Iraq in 1991 was called "Operation Desert Strom" and the one launched on the same country was called "Operation Iraqi Freedom." The two wars caused the destruction of an entire country on all levels—infrastructure, millions of deaths, millions of orphans, millions of widows, and the destruction of millions of houses. Are they mere "storm" and "mere freedom." One can only think of how lies are made to deceive the public opinion by politicians greedy for the riches of Iraq. The two wars are made for the sake of stealing everything from Iraq. Those US politicians have justified their action by accusing Iraq of having "Weapons of Mass Destruction." They lied to the world at the time they themselves really have the "Weapons of Mass Destruction" which have been used to destroy Iraq.

Conclusion

Euphemisms in Social and political discourse are intended to create mild effects. They are created, to a great extent, by means of synonyms, rhetorical devices and framing. Social euphemisms show the sense of politeness on the part of the speakers who always try to avoid harsh and offensive expressions related to death, diseases and the intimate relations. On the other hand, politicians use the same means for the sake of deceiving the public intentionally to frame unpleasant things with pleasant attires and of mitigating the serious matters to make them seem smooth. Thus the main role of euphemism is concealment of unwanted facts whose direct expression causes horror, embarrassment, fear, disgust, contempt and the like. The choice of the means of expressing euphemism depends on the subject matter and the effects required. Euphemism appears to be a composite insofar as it touches almost all aspects of life—social, political, economical, military, etc. it has been proved that euphemism plays a great role in enriching language with new vocabulary inasmuch as they are created by people because they are not found in dictionaries.

Suggestions

Besides the euphemism cited on the website, there is a need to include representations of euphemism within the many and various lessons of the academic study of the English language such as the lessons of composition, translation, conversations, comprehension, etc., so that students will be aware of them and benefit from them in their works after graduation. These are helpful and "most beneficial ways of helping English language learners" (Alireza Hojati, 2012: 554).

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