

LINGUISTIC CAMOUFLAGE: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF EUPHEMISMS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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This study examines the phenomenon of linguistic camouflage through euphemisms in contemporary political communication, focusing on their role as tools for shaping public opinion and managing political discourse. The research analyses how euphemisms function as linguistic and sociocultural phenomena, particularly in political media communication. Through a comprehensive analysis of theoretical frameworks and practical applications, the study reveals that political euphemisms serve multiple functions: mitigating negative associations, smoothing conflict situations, and sometimes distorting factual information for political purposes. The investigation demonstrates that euphemisms in political discourse extend beyond traditional linguistic synonymy, operating as complex mental processes based on conceptual schemes and models of secondary knowledge interpretation. The research highlights the evolution of euphemisms from their original function as substitutes for taboo words to their current role as sophisticated tools of political communication. The findings indicate that political euphemisms are particularly prevalent in areas such as government, diplomacy, economics, war, and social issues, employing various linguistic means, including periphrasis, borrowings, and terms with deliberately ambiguous meanings. The study concludes that political euphemisms are essential tools in modern political communication, maintaining governmental image, managing public opinion, and navigating sensitive political topics domestically and internationally.

Key words: euphemisms, political communication, linguistic means, socioculturology.

Маслова Світлана. Лінгвістичне маскування: комплексний аналіз евфемізмів у сучасній політичній комунікації

У дослідженні розглянуто явище лінгвістичного маскування через евфемізми в сучасній політичній комунікації, зосереджено увагу на їхній ролі як інструментів формування громадської думки й управління політичним дискурсом. У межах дослідження аналізується функціонування евфемізмів як лінгвістичних і соціокультурних феноменів, особливо в політичній медіакомунікації. Комплексний аналіз теоретичних підходів і практичного застосування показує, що політичні евфемізми виконують кілька функцій: пом'якшення негативних асоціацій, згладжування конфліктних ситуацій, а інколи й викривлення фактичної інформації з політичною метою. Дослідження демонструє, що евфемізми в політичному дискурсі виходять за межі традиційної мовної синонімії, функціонують як складні ментальні процеси, засновані на концептуальних схемах і моделях вторинної інтерпретації знань.

У роботі підкреслюється еволюція евфемізмів від їхньої первинної функції заміщення табуованих слів до їхньої сучасної ролі як складних інструментів політичної комунікації. Результати дослідження свідчать, що політичні евфемізми особливо поширені в таких сферах, як державне управління, дипломатія, економіка, війна та соціальні питання. Вони використовують різноманітні мовні засоби, зокрема перифрази, запозичення та терміни з навмисно неоднозначними значеннями. У дослідженні робимо висновок, що політичні евфемізми є важливими інструментами сучасної політичної комунікації, оскільки допомагають підтримувати імідж влади, керувати громадською думкою і орієнтуватися в чутливих політичних питаннях як на внутрішньому, так і на міжнародному рівні.

Ключові слова: евфемізми, політична комунікація, мовні засоби, соціокультурологія.

Introduction. The study of euphemisms in political discourse represents a crucial area of linguistic research, particularly as it intersects with mass media communication and public

opinion formation. In contemporary political communication, euphemisms have evolved beyond their traditional role as simple linguistic substitutions to become sophisticated tools

for shaping public perception and managing political narratives.

Political discourse, primarily manifested through mass media, employs euphemisms as specialised means of creating expression while simultaneously serving as instruments of political power. The dual purpose of political discourse – broadcasting information and engaging audiences – relies heavily on euphemistic language to instil specific ideas and shape political thought patterns among recipients.

This research examines how euphemisms function within political communication, focusing on their implementation in media texts and their role in influencing public opinion. The study particularly emphasises the transformation of euphemisms from simple synonymic substitutions to complex political communication and consciousness management tools.

The subject of the study is the phenomenon of euphemism in contemporary political discourse, mainly focusing on its role in mass media communication and public opinion formation.

The object of the study is the linguistic and pragmatic features of euphemisms used in political communication, including their various forms, functions, and mechanisms of influence in political media texts.

The research tasks: to examine the theoretical foundations of euphemisms in political discourse by analysing existing scholarly approaches and definitions; to identify and classify the main types and functions of political euphemisms in contemporary media communication; to analyse the linguistic means and mechanisms used in the formation of political euphemisms; to evaluate the effectiveness of euphemisms as tools for political communication and public opinion management; to investigate the relationship between euphemisms and social-cultural factors in political discourse; to assess the role of euphemisms in maintaining political stability and managing international relations; to characterise specific techniques and strategies used in the implementation of euphemisms in political media texts; to examine the transformation of euphemisms from simple substitutes to complex tools of political communication.

Discussion. In the framework of traditional linguistics, euphemism has been considered, as a rule, as a special kind of synonymy. This approach is because, on the one hand, the euphe-

mism and the original nomination are in a synonymous relationship with each other, and on the other hand, the euphemism can be an ideographic or stylistic synonym of the original nomination. In other words, synonymy serves as a linguistic means of euphemisation and results in euphemistic renaming. However, that is why these two phenomena cannot be equated.

Studying the phenomenon of euphemism from the point of view of the cognitive approach allows us to look at this issue somewhat more broadly: euphemism, in this case, seems to be a broader phenomenon than intra-systemic relations between language units, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyper- hyponymy, etc. It can be seen as a mental process based on certain conceptual schemes and models of secondary interpretation of knowledge [1, p. 54].

In political discourse, which is most vividly and consistently represented by the mass media, euphemisms are implemented as a special means of creating expression. The purpose of political discourse is both broadcasting and engagement, instilling certain ideas in the addressee and shaping the political vector of thought. One of the main tasks of political communication and the media as its conductor is to regulate public opinion and manage consciousness, which implies the function of political discourse as an instrument of political power.

Euphemisms, a well-known and active tool of political discourse, become an assistant to politicians and journalists as they influence the addressee.

The problem of euphemism in political discourse is not fully understood, so political euphemism is an important and interesting subject of study. Hence, the purpose of our study and its objectives are to analyse how euphemisms are used in TV reports and newspaper texts of the political media, to assess the appropriateness of their use, and to characterise specific techniques that actualise the role of euphemism as a means of effective influence on the addressee. Euphemisms serve the spheres of human life in which social prohibitions and restrictions are imposed on discussing certain topics and problems. The main purpose of using euphemisms is to avoid communicative conflicts and interpersonal dissonances. Another purpose of euphemism is to veil reality.

Thus, in political discourse, regardless of its ideological orientation, which has the main goal

of struggle for power, various ways of influence are manifested. One is the creation of expressiveness through political euphemisms, using such techniques as veiling a certain position, deliberate concealment of the truth, and deliberate misleading. Uncertainty, expressed by multilevel linguistic means and implemented as an approximation, inaccuracy, and lack of clarity, leads to uninformative messages [2, p. 5].

Despite a fairly large number of works addressing the phenomenon of euphemism, the scientific literature lacks a unified understanding of this phenomenon. The dynamic and multidimensional nature of euphemisms is the reason for a wide variety of their lexical and grammatical forms, emotional neutrality or stylistic colouring, and variability of their euphemistic potential. These properties of euphemisms lead to the fact that the problem of defining a euphemism presents certain difficulties for researchers.

Results. The word “euphemism”, according to most researchers, is derived from the Greek *euphemismos* (*eu* – well, *phemi* – say). According to another version, the term “euphemism” was derived from the word “euphemism”, which, in turn, was invented by the English writer John Lyly. “Euphemism” as a literary device and style was first used by Lily in his two-part novel *Euphues: “The Anatomy of Wit and Euphues and His England”*. The exquisite style and syllable were named after the novel’s protagonist, *euphues* (*euphues* means “well-bred” in Greek).

Euphemisms are emotionally neutral words or expressions instead of synonymous words and expressions that seem indecent, rude or tactless to the speaker [3, p. 97].

Ukrainian scientist A. Halaychuk defined euphemisms as the “indirect nomination of objects and phenomena for which there is a certain direct nomination, but for certain reasons, its use is undesirable, indecent or prohibited in a certain society” [4, p. 108].

The linguistic meaning of euphemisms is that they can hide, disguise, and veil phenomena that have a negative assessment in the public consciousness. Euphemisms distract the recipient’s attention from an object that can cause antipathy. The ability of euphemisms to manipulate the recipient is determined by the fact that euphemisms hide the true essence of the phenomenon by creating a neutral or positive connotation, and the recipient usually does not have time to sepa-

rate euphemisms from the context and comprehend them.

The phenomenon of euphemism is closely related to the phenomenon of taboo. Every language has topics related to those spheres of human life that have been considered special, forbidden, sacred, and secret since ancient times, and therefore, when addressing them, required an allegorical expression from the interlocutor, which was carried out with the help of substitute, permitted words used instead of forbidden ones, i.e. euphemisms. All theoretical works on the history of euphemistic substitution emphasise that the main function of euphemisms is closely related to the culture of a nation, taboos – a ban on the use of certain words in society due to various factors – religious, historical, ethical, etc [5, p. 123].

Many researchers consider euphemisms in their inseparable connection with dysphemisms: dysphemisms are invectives based on the hyperbole of a negative feature; euphemisms are anti-invectives based on downplaying the degree of a negative feature or on switching the evaluative sign from negative to positive. The metaphorical essence of their opposition is defined as a “shield and sword”: to speak euphemistically means to use language as a shield against an object that causes fear, hostility, anger and contempt. Euphemism helps to improve the denotation, while dysphemism makes it worse. A euphemism refers to something that, logically, should be evaluated negatively, but the interests of the speaker make it evaluated positively, and at the same time, the requirement of the maxim of quality does not allow us to pass off black as white [6, p. 58].

Due to society’s growing interest in language as an ideological tool for influencing mass consciousness, political communication is now the object of close study by linguists.

Political discourse is characterised by a whole range of special linguistic means, linguistic strategies and tactics, and manipulative technologies, the main purpose of which is to indirectly shape public opinion. One of these manipulative tools, widely used and not always recognised by the recipient, is euphemisms, which allow politicians to disguise the negative aspects of objective reality and mitigate the audience’s negative reaction to these problems. It should be noted that scholars’ views on euphemism have been repeatedly rethought. This is primarily because

euphemisms are both linguistic and sociocultural phenomena.

Initially, the emergence of the term “euphemism” was associated with the concept of taboo and the need for lexical substitution of taboo concepts. In A.M. Katsev’s monograph, we see the following definition of the phenomenon under analysis: “euphemisms are indirect substitutes for the names of the terrible, shameful or odious, which contribute to the effect of mitigation, called into being by moral or religious motives” [7, p. 235].

Over time, the concept of euphemism has become increasingly important and is associated with many socio-cultural phenomena, including social and political ones. The term “political euphemism” refers to groups of euphemisms “used in political communication texts addressed to a mass audience to mitigate negative associations associated with certain facts, often by distorting the meaning of the fact being described”.

Following the above definitions, we can identify a number of characteristic features of political euphemism in the functional and pragmatic aspects:

1) the use of euphemisms in political communication texts is aimed at the mass audience and is one of the factors of targeted influence on public opinion;

2) the main pragmatic function of political euphemisms is related to the need to smooth out conflict situations and negative reactions on the part of the recipient;

3) the euphemisation of political discourse allows not only mitigation but also distortion of factual information, which, in this sense, borders on such a concept as disinformation.

Euphemism is an active way to create words with a new meaning, which is the softening of harsh or overly direct designations. Euphemism words are used in political discourse to hide the true meaning of harsh or expressive words, replacing them with more neutral ones. Political euphemisms are often created to be used in situations where culture requires decent vocabulary.

Political euphemisms belong to the category of euphemisms used in political communication; their functions and purposes are closely related to politics. Political euphemisms in Ukraine are widespread in government, diplomacy, economics, war, and national and social issues. Their linguistic means of expression are also rich: periphrasis, borrowings from other languages,

means with uncertain meaning, and a rather general meaning [8, p. 10].

Political euphemisms play a very important role in political communication. The role of political euphemisms is to conceal the truth, mitigate contradictions and gain support from public opinion at home and abroad. Political euphemisms, on the one hand, serve to express political views and, on the other hand, to speed up the implementation of political decisions. Studying foreign political euphemisms helps us not only to avoid mistakes in communication but also to better understand the country and the nation.

The papers in this group analyse the classification, mechanisms and principles of political euphemisms in English. It is emphasised that political euphemisms are distinguished depending on the sphere of use, i.e. they are found in texts related to political activity. Political euphemisms are classified by function. From a pragmatic point of view, these functions reflect the different goals authors intend to achieve when using political euphemisms [9, p. 223].

These functions include changing people’s emotional attitude toward something, maintaining a positive image of the government, concealing the truth, refusing a request, avoiding talking about wrong and shameful behaviour, reducing contradictions and conflicts, and avoiding sensitive topics. The mechanisms of the formation of political euphemisms are revealed using the theory of cognitive psychology and cognitive pragmatics: the generation of political euphemisms occurs as a result of achieving a balance between communicative intentions and various cognitive hypotheses. The author summarises the principles that guide the speaker in forming political euphemisms. These principles include compliance with etiquette, usefulness, and relevance [10, p. 158].

As a necessary political tool, political euphemisms occupy an important place in the political life of all countries, allowing them to present in a favourable light and embellish political activities, ensure stability in the country, seek the support of the people, and protect political interests.

In international affairs, political euphemisms can improve the image of a state to a certain extent, smooth out contradictions and conceal facts. Without political euphemisms, it is impossible to imagine a set of techniques used by the authorities to express their views on domestic and foreign affairs.

Examples of modern political euphemisms include the following: *character issue* – criticism, attack on a candidate with a question of depravity, *destabilise* – to overthrow something, *devolution* – split, *insurgent* – terrorist, *bat-handler* (to replace batboy) – soldier, *persons in transit* – refugees. Each of these euphemisms has a more pronounced synonym, so we can speak of euphemisation as a transformation, where a new form serves to express the content of the language.

Euphemisms with components active in diachrony are also of great interest. For example, the word-forming element has been used to create euphemisms related to political disputes. It is important to note that all the newly created units include a letter and a word component (*U-word* (for unemployment), *L-word* (for liberal), *R-word* (recession)) [9, p. 119].

Speaking about such phenomena as metaphorical, metonymic transfers and euphemisation, it is necessary to emphasise the transterminalisation of political neologisms, also called semantic changes.

Many political neologisms have come from other spheres, namely military, sports and journalism. For example, the military lexical item moonbat, the name of the experimental night fighter *XP-67*, has entered political discourse as a word insult describing a liberal.

In the military, low profile describes a vehicle that is harder to identify through binoculars and, therefore, easier to avoid being shot at. In the political sphere, it describes a person more likely to go unnoticed by the public.

The word slam dunk is associated with the sports sphere – a basketball technique where a player jumps up and throws the ball into the net. In politics, this word has become a neologism and means a win-win. The emergence of a new meaning in the political sphere led to using the same meaning in many other life situations.

The word *sound bite* – a text easily remembered in the news – has moved from journalism to politics. Thanks to transterminology, we have a different meaning in politics, namely an instantly recorded fragment.

The analysis reveals that political euphemisms have become indispensable tools in modern political communication, serving multiple functions beyond their traditional role as linguistic substitutes. They operate as sophisticated mechanisms for managing public perception, maintaining political stability, and navigating sensitive topics in domestic and international contexts. The research demonstrates that political euphemisms are particularly effective in areas such as government communications, diplomacy, economic discussions, and conflict situations. Their ability to mitigate negative associations while potentially distorting factual information makes them powerful instruments of political discourse, though this dual nature raises important questions about transparency in political communication. Future research might benefit from examining the ethical implications of euphemistic usage in political discourse and its long-term effects on public understanding of political issues.

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