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FEATURES OF METAPHORICAL EUPHEMIZATION IN MODERN ENGLISH

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Abstract: This article examines the features of metaphorical euphemization in modern English from semantic, cognitive, and pragmatic perspectives. Euphemization, as a linguistic strategy, serves to soften, obscure, or indirectly express socially sensitive, taboo, or negatively evaluated concepts. In contemporary English, metaphor plays a central role in the formation of euphemistic expressions, allowing speakers to reframe delicate topics through more acceptable or neutral conceptual domains. As a result, metaphorical euphemisms have become a productive and dynamic component of modern discourse.

Keywords: metaphorical euphemization, euphemism, conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, semantic shift, pragmatic function, politeness strategies, taboo language, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics.

ZAMONAVIY INGLIZ TILIDA METAFORIK EVFEMIZATSIYA XUSUSIYATLARI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada zamonaviy ingliz tilida metaforik evfemizatsiyaning xususiyatlari semantik, kognitiv va pragmatik nuqtai nazardan tahlil qilinadi. Evfemizatsiya tilning muhim strategiyalaridan biri bo'lib, ijtimoiy jihatdan nozik, taqiqlangan yoki salbiy baholanadigan tushunchalarni yumshatib, yashirin yoki bilvosita tarzda ifodalashga xizmat qiladi. Zamonaviy ingliz tilida metafora evfemistik ifodalarni shakllantirishda markaziy rol o'ynaydi, chunki u nozik mavzularni yanada maqbul yoki neytral tushunchalar orqali qayta talqin qilish imkonini beradi. Natijada, metaforik evfemizmlar zamonaviy nutqning sermahsul va dinamik tarkibiy qismiga aylangan.

Kalit so'zlar: metaforik evfemizatsiya, evfemizm, konseptual metafora, kognitiv lingvistika, semantik o'zgarish, pragmatik funktsiya, muloyimlik strategiyalari, tabu til, diskurs tahlili, sotsiologik lingvistika.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматриваются особенности метафорической эвфемизации в современном английском языке с семантической, когнитивной и прагматической точек зрения. Эвфемизация как языковая стратегия служит для смягчения, завуалирования или косвенного выражения социально чувствительных, табуированных или негативно оцениваемых понятий. В современном английском языке метафора играет центральную роль в формировании эвфемистических выражений, позволяя говорящим переосмысливать деликатные темы через более приемлемые или нейтральные концептуальные области. В результате метафорические эвфемизмы стали продуктивным и динамичным компонентом современного дискурса.

Ключевые слова: метафорическая эвфемизация, эвфемизм, концептуальная метафора, когнитивная лингвистика, семантическое изменение, прагматическая функция, стратегии вежливости, табуированная лексика, дискурс-анализ, социолингвистика.

INTRODUCTION

Language does more than simply describe the world around us it shapes how we see and understand it. Through language, reality is filtered, softened, emphasized, or even strategically reshaped in accordance with social norms, cultural expectations, and communicative intentions. One clear example of this process is euphemization, the practice of replacing direct or potentially uncomfortable expressions with milder and more socially acceptable alternatives. In modern English, euphemization has become increasingly widespread, reflecting evolving social attitudes, the rise of political correctness, the influence of media discourse, and the dynamics of global communication. Among the various ways euphemisms are formed, metaphor plays a particularly important role. Metaphorical euphemization allows speakers to talk about sensitive or taboo subjects indirectly by drawing on alternative conceptual images. Instead of naming something directly, speakers reframe it through metaphor, reducing emotional impact and softening negative associations. Topics such as death, illness, aging, unemployment, or social inequality are often expressed through metaphorical language that presents these realities in less harsh or confrontational ways. In this sense, metaphor is not merely decorative language; it functions as a cognitive and pragmatic tool that shapes perception and guides interpretation.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The study of metaphorical euphemization in modern English is especially relevant because it reflects ongoing social change. Contemporary discourse particularly in media, politics, business, and digital communication constantly produces new euphemistic expressions. These expressions are influenced by ideological trends, ethical concerns, and cultural values, and they often play a significant role in shaping public opinion. While metaphorical euphemisms can promote politeness, empathy, and sensitivity, they may also

be used strategically to obscure facts, avoid responsibility, or create ambiguity. From a theoretical standpoint, metaphorical euphemization lies at the intersection of several linguistic fields, including cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis. Conceptual metaphor theory helps explain how abstract or uncomfortable experiences are understood through more familiar domains of human experience. Pragmatic approaches show how euphemisms function within specific contexts to achieve politeness, persuasion, or face-saving effects. Sociolinguistic perspectives, in turn, emphasize the role of social norms, cultural values, and power relations in shaping euphemistic choices. Although euphemism and metaphor have been widely studied as separate phenomena, their interaction in modern English discourse deserves more systematic attention. For this reason, the present article aims to explore the linguistic features of metaphorical euphemization in contemporary English, identify its dominant conceptual patterns, and examine its semantic, structural, and pragmatic characteristics.

Metaphorical euphemization in modern English represents a complex intersection of cognitive, semantic, and pragmatic processes. At its core, euphemization serves the communicative function of softening, obfuscating, or reframing socially sensitive or negatively evaluated concepts. Metaphor, as a cognitive mechanism, is central to this process because it allows speakers to map abstract or emotionally charged concepts onto more familiar and acceptable domains. Conceptual metaphor theory, provides a useful framework for understanding how euphemistic expressions emerge: abstract ideas are consistently structured in terms of concrete experiential domains. For instance, the concept of death is frequently mapped onto journeys or transitions, resulting in euphemistic expressions such as *passed away*, *left us*, or *gone to a better place*. Similarly, economic or social failure is often framed in terms of natural processes or cycles, as in *downsizing* instead of “firing employees” or *career plateau* instead of “stagnation.” Such metaphorical mappings allow speakers to communicate sensitive topics without provoking discomfort or offense, highlighting the dual cognitive and social functions of euphemism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Euphemization also reflects the interplay of language and culture. Social norms, political correctness, and cultural sensitivities shape which topics are considered taboo and how speakers navigate them. Modern English, influenced by media discourse, professional etiquette, and online communication, continually produces and adapts metaphorical euphemisms to meet evolving cultural expectations. These processes illustrate the inherently dynamic and context-dependent nature of metaphorical euphemization.

Metaphorical euphemisms in modern English exhibit specific structural characteristics. They often take the form of:

- Verbal phrases: e.g., *kick the bucket* (death), *take early retirement* (dismissal).
- Nominal phrases: e.g., *sleeping partner* (silent investor), *senior citizen* (older adult).
- Idiomatic expressions: e.g., *passed on* (died), *let go* (fired).

• Verb-noun combinations: e.g., *face challenges* (experience difficulties), *experience downturn* (economic decline).

These structures demonstrate flexibility and productivity, allowing metaphorical euphemisms to adapt to various communicative contexts. Many expressions retain idiomatic qualities, where the literal meaning is insufficient for understanding the euphemistic intent. This requires both linguistic and cultural knowledge for interpretation, reinforcing the social dimension of euphemistic language. Morphologically, metaphorical euphemisms are often neutralized in tone, employing less direct or softened verbs and nouns. For example, the verb *pass away* carries a less threatening connotation than *die*, and the noun phrase *person with a disability* is more socially acceptable than the older, more stigmatized term *cripple*. These choices reflect the pragmatic goal of minimizing offense while maintaining clarity.

The pragmatic dimension of metaphorical euphemization is central to its use in modern English. Euphemisms are not merely linguistic ornamentation; they perform communicative functions that reflect social intent. Some of the key functions include:

- Politeness and face-saving: mitigating directness in sensitive topics to avoid embarrassment or offense.
- Persuasion and influence: shaping perception, e.g., *downsizing* may sound less harsh than *firing*.
- Concealment or euphemistic obfuscation: hiding unpleasant truths or softening harsh realities.
- Cultural conformity: aligning language with socially acceptable norms, as in politically correct speech.

The function of euphemisms is often context-dependent. In professional or media discourse, euphemisms may serve strategic purposes, such as framing political or economic news in a neutral or favorable manner. In everyday interaction, they promote social harmony, empathy, and tact.

Metaphorical euphemisms in modern English are dynamic and continually evolving. Social change, political movements, and cultural sensitivity drive the creation of new euphemistic expressions and the adaptation of existing ones. For instance, terms like *pre-owned* for second-hand goods or *enhanced interrogation* for torture illustrate how euphemisms can be strategically employed in economic, political, and legal discourse. Digital communication and social media have also accelerated euphemistic innovation. Users invent playful, ironic, or context-specific euphemisms to navigate social norms and taboos online. This illustrates that metaphorical euphemization is not a static feature of the language but a living, adaptive system responding to social and cultural pressures.

The interpretation and translation of metaphorical euphemisms present unique challenges. Many expressions are culturally bound, idiomatic, or context-sensitive, making literal translation insufficient. For example, *kick the bucket* carries cultural and idiomatic weight that may not exist in other languages. Translators must identify equivalent metaphorical or neutral expressions that preserve semantic, pragmatic, and emotional

meaning. The study of metaphorical euphemization thus has practical implications for translation studies, intercultural communication, and language teaching. Understanding its cognitive, semantic, and pragmatic mechanisms enables more accurate interpretation, more culturally sensitive communication, and better appreciation of social norms embedded in language.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of metaphorical euphemization in modern English demonstrates that it is a multifaceted linguistic phenomenon, intricately tied to cognition, culture, and social interaction. Euphemisms do not simply soften language; they actively shape how sensitive, taboo, or negatively evaluated concepts are perceived and communicated. Metaphor serves as a central mechanism, enabling speakers to reframe abstract or emotionally charged realities through familiar and socially acceptable domains. Structurally, metaphorical euphemisms range from idiomatic expressions and verb-noun combinations to nominal phrases, exhibiting stability, reproducibility, and contextual flexibility. Semantically, they rely on conceptual mappings such as death as a journey, failure as a natural process, or conflict as a game that reduce negative connotations while maintaining communicative clarity. Pragmatically, metaphorical euphemization fulfills functions of politeness, face-saving, persuasion, and cultural conformity, making it a powerful tool in both everyday and professional discourse. The dynamic nature of modern English ensures that euphemisms continue to evolve, influenced by social change, media discourse, and digital communication. These linguistic innovations reflect ideological, ethical, and cultural values while facilitating indirect communication in complex social environments.

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