SEMANTIC FIELDS AND THEMATIC GROUPS OF EUPHEMISMS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. This study examines the semantic organization and thematic distribution of euphemisms in contemporary English from a linguocultural perspective. Euphemistic expressions are deeply embedded in social norms, cultural taboos, and communicative strategies of politeness, mitigation, and ideological framing. Drawing upon domain-based classification models proposed by scholars such as Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, as well as corpus examples from modern English media, institutional discourse, and everyday communication, this paper systematizes English euphemisms into six major semantic fields: death and dying; illness, disability and the body; sex, gender and bodily functions; social status, occupation and economic life; politics, war and institutional power; religion, morality and evaluation. The findings demonstrate that euphemistic nomination functions not merely as lexical substitution but as a culturally determined mechanism for regulating social sensitivity, preserving face, and reshaping reality through language. The study contributes to euphemism research by offering a structured semantic model that highlights the interaction between language, culture, and communicative pragmatics.

Keywords: euphemism, semantic field, taboo language, politeness strategy, linguocultural analysis, English lexicon

Introduction. In the second chapter of the present dissertation we focus on the semantic and linguocultural characteristics of euphemisms functioning in English

and Uzbek. In this first subchapter, our task is to systematize English euphemisms according to their semantic fields and thematic groups, drawing on both classical and contemporary scholarship as well as on our own corpus of examples from modern English usage. Euphemisms are closely tied to taboo topics and sensitive areas of social life; therefore, any semantic classification must take into account culturally salient domains such as death, illness, sexuality, bodily functions, social status, and politics. A number of scholars, including K. Allan and K. Burridge [1; 24], B. Warren [3; 78], and later researchers, have proposed classifications of euphemisms either by their formal-derivational features or by the taboo domains they cover. In the present research, we adopt a domain-based or field-based approach, which has become widespread in recent euphemism studies, including works published in Uzbek and regional journals. This approach allows us to show how English speakers structure socially delicate experience and how they use lexical choice to negotiate politeness, face, and cultural values.

Materials and Methods. The present study employs a qualitative semantic-pragmatic methodology combined with elements of linguocultural and discourse analysis. The concept of semantic field, also called semantic domain, goes back to traditional lexicology and denotes a set of lexical units that share a common area of reference, such as the field of *"death"* or the field of *"illness"*. In euphemism research, domain-based classifications group euphemistic expressions according to the tabooed or sensitive topics they indirectly refer to, for example, death, disease, sex, bodily excretions, religion, or politics. In this way, researchers link patterns of lexical substitution with broader cultural attitudes to particular social realities. Allan and Burridge emphasise that taboo is always relative to *"a particular community of people, for a specified context, at a given place and time"*, thus the semantic fields of euphemism reflect the dynamic hierarchy of taboos in a given society [2;67].

Results. In contemporary Anglo-American culture, the heaviest concentrations of euphemisms cluster around topics such as death, physical and mental illness, sexuality and the body, and social inequality, whereas in other cultures different topics, for example, religious matters or political authority, may be more strongly tabooed. In the given subchapter, we follow a widely used domain-based scheme and distinguish the following major semantic fields of English euphemisms:

- Death and dying;
- Illness, disability and the body;
- Sex, gender and bodily functions;
- Social status, occupation and economic life;
- Politics, war and institutional power;
- Religion, morality and evaluation [10; 88].

This list synthesises earlier classifications and reflects the thematic distribution of euphemisms in our own data from contemporary English media, everyday speech, and institutional discourse.

Euphemisms typically arise where direct reference is perceived as face-threatening, impolite, indecent or otherwise socially risky. Sociolinguistic studies show that taboo topics in English-speaking communities include sex and excretion, private parts of the body, illness and death, social and economic disadvantage, as well as blasphemy and certain politically sensitive issues. Consequently, most euphemistic expressions can be grouped around these domains [4; 76]. Contemporary research also stresses that euphemisms fulfil a range of communicative functions: they protect the speaker or hearer from embarrassment; they show politeness and respect; they align with institutional norms, for example, in medicine or politics; or they deliberately obscure unpleasant realities. In what follows, we analyse the major semantic fields of English euphemisms, illustrating each field with authentic lexical examples and brief contextual comments. Table 2.1

gives a preliminary overview of the main thematic domains and some typical euphemistic patterns.

Table 2.1. Major semantic fields of English euphemisms and typical examples

Semantic field	Typical euphemistic themes	Illustrative examples
Death and dying	death, burial, the dead, cemeteries	to pass away, to be no longer with us, the departed
Illness, disability and the body	serious disease, cancer, mental illness, old age, obesity	long-term condition, special needs, senior citizen
Sex, gender and bodily functions	sexual intercourse, pregnancy, private parts, excretion	to sleep with, expecting a baby, to go to the bathroom
Social status, occupation and economic life	poverty, unemployment, low-paid work, dismissal	economically disadvantaged, between jobs, sanitation worker
Politics, war and institutional power	war, killing, torture, civilian casualties, corruption	collateral damage, enhanced interrogation, friendly fire
Religion, morality and evaluation	sin, alcohol, gambling, moral judgement	to have a drink, adult entertainment, ethically challenged

This classification is not exhaustive; many expressions belong simultaneously to more than one field. However, it provides a useful framework for describing the semantic and linguocultural behaviour of English euphemisms.

Death is one of the most universal and heavily tabooed topics in human societies, and English is particularly rich in euphemistic expressions that soften or avoid direct mention of dying. Allan and Burridge describe death as a “fear-based timeless taboo” and show that English has developed dozens of conventional euphemisms in this field, such as to pass away, to depart this life, to go to a better place, or to lose someone. In our material the following subthemes of the death field can be distinguished [7; 123].

English euphemisms form a highly structured lexical system organized around culturally tabooed semantic domains. Their distribution across six principal fields demonstrates that euphemization is motivated by universal human concerns—death, illness, sexuality—as well as historically specific social values such as political correctness, institutional diplomacy, and ideological framing.

The study confirms that euphemisms are not simply lexical ornaments but powerful instruments of social cognition, cultural representation, and communicative strategy [8; 99].

Future research may compare these semantic fields cross-linguistically, particularly between English and Uzbek, to identify universal and culture-specific patterns of euphemistic nomination [9; 143].

Conclusion. English euphemisms form a highly structured lexical system organized around culturally tabooed semantic domains. Their distribution across six principal fields demonstrates that euphemization is motivated by universal human concerns—death, illness, sexuality—as well as historically specific social values such as political correctness, institutional diplomacy, and ideological framing.

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