AN EXPANDED CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF EUPHEMISMS

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Annotation. This article expands on the cross-linguistic use of euphemisms. It surveys their functions, structural types, and cultural manifestations shortly across English, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Spanish, and Uzbek. The discussion demonstrates that while the impulse to euphemize is universal, the exact forms and cultural rationales are strikingly diverse.

Key words: linguistic strategy, taboo, functions, cross- linguistic use of euphemisms.

Introduction

Euphemisms are more than fancy words; they are linguistic strategies for social survival. Defined broadly, a euphemism is a milder or indirect expression used in place of a blunt, taboo, or face-threatening one. Scholars have noted that euphemisms and their opposites, dysphemisms, are two ends of the same spectrum: they reflect how speakers choose wording to manage interpersonal meaning (Allan & Burridge, 1991). Their prevalence shows that human beings are not only information transmitters but also social actors who balance politeness, respect, and power every time they open their mouths.

Euphemism as a Social and Pragmatic Phenomenon. Euphemisms exist because language is bound by social norms. They are tightly linked to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), which argues that communication constantly risks threatening the "face" of speaker and hearer. Euphemisms mitigate these threats by softening criticism, obscuring taboos, or cushioning sensitive information. Another dynamic is the euphemism treadmill (Pinker, 2007). Over time, a euphemism inherits the stigma of its referent, becoming pejorative itself. New terms replace old ones in endless cycles: crippled → handicapped → disabled → differently abled. This treadmill highlights how stigma clings to concepts, not just words.

Functions of Euphemisms. Euphemisms are not mere ornaments; they perform real work in interaction:

-Shielding taboo: Euphemisms cover topics like death, sex, bodily functions, and illness, where direct reference may cause shame or offense (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

-Institutional tone management: Governments and corporations use euphemisms like collateral damage or downsizing to sanitize harsh realities (Rawson, 1981).

-Politeness and harmony: Euphemisms smooth over potentially offensive acts, from asking favors to delivering bad news (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

-In-group signaling: Professional jargon and community-specific euphemisms reinforce group identity and filter outsiders (Crespo-Fernández, 2015).

Structural Types of Euphemisms. Linguists distinguish euphemisms not only by what they address but how they are formed. Lexical substitution: Using elevated or technical terms, e.g., fallecer (Spanish) instead of morir "to die." Metaphor and idiom: Framing death as a journey (passed away). Periphrasis: Lengthy or vague expressions (financially challenged instead of poor). Morpho-syntactic detours: Passive voice (mistakes were made) removes agents and dilutes blame. Register shifts: Languages with grammatical politeness, like Japanese keigo, encode euphemism directly in morphology (Ide, 1989).

Cross-Linguistic Perspectives. English- English euphemisms demonstrate the euphemism treadmill vividly. Terms for disability, race, and mental illness churn rapidly as old words acquire stigma. English also shows a heavy institutional reliance on euphemism: enhanced interrogation masks torture, restructuring hides layoffs. Here, euphemism operates as both politeness and propaganda (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Pinker, 2007). Chinese- In Mandarin, euphemism is tied to miànzi (face) and harmony. Death is softened through terms like 去世 (qùshì, "depart the world") instead of the blunt 死 (sǐ, "die"). Homophonic taboos (e.g., the number four sì, echoing sǐ) influence avoidance strategies. Euphemisms here embody cultural scripts of filial piety, ritual propriety, and social harmony (Ye, 2010).

Japanese- Japanese demonstrates grammaticalized euphemism through its system of honorifics (keigo). A direct imperative shite ("do it") can be softened into shite itadakemasu ka ("might I receive the favor of your doing it?"). The system allows euphemism to be encoded in grammar itself, making politeness and deference obligatory rather than optional (Ide, 1989). Arabic- In Arabic, euphemisms often carry a religious flavor. Death is expressed as intaqala ilā raḥmatillāh ("he moved to God's mercy") or tawaffā Allāh ("God took him"). Euphemisms here are not only polite but theologically framed, comforting the hearer through faith-based metaphors (Al-Adaileh, 2007). Spanish- Spanish relies on lexical elevation (fallecer) and metaphor (pasar a mejor vida, "move to a better life"). Idiomatic expressions such as se nos fue ("he left us") add warmth and familiarity. Spanish euphemisms balance solemnity and intimacy depending on genre - formal obituaries versus casual talk (Chamizo Domínguez, 2005). Uzbek.- In Uzbek, euphemisms often reflect gender norms, modesty, and family honor. Sensitive topics like illness or reproduction are cloaked in indirect phrasing. Studies note gender-specific patterns: women and men may choose different euphemisms, reflecting cultural roles in preserving social dignity (Saidova, 2020). Here, euphemism is as much about protecting communal shame as individual face.

Domains of Taboo and Variation. Certain semantic fields are almost universally euphemized: Death: A near-universal taboo. English (passed away), Spanish (fallecer), Chinese (去世), Arabic (religious formulas), and Uzbek all prefer journey metaphors or divine agency. **Bodily functions**: English (restroom), Spanish (hacer sus necesidades), Japanese signage with polite circumlocution—these show embarrassment-mitigation. **Work- institutions**: Bureaucratic euphemisms (restructuring, reorganización de personal) remove human agency and soften harsh economic realities. **Sex - reproduction**: Universally euphemized but with cultural flavor: modesty in Arabic and Uzbek, oscillation between clinical and coy in English, or indirectness in Chinese family contexts.

Pragmatic Factors. Several variables determine euphemism choice:

-Formality: Higher formality encourages euphemism, e.g., obituaries.

-Power and distance: With superiors or strangers, speakers euphemize more.

-Cultural scripts: Communities rank taboos differently; what is unspeakable in one may be casual in another.

-Diachrony: Euphemisms age, requiring replacement as social attitudes shift (Pinker, 2007).

Conclusion. Euphemisms are universal yet culture-specific. They reveal not just how languages work, but how societies manage shame, dignity, and power. From English's treadmill churn to Japanese's honorific grammar, from Arabic's theological reframing to Uzbek's modesty norms, euphemisms illustrate that words are never "just words." They are social instruments calibrated to protect, conceal, or persuade. Ultimately, euphemisms remind us that language is not only a tool for describing the world but also for managing our place within it. Studying them cross-linguistically exposes both human universals—like the discomfort around death—and local signatures of culture, religion, and power.

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