

EUPHEMISMS AND TABOO WORDS

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There are words in every language that are instinctively avoided because they are considered indecent, indelicate, rude, too direct or impolite. As the “*offensive*” referents for which they stand, they are often described using substitutes, called *euphemisms*.

The aim of this article is to state the role and the functions of euphemisms in communication touching upon the cultural background of the speakers.

Linguists say that this device is dictated by social conventions which are at times oversensitive, which see “*indecenty*», where there is none and seek refinement in absurd avoidances and pretentiousness. At the same

time it should be pointed out that euphemisms are usually in close connection with taboo words, as neither could exist without the other.

Horia Hulban, a Romanian scholar affirms that the word taboo usually denotes “*words that are either forbidden to use or banned on grounds of mortality or taste*”. And the euphemism is “*the substitution of an agreeable word for one that is taboo, harsh, indelicate, and it is usually a less explicit and more delicate term*”. Also here Irina Arnold says that “*euphemisms are milder ways to express a rude or unpleasant notion*”.

It has been stated that the taboo spheres of a vocabulary reflect the taboo spheres of human life in a given society and at a given time. At peoples of a developed culture and civilization euphemism is dictated by the social usage, etiquette, advertising, tact, diplomatic considerations and political propaganda. Anyway different peoples may have different taboo spheres, but as a rule the spheres banned by most peoples are: religion, swearing, parts and functions of the body, dress, eating, illness and death, physical disability, some professional activities and social status. In the vocabulary of any language there can be found: synonyms that soften some coarse or unpleasant ideas, because euphemism is sometimes figuratively called as “*a white – washing device*”. And the linguistic peculiarity of euphemism lies in the fact that each of them must call up a definite synonym in the mind of the reader. For example euphemistic synonyms as: *to possess a vivid imaginations, to tell stories* (- to lie) are part of the language – as a system and of course can be found in any good dictionary.

Recent linguistic researches show that according to their field of functioning the most widely spread euphemisms can be divided into such groups as: religious, moral, medical, parliamentary.

The life of euphemism is short, because it soon becomes closely associated with the referent and gives way to a newly built word or combination of words, which throws another veil over an unpleasant, or indelicate concept.

After a thorough study of medical terms it has been proved that, the evolution over the years of a civilized mental health service has been marked by periodic changes in terminology. The *madhouse* became the *lunatic asylum* and then it changed into *mental hospital* – even if the building remained the same. *Idiots, imbeciles* and the *feeble-minded* became *low medium*, and *high-grade mental defectives*. And they all can be lumped together and called now as *patients of severely, subnormal personality*. The insane became persons of unsound mind.” Linguists say that though “*unimportant in themselves, these changes of names are the signposts of*

progress". The reasons for using euphemisms may be various: because of one's feelings (that are especially connected with a painful reality or something unpleasant) and decency (in case of vulgar terms). In order not to hurt someone's feelings a liar can be called *a person who doesn't always strictly tell the truth* and a foolish man can be called *not exactly brilliant*.

It has been noticed that euphemisms also touched the sphere of superstitions. Since ancient times all words denoting evil spirits, dangerous animals or the powers of nature threatening danger were referred to in a roundabout descriptive way. So, a dangerous animal might be described *as the one lurking in the wood*, an incurable disease – *as the Black Death*. Euphemisms are probably the oldest types of synonyms, because it is reasonable to say that superstitions that caused real fear called for the creation of euphemisms long before the need to describe things in their various aspects caused the appearance of other synonyms.

The Christian religion also made certain words taboo. For example the word *devil* was replaced by a number of substitutes like: *The Prince of the Darkness*, *the black one*, *the evil one*; *dickens* (coll.), *deuce* (coll.), *Old Nick* (coll.) And the word God, according to its considerations in meaning, has many substitutes which can still be traced in such phrases as "Good Lord!", "By Heavens!", "Good Heavens!", "(My) Goodness; "Gracious me!"

Though we live in an emancipated world we try to avoid words associated with death, and give our preference to such euphemisms as *to kick the bucket*, *to go under*, *to fade out*, *to kick off*, *to pass away*, *to pop off* (verbs); the one way-ticket, the fade out, the finish, the last call (nouns); chocked out, done for, finished, gone under, done and out(adj.).

In Irina Arnold's opinion "it is less emotional to call countries with a low standard of living *underdeveloped*, and it is more tactful to call them *developing*".

In conclusion it should be emphasized that in general euphemisms are used to avoid the so-called social taboos. Their use and existence has been inspired by social conventions or by certain psychological factors. The problem is, as many scholars of the phenomenon have remarked, that the words used euphemistically tend to become bearers of negative connotation themselves, and accordingly they have to be replaced, in their turn, by other euphemistic words and expressions.

Bibliography

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