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SOCIO-PRAGMATIC POTENTIAL OF EUPHEMISMS IN ENGLISH

***Abstract.** The article touches upon the issue of the socio-pragmatic potential of euphemisms in English. It has been determined that euphemisms are associated with pragmatic reasons including politeness, discretion, taboo, the desire to disguise the negative essence of certain phenomena of reality, increasing prestige, etc. The use of euphemisms is guided by the following principles of political correctness: the principle of observing interracial and interethnic tolerance; the principle of irrelevance of the profession designation to gender identity; the principle of social acceptability of word usage.*

***Keywords:** euphemism, socio-pragmatic, political correctness.*

In recent decades, linguoculture has been strongly influenced by the ideology of political correctness which manifests itself both in social life and in the sphere of language. Political correctness is a social trend aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination from social life, i.e., any form of oppression based on socially significant characteristics (gender, age, financial status, race, national origin, sexual orientation, etc.). One of the most important tools that the trend uses is language reform since proponents of the movement believe that by changing the language, they can achieve changes in people's mentality and behavior. Changes in society stemming from the trend toward political correctness, related to overcoming discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity, have prompted the formation of

new politically correct terminology excluding words and expressions that may offend the feelings and dignity of members of other nationalities, races, etc.

The phenomenon of euphemism is at the intersection of extralinguistic and linguistic problems since euphemisms are social formations by their nature. The emergence of euphemistic expressions indicates a certain stage in the development of society and generates interest in their study among historians, ethnographers, psychologists, sociologists and linguists alike.

Euphemisms are emotionally neutral words or expressions used to replace synonymous words or expressions that seem indecent, rude, or indelicate to the speaker. It should be noted that the definitions of euphemism offered by various linguists do not differ much from each other, but we believe that they can be consolidated under the definition provided by A. Kovalchuk as the most general one. Euphemisms are “words or expressions used in place of words or expressions considered unacceptable, rude or undesirable in a particular communicative situation and may offend or insult its participants; they are used to avoid the direct designation of anything that may negatively affect the recipient, or to disguise certain facts of reality” [1, p. 87].

The pragmatics of euphemisms ensues from their nature. They are words-periphrases, i.e., units of secondary nomination, and their denotatum refers to intentional, anthropocentric objects, i.e., those which are nominated not by their objective characteristics but rather by the subjective standpoint of the speaker. Euphemisms improve a denotatum marked by a negative attitude toward it regardless of its actual qualities. Moreover, simultaneously with the emergence of positive connotations there occurs an increase in the stylistic register. Therefore, euphemisms are “tied” to the value-normative worldview, both in terms of their subject-logical content and the rules of their use. Consequently, they can be attributed to pragmatically marked linguistic means whose semantics and pragmatics, i.e., the rules of contextual use, are determined by the culture of society, its axiological and normative attitudes.

From the pragmatic perspective, the formation of such euphemisms is based on reinforcing a positive effect. The positive or neutral semantics of the original word

meaning imparts a certain positive pragmatic effect to the entire utterance in which the euphemism is used, e.g.: *Never found evidence of it to this day. Six hundred white kids, and I was the only **black child** there. No, I was the only **person with a bit of a color on me**. Let me say that. Chocolate color. There were no **Asians**, no **indigenous*** [4].

The expressions “black child”, “person with a bit of a color on me”, “Asians”, and “indigenous” have been preferred over racially coloured words and expressions. The basis for the pragmatic effect is the positive associations linked to the used euphemisms. The use of these euphemisms is associated with a number of pragmatic reasons: politeness, discretion, decency, taboo, the desire to disguise the negative essence of certain phenomena of reality, increasing prestige.

Compliance with the principle of interracial and interethnic tolerance underlies the changes in language that have occurred with words, phrases that are perceived in society as discriminating against an individual on the basis of race or ethnicity resulting in the appearance of various politically correct euphemisms to replace them. The observance of the principle of interracial and interethnic tolerance is a way to avoid verbal aggression associated with various forms of discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

There are numerous examples of politically correct professional designations in English that do not indicate gender, e.g., “chairman” is replaced by “chairperson”, or “chair”, “committee chair”, or “flight attendant” is used instead of “steward” and “stewardess”, e.g.: *Well, I had a unique seat that day. I was sitting in 1D. I was the only one who could talk to the **flight attendants*** [4].

*So I'm not saying that agenda art isn't important; I'm the **chairperson** of a charity that deals with films and theaters that write about HIV and radicalization and female genital mutilation* [4].

Thus, the principle of political correctness as a cultural-behavioural and linguistic practice, defines the changes that have occurred and are occurring in the language at the given stage of development of English-speaking society, provides for the use of ways of language expression for the names of professions, which do not indicate gender in order to avoid gender discrimination, that is the formation of a new layer of vocabulary free from gender labelling.

The “standards” of beauty imposed by advertising, “connoisseurs”, and propaganda have led to the situation when people who do not conform to “standards and models” feel vulnerable and helpless in the face of linguistic insensitivity. This type of politically incorrect behavior is termed “lookism” – prejudice or discrimination based on physical appearance and especially physical appearance believed to fall short of societal notions of beauty [3].

There exist special terms denoting different types of discrimination based on appearance. For example, the term “fattism” (“fatism”) refers to discrimination against obese people. Discrimination related to a person’s weight status is called “weightism”, and discrimination based on height is termed “heightism”. The term “ageism” denotes the prejudice based on age, and “ableism” refers to the discrimination related to different physical abilities of an individual. Thus, the lexeme “short” has been replaced by the phrase “vertically challenged”, for instance: *I never got a basketball scholarship, so I’m salty assisting anybody taking a smack at the **vertically challenged*** [4].

Politically correct equivalents of the lexical unit “fat” have recently started to be used – “differently weighted”, “horizontally gifted”, “gravitationally challenged”, for example: *Subjects report being less inclined to hire an overweight person than a thin person, even with identical qualifications. Individuals make negative inferences about **differently weighted persons** in the workplace, feeling that such people are lazy, lack self-discipline, and are less competent* [4].

The study also allows identifying a group of politically correct euphemisms aimed at eliminating discrimination on the basis of social status. This group includes euphemisms that represent the names of various professional activities. Thus, the familiar term “gas station attendant” has been replaced by the politically correct substitute “petroleum transfer technician” or “petroleum engineer”; “car washer” – “vehicle appearance specialist”; “cleaning lady” – “domestic assistant”; “cosmetologist” – “beautician”; “dishwasher” – “utensil sanitizer”; “garbage man” – “sanitation engineer”, “sanitation worker”, e.g.: *I find the stigma especially ironic, because I strongly believe that **sanitation workers** are the most important labor force on the streets of the city, for three reasons* [4].

*She opened a computer store, then studied to be a **beautician** and opened another business [4].*

The euphemisms “unbalanced” – *of unsound mind* [2, p. 419], “unplugged” – *mentally ill* [2, p. 423]; “unwired” – *mentally unbalanced* [2, p. 424], mitigating the notion of madness, create a positive “attitude” in terms of pragmatics. Thus, the disease is perceived as something temporary and insignificant, e.g.: *The **unbalanced person** is running a private unapproved film which he happens to like better than the current cultural one [4].*

Manipulative influence aimed at the conscious and unconscious spheres of personality is carried out with the help of specially selected lexical units, filled with special semantics and cause certain associations. There is a whole system of generalized euphemistic designations in the language. Thus, military actions are often described using nominations with the general meaning such as *conflict, action, operation, campaign, crisis*, e.g.: *In bearing witness to their **crisis**, I felt a small communion with these people [4].*

The stylistic characteristic of euphemisms determines their belonging to the stylistic register, i.e., the choice of a certain euphemism is conditioned by its expressive and stylistic possibilities and the topic of conversation, the significance of the subject in question. A number of euphemisms in the explanatory dictionaries are marked as “bookish”, “colloquial”, and even “slang”. Changing the stylistic register of euphemisms contributes to the effect of softening. For example, the stylistic difference of euphemisms that replace the lexeme “to die” is quite noticeable: “to pass away”, “to go to heaven” and “to come home feet first”, “to kick up one’s heels”, “to kick the bucket”. Stylistically contrasted euphemisms include the following: “ceased to be”, “fallen asleep”, “gathered to his ancestors”, “no longer with us”, etc., e.g.: ***To kick the bucket, bite the dust, cash in your chips, check out, depart, expire, launch into eternity ... These are all euphemisms we use in humor to describe the one life event we are all going to experience: death [4].***

Thus, the need to use euphemisms is conditioned by pragmatic and sociolinguistic reasons. Euphemisms serve as a means of replenishing "etiquette" lacunae that arise in the language under the influence of taboos. English euphemisms

are dependent on such components of the pragmatic situation as the agent factor, the recipient factor, as well as the purpose and sphere of communication.

Political correctness as a cultural, behavioral, and linguistic practice is a means of avoiding verbal aggression. The reasons for political correctness in English are related, firstly, to the existing and perceived forms and varieties of discrimination by members of society; secondly, to the desire to overcome discrimination, due to cultural and behavioral traditions, the high level of social culture, the mentality of Western society; thirdly, to the manipulative activity of communication. Political correctness is represented by euphemisms focused on the exclusion of possible manifestations of various types of discrimination (based on race, ethnicity, age, appearance, social status, etc.). The systematization of the obtained data allowed distinguishing such principles of political correctness: the principle of observing interracial and interethnic tolerance; the principle of irrelevance of the profession designation to gender identity; the principle of social acceptability of word usage.

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