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THE ROLE OF EUPHEMISMS IN THE FORMATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT
Phraseology is one of the main branches of general linguistics which deals with lexical layer of the language with indirect meaning based on non-motivation mainly called as phraseological units, set expressions or simply idioms. The study of phraseological units in different languages, specifically in English has always been one of the most debatable issues of linguistic investigations. There are a number of sources caused for the formation of phraseological units in English based on extralinguistic factors such as history, customs, traditions, in general culture, and language devices like metaphor, metonymy, litotes, synecdoche, euphemisms and many others. Euphemism can be a good material for the formation of phraseological units in English, which will be discussed in this article.
KEY WORDS: *Euphemism, Phraseological Unit, Idiom, Set Expression, Stylistic Device, Phraseology, Euphemization, Moral Factor, Phraseological Euphemism, Politeness,*

INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, euphemisms have been regarded as a stylistic device serving as a form of verbal softening. A list of communicatively significant qualities of speech was already established in antiquity, as evidenced by the works of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and other Greek and Roman scholars of the 5th–1st centuries BC.

Linguistically, euphemisms began to be studied in the nineteenth century. At the end of the 19th century, the German linguist H. Paul identified euphemisms within the now well-known pattern of semantic change. The problems of euphemization became particularly popular in the 1960s–1980s. Works by S. Widlak and J. Lourence appeared during this period. Problems of euphemistic renaming in various languages were also examined by I.R. Galperin, L.P. Krysin, V.P. Moskvin, and O.I. Reunova, V.N. Telia, J. Williams, and others.

As the number of published works on this topic grew, disagreements began to emerge in the interpretation of euphemism and taboo in general, and their aspects in particular.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of definitions suggested by well-known scholars in terms of euphemism. One of the widely-found definitions of the term is found its reflection in in the work of the Russian researcher D.N. Shmelev, who characterizes euphemism as “refraining from inappropriate words, a softened expression that serves in certain circumstances to replace such designations that seem undesirable, not entirely polite, too harsh to the speaker” [1: 87]. Another scientist is D.E. Rosenthal who gives approximately the same interpretation of euphemism in his dictionary, calling it as “a softening designation of some object or phenomenon, a softer expression instead of a rough one” [2: 120]. K. Allan and K. Burridge define euphemism as “an expression used as an alternative to a disliked expression in order to avoid possible loss of face: either of the speaker, the audience, or some third party" [3; 81]. E. Tyurina writes: “euphemisms are soft and permissible, ameliorative-allegorical, and sometimes simply more acceptable for one reason or another words or expressions, used instead of a thematically stigmatic or socially incorrect antecedent, instead of words or expressions that seem to the speaker either prohibited, indecent, unacceptable from the point of view of accepted social moral standards, or even simply rude and tactless” [4: 83]. According to J. Lourence, a euphemism is a form of words that (for various reasons) expresses an idea in a softened or veiled or more respectful form. [5: 55] J. Nieman and C. Silver define the process of euphemization as the use of a non-offensive or pleasant term instead of a direct, offensive one, while masking the truth [6: 102].

In general, the main purpose of euphemisms in the text is to soften the message, since a euphemism is a word or expression used instead of another, which for some reason is inconvenient or undesirable to pronounce.

METHODOLOGY

There are a number of research methods which are effectively used in contemporary linguistic investigations such as statistical, comparative, analytical, multi-level definitional analysis and many others. As part of our research, a phraseological minimum of 200 English idioms was prepared using the full sampling method based on selection. Phraseological units based on euphemisms were picked out from A.V. Kunin’s “English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary” [7] according to the label “эвф.” (euphemism), some other phraseological dictionaries and books on phraseology. The author of the above-mentioned dictionary includes this label into the system of stylistic labels marking at the same time that the system of stylistic labels is, to some extent, conventional.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

First of all, phraseological units formed by means of euphemisms (also called phraseological euphemisms - PE) will be studied from the point of view of the notions they express. Secondly, one synonymic group of phraseological euphemisms

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will be investigated from the point of view of different types of synonyms.

From the point of view of their semantics phraseological euphemisms (PE) may be subdivided into the following six groups:

1. Euphemisms naming **death** and everything connected with it. For instance, "to draw one's last breath", ""to breath one's last (one's last breath, gasp)", "to depart this life", "to pay one's debt to nature", "to go to one's last home", "to go the way of all flesh", "to kick the bucket", "to hop the twig", "to join the majority", "to be no more", "God's acre", etc.: *The next day, his parents were flown to New Mexico by special Army plane, and they stayed at their son's bedside, until he breathed his last.*

Religious and moral factors are the driving forces of this group of phraseological euphemisms. Fear before death and, sometimes, the desire not to hurt a person, to show one's tact and courtesy can be considered to be the emotional basis of such PE. This group of PE is rather numerous.

2. Euphemisms naming ***social evils***, crimes, human vices and their consequences. For instance, "three sheets in (to) the wind", "in one's cups", "send somebody to glory", "send somebody to kingdom-come", "the Duke of Exeter's daughter", shoot (sling, throw) the bull", "kiss the cup", "have (take) a drop", "have one too many", "have had a few", etc.: They threatened to make me hug the Duke of Exeter's daughter. …he is a good unconscious spy on Brass, and tells, in his cups, all that he sees and hears.

Moral principles serve as a social determinant of phraseological euphemisms of this rather large group. Social evils and human vises have always been a rich source of creating such PEs.

3. Euphemisms naming ***poverty, hard financial situation***. For example, "be in Queer Street", "live from hand to mouth", "not to have a shirt to one's back", "not to have a penny to bless oneself with"; "without a penny to one's name", "keep body and soul together", make both, two ends meet": *One of his guests, a writer of poetical drama, was a man who three months after he had earned a thousand pound, never had a penny with which to bless himself.*

Poverty has always been a very undesirable and unpleasant condition, especially in the English society. No wonder that poor people tried to conceal their poor financial situation using or inventing indirect names for it.

4.Euphemisms naming ***mental deformities (disability)***. For example, "be out (take, leave) of one's senses", "be off one's nut", "go nuts", "soft (touched, weak) in the head", "a strange bird", a weird (strange) customer", a weird (strange) card (duck)", etc.: *He said he didn't want to see you… Babbit reared over him. The attendant hastily changed to a coaxing. 'You can come back and try to-morrow. Probably the poor guy is off his nut'.*

Mental and physical handicaps cause the sense of pity, sometimes disgust. No wonder that there appeared a lot of phraseological euphemisms to name them.

5.Euphemisms naming some ***acts or conditions from the sphere of physiology***. For instance, "pay a call", "a call of nature", "in the straw", "in a (the) family way", "in nature's garb", "not a stitch on", "in a state of nature", "in one's skin", etc.:

Angelina: Your friend, the bald man, the one who calls for you, where is he?
Philip: He is at the moment responding to a call of nature.

It is interesting to note that the polysemantic phraseological unit "not (without) a stitch to one's back" is a phraseological euphemism in both meanings: 1. absolutely naked; 2. very poor. Physiological function, the condition of pregnancy and human nakedness are considered to be indecent or not worth speaking about in normal society according to moral principles existing in such a society.

6.Euphemisms referring to the ***sexual sphere***. For example, "a lady of easy virtue", "a light (easy) woman", "a real battleaxe", "a house of ill fame", "make love" (in the second meaning): *It is entirely populated by crooks, stock-exchange jugglers, corrupt policemen, and … ladies of easy virtue.*

Phraseological euphemisms belonging to one and the same phraseo-semantic group may further be subdivided into synonymic groups as there are different grammatical classes in one and the same group – verbal, substantive, adjectival, etc. Phraseological synonyms belong to the same grammatical class and are phraseological units which are the same in the plane of content but different in the plane of expression.

Mainly, three types of phraseological synonyms are distinguished in linguistic literature such as ideographic, stylistic and stylistic-ideographic. Ideographic synonyms differ in shades of meaning or have different notional components of meaning. Their archesemes coincide but they have one or more minor differential semes in the denotational component of meaning. Stylistic synonyms have the same notional components of meaning but differ in their stylistic reference. Stylistic-ideographic synonyms have some different notional and connotational components of meaning.

There are also synonyms that coincide both in denotational and connotational components of phraseological meaning. Such synonyms are called equivalent (or equipollent) ones.

We have analyzed the synonymic group of phraseological euphemisms with the meaning "to die". This synonymic group is rather numerous as the concept of death finds its reflection in all languages and the attitude towards this "event" is similar. "All people are mortal" is a well-known expression, so speakers of different languages as representatives of different nations and nationalities try to conceal the unpleasant emotions and painful news. Phraseological units are based on different images, the majority of such images may be considered elevated, as in such units as " go to a better world", "go to glory", "go to heaven", "go to kingdom-come", "go to one's last (long) home", etc. Others are based on some "common" images, e.g. "take the ferry", "be (go) up the flume" (in the second meaning), "to be no more". Only a very limited number of phraseological euphemisms of this synonymic group "use"

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the images which can cause ironical or jocular attitude, e.g. “kick the bucket”, “to hop the twig”. All phraseological units belonging to this group of phraseological synonyms denote one and the same action, that’s why their denotational components coincide. Differences may be observed either in emotional evaluation or stylistic reference of phraseological units.

Summarizing all above mentioned, it is possible to draw a conclusion that being one of the effective ways of expressing something impolite or unpleasant by means of politeness, euphemisms are a sustainable source for the formation of phraseological units in English.

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