Філологія / Philology

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EUPHEMISMS IN MASS MEDIA DISCOURSE: THE USA ELECTIONS 2024

Given the global desire of the society to promote tolerance and equality in terms of age, gender, religion, nationality, and social status, nowadays the prevalence of euphemisms has noticeably increased. Euphemisms serve as a tool to soften a harsh, offensive or unpleasant expression in order to prevent any potential conflicts, offence or discomfort when dealing with sensitive and controversial topics regarding various aspects of social life. Moreover, the use of euphemistic language instead of harsh phrases with negative emotional connotations reflects a collective effort to understand complex social patterns while maintaining mutual respect and sensitivity. It can also be seen as an essential trait of human communication that demonstrates the cultural and historical changes in society. The phenomenon of euphemism is a remarkable feature in the English-language mass media discourse. For the past decades, as the Internet and television have significantly evolved, media is widely considered to play a vital role in influencing public opinion, regarding political sphere in particular. It is set to be a crucial factor in the country's political process and all its manifestations, such as coverage of global political events, influence on election campaigns and electorate as well as the final election outcome. The use of euphemisms, in turn, is believed to be one of the key mechanisms in such influencing process created by media. Euphemisms enable media imperceptibly impact the way the public responds to political processes, events, and how it perceives certain representatives of the political world. The article outlines the issues related to the term "euphemism", its' definition and the role of the considered linguistic unit in modern mass media discourse. Based on articles about 2024 Unted States elections, the study analyzes the strategies of formation of euphemistic units in the English-language mass-media discourse and how it influences reader's perception of the text.

Keywords: euphemism; mass media discourse; political media discourse; formation of euphemisms; strategy; politically correct language; media texts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Formulation of the problem. Over the past few years, there has been a noticeable tendency in society to employ more gentle language for the sake of politeness, tolerance and avoidance of conflicts. Therefore, the phenomena of euphemism have taken over various spheres of people's life, including the mass-media world. The rapid rise in the use of lexemes that can soften, disguise or even hide a reality when referring to controversial topics, e. g. politics, can be attributed to a distinctive linguistic feature of the modern media. The article takes a look at the concept of euphemism, analyzes the role of euphemistic expressions in mass media discourse and the way it is

used when presenting the news about political events the topic of euphemisms has been the subject of studies of numerous Ukrainian and foreign researchers. These are: A. Yu. Halaichuk (2013), O. I. Maniutina (2015), V. B. Velykoroda (2008), Ye. V. Kornielaieva (2019), S. V. Baranova (2018), K. Burridge (2012) K. Allan (2006) and others. Researchers focused their work on the meaning of such linguistic concept as euphemism, the peculiarities of its formation as well as the functions of euphemistic expressions in social communication. Their studies also cover the advantages and disadvantages of using euphemisms in mass media discourse

2. REASEARCH METHODS

The object of the study is the concept of euphemism in English-language mass-media texts. The subject of the study is the analysis of functional features of euphemisms in English-language mass-media texts.

The material for this study includes CNN news reports about the USA elections of 2024.

The aim of the article is to look at the concept of "euphemism" and "mass media discourse", to delve into specifics of euphemistic units in the English-language mass media discourse and online news in particular, and to analyze the linguistic strategies of its formation.

In this study, the following research methods were used: descriptive method, typological method, qualitative and quantitative analysis. я

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The concept of the euphemism in linguistics

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the term "euphemism" originates from the Greek word euphēmismos ("eu"– "good" and "pheme" – "speak"). In the English language it is first asset in 1793, denoting the process of "choosing a less distasteful word or phrase than the one meant" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2024). Nowadays, the definition of euphemistic expression has not undergone any fundamental changes. In broad terms, it can be defined as a way of softening harsher phrase that has negative connotation by replacing it with a more pleasant term.

It would be considerable to draw attention to a more specific definition of euphemism. According to the Cambridge International English Dictionary, euphemism means a word or phrase used to replace another one that is stronger and more honest, and also more unpleasant and offensive (Cambridge international dictionary of English, 1995).

It is necessary to point out that the use of euphemisms is strongly related to the situation in which communication occurs. For instance, Australian scholar K. Burridge refers to euphemisms as alternative words or phrases used instead of expressions that communicators prefer to avoid in particular situations when achieving a specific communicative goal. (Burridge, 2012).

Attention should be also paid to specific topics, as some of them may be sensitive or inappropriate for a particular person. For instance, when talking about death, religion, politics, physiological processes, parts of human body, etc. it is common to use euphemistic substitutions for direct terms to avoid unpleasant communication outcomes. Therefore, Ukrainian researcher O. I. Maniutina claims that euphemization mechanisms contribute to the successful regulation of human relations and serve as a tool to identify and develop various methods of effective communication with representatives of different cultures (Maniutina, 2015).

Researchers have not reached a consensus on the specific functions of euphemisms; however, they generally agree that euphemistic language is used to facilitate conflict-free communication, avoid discomfort, and maintain political correctness.

Although the positive role of euphemistic substitutions cannot remain unnoticed, there is still considerable uncertainty regarding its' negative impact. Nowadays, a significant number of linguists consider euphemisms as a way of deception and manipulation. On this matter, S. Lacone argues that euphemisms are capable of hiding simple and clear messages using words that are misleading or overly complex (Lacone, 2003). A similar point of view is held by P. LaRocque, who notes that euphemisms related to political, military and commercial concepts may be controversial and

misleading (LaRocque, 2000). In previously mentioned discourses intentional application of euphemism substitutions frequently adds a sense of insidiousness and secrecy to the substituted component of the text.

It would be appropriate to touch on the question of the main linguistic strategies of formation of euphemistic units. In this regard we share the views of the researcher K. Burridge who proposed her own classification of the mechanisms of euphemism formation in the English language. The main strategies include:

a) *analogy* (e.g. metaphor, hyperbole, litotes, general-for-specific/ part-for-whole substitutions);

b) *distortion* (e.g. shortening, circumlocution, phonological remodeling);

c) *internal* and *external borrowing* (e.g. jargon, slang, borrowings from other languages) (Burridge, 2012).

With the help of the strategies mentioned above, the communicator is enabled to modify the initial message depending on its purpose and, thus, significantly influences the attitude of the receiver towards the information that is being transmitted as well as the perception of the text in general.

The essential issue is the notion of euphemism in mass media discourse, since the given linguistic unit to a great extent shapes the unique style of mass media texts. In their study, S. Baranova and K. Pletenko claim that the role of euphemisms in the English-language media is focused on preventing racism and other forms of discrimination related to gender, age, social life, etc. Euphemism can most often be traced when speaking about education, religion, interethnic and international relations or economic issues (Baranova, Pletenko, 2018).

It should also be noted that euphemistic expressions hold a special place in political media discourse. Political mass media discourse refers to the texts on political topics published in newspapers, magazines, on television, and on Internet platforms. When reporting on political processes and events or expressing their opinions on particular political figures and their actions, journalists usually seek for more indirect narratives in order to influence the audience or avoid criticism and unnecessary confrontations.

However, as reported earlier, in political discourse euphemistic language is not always applied for a good purpose. It is widely known that politicians masterfully use euphemisms to disguise real facts or even hide their criminal actions. This is often done to create the impression of stability in the political and economic situation in the country. Mass media, in turn, exploit euphemisms to correct politicians' mistakes, control their statements and thus shape public opinion about their personalities (Arif, 2015).

3.2. Formation strategies of euphemisms in the English-language media

To illustrate the theoretical material highlighted above, we would like to analyze the examples of euphemistic language traced in online news texts of CNN – one of the largest news outlets in the United States. The analyzed texts were selected from the months prior to the 2024 elections, in particular, from the articles published in September and October 2024. To extract elements for our analysis from the data set we used random sampling. The analysis will be mainly focused on the linguistic strategies used to form euphemisms. This study has potential limitations, as it includes an analysis of articles for a period of time limited to two months. In addition, we considered several types of strategies, based on a single classification, which may not fully cover the complexity of euphemism formation.

Before considering examples of euphemistic units, it would be relevant to look at the ratio of linguistic strategies of euphemism formation in CNN's articles. For our analysis we turned to the classification of Australian scholar K. Burridge (Burridge, 2012). Out of the overall number of analyzed euphemistic units – 45 (100%), metaphor was traced 18 times (usage rate – 40%), circumlocution – 9 times (usage rate – 20%), generalisation – 5 times (usage rate – 11, 1 %), jargon – 5 times (usage rate – 11.1 %), hyperbole – 4 times (usage rate – 8.9 %), litotes – 2 times (usage rate – 4.4 %), abbreviation – 2 times (usage rate – 4.4 %).

Metaphor appears to be the most frequent type of analogies employed in the analised

publications that is used to form conceptual euphemisms. Let us consider the example: "Both California and New York, while deep-blue at the statewide level, are home to buckets of highly competitive House seats that were key to Republicans gaining their narrow majority two years ago" (Wright & Matthews, 2024). Instead of directly stating that Democrats have a significant advantage among voters in the states of California and New York, the metaphorical expression deep blue is used, as this colour is considered to be the symbol of the US Democratic Party. Take another example: "The furor over whether there'll be another debate and Loomer's proximity to Trump are examples of the heated controversies that flare in the endgames of campaigns, which can often appear irrelevant to the final result" (Collinson, 2024a) The metaphoric expression heated controversies that flare is another conceptual euphemism that provides a gentler description of a tense situation, by comparing it to a flame that can suddenly emerge and quickly burn out.

Euphemisms of deformation have been traced in the analysed material. Consider the example of circumlocution: "Trump sought to make inroads with young men who are often low-propensity voters but who could add to his coalition" (Collinson, 2024c). The conceptual euphemism low-propensity voters denotes citizens who are generally uninterested in the political situation in their country and therefore do not vote in elections. The expression was used to avoid the harsher terms, e.g., disengaged voters.

A highly widespread strategy of euphemism formation found in materials is general-for-specific substitutions. For instance: "In another effort by Harris to ease concerns about her apparently stalled momentum, she announced a major new initiative to court Black male voters amid anxiety that Trump is making inroads into a critical Democratic support base or that they simply won't turn out" (Collinson, 2024c). Instead of delving into any details and explicitly stating that Harris' campaign is experiencing setbacks, authors apply a general term stalled momentum that serves as a conceptual euphemism to provide a less negative description of Harris's declining progress.

Attention should also be drawn to the application of euphemisms in CNN articles, which are formed by means of internal borrowings. The most common include jargon. For example: "The former president might be right to mitigate the risk; after all, polls show he's in a dead heat with Harris in a race in which the fundamentals on top voter priorities like the economy and immigration may favor him" (Collinson, 2024a). As the figurative expression dead heat was in widespread use in political discourse, usually when describing equal chances of candidates to win elections, it eventually became a jargon. In the given context this phrase serves as a literal euphemism to substitute more direct term tie in race.

Another quite widespread formation mechanism of euphemistic units is hyperbole, e.g., "Dread is growing among Democrats that the euphoria over Harris' entry into the race in July, her successful convention in August and her debate performance the following month have not translated yet into a decisive lead over Trump" (Collinson, 2024b). The application of the word dread to summarise the negative emotions of democrats after a less than expected success over the Republicans is likely to be an overstatement. The word euphoria, on the other hand, reinforces the sense of excitement among voters and Democrats that was growing in summer. Both terms denoting emotions create a certain contrast, emphasising fewer positive changes then was predicted earlier.

The example of litotes was also found in CNN materials: "The ex-president said he doesn't need a rematch because he won Tuesday night's debate, despite overwhelming reviews saying he bombed against a vice president who outdid a former reality star" (Collinson, 2024a). By applying a more neutral term former reality star to describe Trump's background, authors oversimplified and diminished his political personality and focused on his television identity rather than his accomplishments as a politician.

In analized materials the euphemisms derived from abbreviation were noted, e.g., "Last month, a federal appeals court panel denied Trump's motion after the judge overseeing the state case agreed to move the GOP nominee's sentencing until after Election Day" (Scannell et al., 2024) The acronym GOP, which stands for "Grand Old Party" (the unofficial name of the Republican Party), is used instead of a direct statement about Trump's affiliation to the Republicans. For the US

audience, the acronym emphasizes the traditional views and values of the party that were prevalent in the USA in the past. However, it is very likely that outside the United States this abbreviation will not be instantly recognised and will require additional research to grasp the meaning. Note another example of abbreviation in the following sentence: "Sen. JD Vance's refusal to accept the legitimacy of the 2020 election at last week's vice presidential debate culminated his years-long conversion from a Never Trump critic into a MAGA supporter" (Kaczynski, 2024) The statement *MAGA supporter* indicates that a person is a follower of Trump and his political movement, as the acronym *MAGA* stands for "Make America Great Again" – a slogan that was spread by Trump during elections in 2016. "Make America Great Again" unites radical voters who are committed to traditional values and who, as they say, are standing up for "ordinary Americans". For readers, this abbreviation may evoke direct associations with the 2016 US elections, which resulted in the victory of Donald Trump.

So, based on the examples found in analysed material, we can observe several distinctive features in usage of euphemistic expressions. Firstly, it should be noted that analogy is one of the most widespread strategies applied to form euphemistic expression. Stylistic devices, in particular, serve as a tool to replace direct statements with soft euphemistic terms. These include: metaphor, hyperbole, litotes, general-for-specific substitutions. The types of distortion and internal borrowings such as circumlocution, abbreviations, and jargon can also be identified in the news texts of CNN.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SCOPE FOR THE FURTHER RESEARCH

In conclusion, euphemistic expressions are inherent in many languages and cultures, and for many years they have been used in various spheres of human activity. The sharp increase of its use in the current world indicates significant changes in culture, traditions, ethics and communication specifics of modern society. Media discourse represents one of the areas where euphemistic substitutions are being actively adopted. By using euphemisms, authors can mitigate harsh statements, maintain tolerance and politeness, as well as avoid controversy or influence public opinion. Especially, the given linguistic phenomenon can be frequently observed in media texts that cover political events and the actions of political personalities. There are several linguistic strategies of euphemism formation that may be applied in political mass media texts. In this study we analised media text published by CNN and distinguished the types of the formation of euphemistic units found in the given research material. It was discovered that analogy is the most common way of forming euphemisms, with a rather noticeable advantage over deformation and borrowing. It can be stated that such rhetorical devices as metaphor, hyperbole, litotes and generalisation are frequently used by authors to soften harsh expressions and prevent unnecessary negative reactions from the audience. Our research has also shown that euphemisms created by means of circumlocution and abbreviations, which are types of deformation, as well as jargons, related to the internal borrowings, can also be traced in the texts of CNN. The analised topic related to the application of euphemisms in mass media discourse is considered to be relevant and scientifically valuable for further academic research.

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Олена Назаренко, Козел Яна. Евфемізми в мас-медійному дискурсі: вибори в США 2024. Зважаючи на глобальне прагнення суспільства до толерантності та рівноправності за віком, статтю, релігією, національністю та соціальним статусом, нині помітно зросла поширеність використання евфемізмів. Евфемізми виконують функцію пом'якшення різкого, образливого чи неприємного висловлювання з метою запобігання потенційним конфліктам, образам чи дискомфорту при обговоренні делікатних і суперечливих тем, що стосуються різних сфер суспільного життя. До того ж, використання евфемістичної мови замість грубих фраз, що мають негативне емоційне забарвлення, свідчить про колективні зусилля усвідомити складні соціальні закономірності, зберігаючи при цьому взаємну повагу та чуйність. Цей процес також можна трактувати як невід'ємну рису людської комунікації, що демонструє культурні та історичні зміни в суспільстві. Явище евфемії стало прикметною рисою англомовного мас-медійного дискурсу. За останні десятиліття, з розвитком Інтернету та телебачення, медіа є важливим чинником у формуванні громадської думки, зокрема, стосовно політичної сфери. ЗМІ є ключовим фактором політичного процесу в державі та всіх його аспектах, серед яких висвітлення глобальних політичних подій, вплив на виборчі кампанії та електорат, а також на остаточний результат виборів. Використання евфемізмів, у свою чергу, вважається одним із центральних механізмів у таких процесах, що здійснюється за допомогою ЗМІ. Завдяки евфемізмам медіа непомітно впливає на сприйняття громадськістю політичних процесів, подій, а також формує її ставлення до тих чи інших представників політичного світу. У статті окреслюється питання пов'язане з терміном «евфемізм», його дефініцією та місцем у сучасному мас-медійному дискурсі. На основі дописів про вибори в США 2024, здійснюється аналіз стратегій формування евфемістичних одиниць в англомовному медіа дискурсі та їх вплив на сприйняття тексту читачем.

Ключові слова: евфемізм; мас-медіа дискурс; політичний медіа дискурс; формування евфемізму; стратегія; політкоректна мова; медіа-тексти