

THE ROLE OF EUPHEMISMS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

РОЛЬ ЕВФЕМІЗМІВ У ПОЛІТИЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

Chetaikina V.V.,

orcid.org/0000-0003-0332-7925

Candidate of Philological Sciences,

Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages

Ivan Franko National University of Lviv,

Guest Scholar

University of Basel

The article is devoted to highlighting the role of euphemisms usage in the English political discourse. The material of the study was the speeches of the British Prime Ministers and the euphemisms which have already become "iconic" and "viral", i.e., were used a lot outside the context of their first mentioning. The study has been conducted within the framework of political linguistics. The analysis of euphemisms is relevant for understanding language, communication, power dynamics, societal attitudes, ethics, and language evolution. It offers valuable insights into the complexities of human interaction and the role of language in shaping our perceptions and beliefs. The usage of euphemisms in the speeches of British Prime Ministers serves several purposes. Firstly, euphemisms are employed to soften the impact of sensitive or controversial topics, allowing politicians to discuss them in a more palatable manner. By using less direct or harsh language, prime ministers can mitigate potential backlash or public outrage. Secondly, euphemisms are used to manipulate language and shape public perception. By choosing specific words or phrases, prime ministers can influence how certain actions or policies are perceived by the public, downplaying negative consequences or presenting them in a more positive light. Thirdly, euphemisms can be utilized to preserve diplomatic relationships or alliances. By using euphemistic language, politicians can avoid directly criticizing or offending other countries or leaders, maintaining a sense of cooperation and diplomacy. Overall, the usage of euphemisms in the speeches of British Prime Ministers reflects the complex dynamics of political communication, where language is carefully chosen and crafted to shape public perception, maintain diplomatic relationships, and navigate sensitive topics.

Key words: euphemisms, political linguistics, pragmatics, discourse.

Стаття присвячена висвітленню ролі використання евфемізмів в англійському політичному дискурсі. Матеріалом для дослідження стали виступи британських прем'єр-міністрів та евфемізми, які вже стали «культовими» та «вірусними», тобто часто використовувалися поза контекстом їх першої згадки. Дане дослідження проведено в рамках політичної лінгвістики. Аналіз евфемізмів є актуальним і важливим для розуміння мови, спілкування, динаміки влади, ставлення суспільства, етики та еволюції мови. Він пропонує цінну інформацію про складність людської взаємодії та роль мови у формуванні наших уявлень і переконань. Проведений аналіз показав, що використання евфемізмів у промовах британських прем'єр-міністрів служить кільком цілям. По-перше, евфемізми використовуються для пом'якшення впливу делікатних або суперечливих тем, дозволяючи політикам обговорювати їх у більш привабливій формі. Використовуючи менш пряму або різку мову, мовці можуть пом'якшити потенційну негативну реакцію чи громадське обурення. По-друге, евфемізми використовуються для маніпулювання мовою та формування суспільного сприйняття. Добираючи конкретні слова чи фрази, політики можуть впливати на те, як певні дії чи політика сприймаються громадськістю, применшуючи негативні наслідки або представляючи їх у більш позитивному світлі. По-третє, евфемізми можна використовувати для збереження дипломатичних відносин або союзів. Використовуючи евфемістичну мову, політики можуть уникати прямої критики або образи інших країн або лідерів, зберігаючи почуття співпраці та дипломатії. Загалом використання евфемізмів у промовах британських прем'єр-міністрів відображає складну динаміку політичної комунікації, де мовлення ретельно підібране і продумане, щоб формувати суспільне сприйняття, підтримувати дипломатичні відносини та орієнтуватися на чутливі теми.

Ключові слова: евфемізми, політична лінгвістика, прагматика, дискурс.

Problem statement. The political sphere of communication undergoes constant changes under the influence of new political events and processes. It is worth noting that the driving forces of modern politics affect not only the originality of the communication process of politicians, but also the choice of special language units that help political figures in achieving their political goals, such as euphemisms. The role of euphemisms in modern political activity should not be underestimated, because their application is not limited to the replacement of harsh or taboo

concepts, but also contributes to the implementation of pragmatic goals of communication

The study of euphemisms is relevant for several reasons. Euphemisms are a fundamental aspect of language and communication. By studying euphemisms, linguists and communication scholars can gain insights into the social and cultural dynamics of a particular community or society. Euphemisms are often used as a tool of power and manipulation in various contexts, including politics, advertising, and media. Understanding the strategies and techniques

used in the creation and dissemination of euphemisms can help individuals become more critical consumers of information and better navigate persuasive language [3; 4; 10].

Euphemisms provide valuable insights into the social and cultural attitudes towards certain topics or groups of people. The choice of specific euphemisms can reveal underlying biases, prejudices, or attempts to conceal uncomfortable truths. By analyzing euphemisms, researchers can uncover hidden meanings and societal attitudes that may not be explicitly expressed [6].

Moreover, the study of euphemisms raises important ethical and moral questions. Euphemisms can be used to soften the impact of negative actions or to avoid taking responsibility for harmful behaviors. Examining the ethical implications of euphemistic language can contribute to discussions about honesty, transparency, and accountability in various domains of society [9].

Finally, euphemisms are dynamic and ever-changing, reflecting shifts in social norms and values. Studying euphemisms can provide insights into the evolution of language and how words and phrases adapt to new cultural and social contexts. It helps researchers understand how language evolves to reflect changing attitudes and sensitivities [5].

Purpose statement. The article is dedicated to highlighting the role of euphemisms usage in the English political discourse. The material of the study was the speeches of the British prime ministers and the euphemisms which have already become “iconic” and “viral”, i.e. were used a lot outside the context of their first mentioning. The following research methods were used in the work: analysis, synthesis, systematization, contextual-interpretative method.

Research results. The need for successful communication for the development of society has long encouraged people to avoid taboo topics related to socially or morally unacceptable phenomena. It was the desire to soften or replace words with a rude or offensive meaning for the addressee that led to the emergence of euphemisms, as more appropriate expressions with a neutral meaning. Today, humanity lives in the information age of society, therefore, the scope of euphemisms is not limited to everyday topics, but is present in economic and political discourse.

Ukrainian scholar in the field of communicative linguistics Floriy Bacevich notes that linguistic pragmatics has covered a significant number of problems related to the dynamic theory of the text, the emergence of discursive analysis and the theory of discourse in general, communicative syntax, theory

and typology of speech, the theory of functional styles, socio- and psycholinguistics and other areas. In particular, the linguist singles out a complex of issues related to such components of the communication process as the interaction of the addresser and the addressee, their separate functioning, prerequisites for communication and situations [1].

The given study has been conducted within the framework of political linguistics which is highly relevant in understanding the dynamics of political communication and its impact on society. Language is a powerful tool used by politicians to shape public perception, influence opinions, and rally support. The choice of words, tone, and framing can significantly impact how policies and actions are perceived by the public. Political linguistics helps us understand how language can be used to manipulate and persuade. Politicians may employ rhetorical devices, such as euphemisms, exaggerations, or emotional appeals, to sway public opinion and advance their political agendas [2].

Language plays a crucial role in articulating political ideologies and shaping political identities. Through linguistic choices, politicians can signal their affiliation with certain ideologies or political groups, appealing to specific voter bases. Political linguistics helps us analyze the use of language in spreading misinformation and propaganda. Politicians may employ techniques such as framing, selective word choice, or euphemisms to distort facts, manipulate public opinion, or divert attention from certain issues [8].

The study of political linguistics enables us to analyze political discourses and understand the underlying power dynamics. By examining speeches, debates, or political campaigns, we can identify patterns, rhetoric strategies, and the manipulation of language for political gain. With the rise of social media and digital platforms, understanding political linguistics is crucial to analyze how language is used in online political discourse. The impact of hashtags, memes, or viral messages can significantly shape political debates and public opinion [5; 9].

Political linguistics allows for cross-cultural analysis of political communication. By comparing the language used by politicians in different countries or regions, we can gain insights into cultural differences, political systems, and societal norms [3].

Overall, political linguistics provides us with valuable insights into how language is used in political contexts, enabling us to critically analyze political communication, identify manipulation techniques, and understand the impact it has on public opinion and democratic processes.

According to a broad point of view, researchers define the concept of «euphemism» as a word or expression that serves in the appropriate conditions, situations, that is, discourse, to replace such designations, which the speaker interprets as undesirable, not quite polite, too harsh. A narrow view of the essence of this concept consists in understanding euphemism as a substitute for taboo vocabulary [7, p. 183].

Linguists, studying the functioning of euphemisms in political discourse, managed to single out such main functions of euphemisms as:

1) preventive (related to the use of euphemisms as substitutes for taboos that were formed in society as religious and social prohibitions);

2) veilative (illustrates the intention of the addressee to mask those facts from real life that he does not agree to discuss openly or to hide unacceptable political facts in order to gain political power);

3) mitigating (presupposes a certain effect on the addressee's emotional sphere, the desire of the participants in the communication process to ensure communicative cooperation and prevent the addressee from becoming anxious or dissatisfied during communication in order to maintain a favorable attitude towards the addressee);

4) elevative (allows the speaker to represent reality in an elevated and optimistic style) [4, p. 26].

It is common knowledge that British political discourse is characterized by a very high level of political correctness. Most British politicians seek to reach out to all social groups and build trusting relationships with their future constituents. In order to achieve the main political goal – to influence the consciousness, thoughts and decisions of the addressees – modern British politicians try to use euphemistic words and expressions in their speeches [9].

In view of the above, we have chosen British political discourse as a field of study of the realization of the potential of euphemisms.

«*Friendly fire*» – used by British Prime Minister Tony Blair during the Iraq War to refer to accidental attacks by one's own military forces on friendly or allied troops. This euphemism downplays the seriousness and consequences of such incidents.

By using the term «friendly fire», Blair sought to soften the impact of the tragic events and avoid direct responsibility for the lives lost. The euphemism implies that the incident was a regrettable accident rather than a grave error or failure in military operations.

«*Special relationship*» – often used by British Prime Ministers when referring to the close

diplomatic ties between the United Kingdom and the United States.

This euphemism is used to emphasize the historically strong alliance and partnership between the two countries. It serves to create a positive image of the relationship, downplaying any potential conflicts or disagreements that may exist.

«*Surgical strikes*» – used by British Prime Minister David Cameron during military interventions to describe targeted and precise attacks on specific enemy targets.

The term «surgical strikes» is a euphemism that presents military actions as precise and controlled, suggesting minimal collateral damage and civilian casualties. This language is used to create a perception of precision and effectiveness while downplaying the potential human cost and destruction caused by such strikes.

«*Economic downturn*» – used by British Prime Ministers to refer to periods of economic recession or decline.

This euphemism is employed to soften the negative impact of economic crises and avoid using more alarming terms like «recession» or «depression». It may be used to downplay the severity of the situation or to maintain public confidence in economic policies.

«*Enhanced interrogation techniques*» – used by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and others to refer to controversial interrogation methods such as waterboarding.

This euphemism is used to mask the harsh and potentially inhumane nature of the techniques employed. By using the term «enhanced interrogation techniques», proponents sought to present these methods as legitimate and effective, rather than acknowledging them as forms of torture.

«*Collateral damage*» – used by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during the Falklands War to refer to unintended civilian casualties resulting from military operations.

This euphemism is used to minimize the human cost of war by framing civilian deaths as an unfortunate side effect rather than a direct consequence of military actions.

«*Efficiency savings*» – used by British Prime Ministers to refer to budget cuts or reductions in government spending.

This euphemism is employed to present austerity measures in a more positive light, suggesting that the cuts are aimed at making government operations more efficient rather than acknowledging the potential negative impact on public services.

«*Managed migration*» – used by British Prime Ministers to refer to immigration policies and

controls. This euphemism is used to convey the idea that immigration is being carefully regulated and controlled, presenting it as a managed and planned process rather than acknowledging the political controversies and debates surrounding immigration.

«*Friendly persuasion*» – used by British Prime Minister John Major to refer to diplomatic negotiations and attempts to influence other countries.

This euphemism is used to soften the concept of diplomatic pressure or influence, suggesting a more cooperative and amicable approach to international relations.

«*Strategic withdrawal*» – used by British Prime Ministers to refer to the gradual reduction or withdrawal of military forces from a conflict zone. This euphemism is used to downplay the notion of retreating or pulling out from a conflict, presenting it as a strategic decision rather than admitting defeat or acknowledging difficulties.

These examples demonstrate how euphemisms are used in political speeches to shape perceptions, soften the impact of certain actions or policies, and manipulate language to convey a specific message.

Thus, due to the repeated usage, the analyzed euphemisms can be called trite ones. Trite euphemisms are overused or cliché phrases that are used to replace or soften words or phrases that may be considered harsh, offensive, or uncomfortable. They are often used in political discourse to manipulate or obscure the true meaning of a statement.

Conclusions. The study of euphemisms is relevant for understanding language, communication, power dynamics, societal attitudes, ethics, and language evolution. It offers

valuable insights into the complexities of human interaction and the role of language in shaping our perceptions and beliefs.

In conclusion, the usage of euphemisms in the speeches of British Prime Ministers serves several purposes. Firstly, euphemisms are employed to soften the impact of sensitive or controversial topics, allowing politicians to discuss them in a more palatable manner. By using less direct or harsh language, prime ministers can mitigate potential backlash or public outrage. Secondly, euphemisms are used to manipulate language and shape public perception. By choosing specific words or phrases, prime ministers can influence how certain actions or policies are perceived by the public, downplaying negative consequences or presenting them in a more positive light. Thirdly, euphemisms can be utilized to preserve diplomatic relationships or alliances. By using euphemistic language, prime ministers can avoid directly criticizing or offending other countries or leaders, maintaining a sense of cooperation and diplomacy.

However, the usage of euphemisms in political speeches raises ethical concerns. Euphemisms can be seen as a form of deception or obfuscation, obscuring the true nature of actions or policies. They can also contribute to a lack of transparency and accountability in government.

Overall, the usage of euphemisms in the speeches of British Prime Ministers reflects the complex dynamics of political communication, where language is carefully crafted to shape public perception, maintain diplomatic relationships, and navigate sensitive topics.

REFERENCES:

1. Бацевич Ф. С. Основи комунікативної лінгвістики. К.: ВЦ "Академія", 2004. 344 с.
2. Кондратенко Н.В. Український політичний дискурс: монографія: / Одес. нац. ун-т ім. І.І. Мечникова. Одеса: Чорномор'я. 2007. С. 150–155.
3. Кузнєцова Г.В. Адресат політичного дискурсу: стан вивчення й перспективи дослідження. *Актуальні питання іноземної філології: наук. Журнал*. 2019. № 10. С. 176–181.
4. Макеєвець Ю. Семантика та функціонування евфемізмів у німецькому політичному дискурсі (на матеріалі сучасної преси). *Іноземна філологія*. 2013. № 125. С. 22–28.
5. Мартинюк А. П. Словник основних термінів когнітивно-дискурсивної лінгвістики. Х.: ХНУ імені В. Н. Каразіна, 2011. 196 с.
6. Селіванова О. Сучасна лінгвістика: термінологічна енциклопедія. Полтава: Довкілля-К, 2006. 716 с.
7. Сковронська І., Юськів Б. Явище евфемізації у відображенні комунікативного принципу толерантності українців. *Knowledge. Education. Law. Management*. 2019. № 3-4 (27/28). С. 182–198.
8. Славова Л. Л. Комунікативні стратегії та тактики у сучасному масмедійному політичному дискурсі: зіставний аспект (на матеріалі українських та американських Інтернет-джерел). *Вісник Житомирського державного університету імені Івана Франка*. 2006. № 27. С. 116–117.
9. Geis M. L. *The Language of politics*. NY. etc.: Springer Verl., 1987. 189 p.
10. Joslyn R. *Keeping Politics in the Study of Political Discourse*. Columbia (S. Car.), 1986. 400 p.