

COGNITIVE AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL EUPHEMISMS IN MODERN ENGLISH DISCOURSE

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Annotation. *This article examines the cognitive and pragmatic dimensions of phraseological euphemisms in modern English discourse. Euphemisms serve as linguistic tools that soften direct expressions, helping speakers maintain politeness and social harmony. From a cognitive perspective, euphemisms reflect mental representations and conceptual metaphors underlying thought processes, while pragmatically, they demonstrate strategic language use in various communicative contexts. The study explores how phraseological euphemisms operate in media, politics, and everyday communication to convey sensitivity, mitigate offense, and preserve social face. It also analyzes their role in shaping cultural norms and collective cognition. Through this lens, euphemisms are understood not only as stylistic features but also as significant cognitive-pragmatic mechanisms within modern English communication.*

Key words: *euphemism, cognition, pragmatics, phraseology, discourse, conceptual metaphor, communication, politeness, semantics, language use, culture, context, perception.*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary linguistics, the study of euphemisms has attracted increasing attention due to their multidimensional role in human communication. Euphemisms, particularly phraseological ones, are not mere lexical substitutions but complex linguistic constructs that reflect cognitive, social, and pragmatic mechanisms. They function as linguistic devices allowing individuals to express unpleasant or socially sensitive ideas in an acceptable manner. In modern English, euphemisms permeate everyday discourse, political speeches, media reports, and interpersonal communication, illustrating the intricate relationship between language, thought, and society. Cognitive linguistics interprets euphemisms as manifestations of conceptual metaphors and mental frames that reveal how people perceive and categorize taboo concepts. Pragmatic analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the speaker's intention, context, and communicative effect of euphemistic expressions. For instance, expressions like "pass away" instead of "die" or "correctional facility" instead of "prison", reflect both cognitive reframing and pragmatic politeness. These linguistic strategies reveal the speaker's awareness of social conventions and the cognitive processes guiding language choice. Therefore, exploring the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of phraseological euphemisms provides valuable

insights into how English speakers conceptualize sensitive realities and how language functions as a tool of both cognition and interaction within modern discourse.

MAIN PART

Phraseological euphemisms constitute a fascinating linguistic phenomenon in modern English, combining elements of phraseology, semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics. They are not isolated lexical items but stable word combinations that have acquired figurative meanings used to mask, soften, or mitigate direct references to uncomfortable realities. From a cognitive perspective, phraseological euphemisms mirror mental operations that enable individuals to restructure reality through linguistic conceptualization. From a pragmatic standpoint, they serve communicative purposes that align with politeness, indirectness, and social tact. Thus, the study of phraseological euphemisms provides a comprehensive understanding of how linguistic, cognitive, and cultural mechanisms intersect in English communication.

Cognitive linguistics postulates that language is a reflection of thought and that euphemisms emerge from conceptual metaphors shaping human cognition. According to Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, euphemisms arise when abstract or socially restricted domains are mapped onto more neutral or positive conceptual structures. For example, the expression "to pass away" metaphorically conceptualizes death as a form of movement or transition, thereby reducing emotional tension. Similarly, phrases such as "downsizing the company" for "firing employees" or "friendly fire" for "accidental attack" illustrate cognitive re-framing through metaphorical transfer. These phraseological euphemisms allow speakers to maintain a positive worldview and avoid direct confrontation with unpleasant truths. Cognitive mechanisms of euphemism formation often rely on metaphor, metonymy, and generalization, which all contribute to creating new conceptual associations that align with social acceptability.

Pragmatically, euphemisms are employed as strategic linguistic choices that maintain politeness, prevent face-threatening acts, and sustain social harmony. According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, speakers use euphemistic expressions to protect both their own and their interlocutors' social face. In institutional and public discourse, such as media and politics, euphemisms often function as tools of manipulation and persuasion. Political euphemisms like "collateral damage" for "civilian casualties," or "enhanced interrogation techniques" for "torture", exemplify deliberate attempts to obscure reality while maintaining an appearance of propriety. These phraseological forms not only reflect pragmatic intentions but also reveal the cognitive framing of socio-political issues in collective consciousness. The pragmatic aspect of euphemism thus lies in its dual capacity to conceal and to reveal meaning simultaneously managing

interpretation through context and inference. From the perspective of discourse analysis, euphemisms contribute to shaping communicative tone and ideological framing. In journalistic discourse, for instance, phraseological euphemisms are used to align narratives with cultural values or institutional interests. Terms like “economically disadvantaged” or “special needs” exemplify how discourse shapes perception and mitigates potential offense. Cognitive linguists interpret such expressions as linguistic evidence of how thought is socially constructed through repeated conceptual metaphors. Pragmatically, these euphemisms establish a shared communicative norm where sensitivity and politeness are prioritized over blunt factuality.

In everyday interpersonal communication, phraseological euphemisms perform psychological and emotional functions. They help speakers navigate sensitive topics such as illness, death, unemployment, or moral failings without causing discomfort. For example, expressions like “to be between jobs” or “to have a bad habit” are more socially acceptable than “unemployed” or “addicted”. Cognitively, these euphemisms demonstrate how individuals manage emotional distance through conceptualization. Pragmatically, they illustrate the cooperative principle in action, where speakers choose language that aligns with social expectations and emotional empathy. In this sense, euphemisms serve as linguistic buffers between individual cognition and collective morality. Furthermore, the role of phraseological euphemisms in shaping cultural identity is significant. English-speaking cultures, particularly in Western societies, emphasize privacy, politeness, and social tact, which contribute to the proliferation of euphemistic phraseology. The conceptualization of sensitive realities through euphemisms thus mirrors cultural models of behavior and collective psychology. For instance, the euphemistic expression “senior citizen” instead of “old person” reflects not only linguistic politeness but also cultural attitudes toward aging. This interaction between language and culture underscores the cognitive-pragmatic unity of euphemisms: they are both reflections of thought patterns and instruments of social regulation.

In institutional discourse, particularly in business and education, euphemistic phraseology serves bureaucratic and motivational functions. Terms like “performance improvement plan” or “learning opportunity” reframe potentially negative events into constructive ones. Pragmatically, such expressions aim to preserve motivation and cooperation, while cognitively they modify conceptual understanding. This duality illustrates the essence of euphemisms as cognitive-pragmatic constructs: they embody the mental strategies and communicative norms of society. Moreover, euphemisms evolve dynamically, adapting to new social realities, technological developments, and ideological shifts. Modern English euphemisms increasingly appear in digital

communication, where indirectness and politeness intersect with brevity and irony. Phrases like “content moderation” instead of “censorship” or “data adjustment” instead of “deletion” reflect this ongoing linguistic evolution.

Ultimately, the study of phraseological euphemisms in modern English reveals their integrative nature. They cannot be reduced to mere lexical replacements; rather, they embody the interdependence of cognition, pragmatics, and culture. Cognitive linguistics explains their internal structure through conceptual metaphor and categorization, while pragmatics highlights their social functionality and communicative relevance. The pragmatic use of euphemisms depends on context, speaker intention, and audience interpretation, making them essential indicators of linguistic competence and cultural awareness. Through phraseological euphemisms, English speakers manage social relationships, construct cultural meanings, and maintain cognitive balance between reality and expression. Therefore, they remain a vital field of inquiry in contemporary linguistic research, offering insights into the ways human beings think, feel, and communicate through language.

CONCLUSION

The cognitive and pragmatic study of phraseological euphemisms in modern English demonstrates that euphemisms are far more than stylistic ornaments they are dynamic linguistic mechanisms reflecting thought and social interaction. From a cognitive perspective, they reveal the metaphorical and conceptual structures that shape human understanding of sensitive or taboo subjects. Pragmatically, they function as communicative strategies designed to maintain politeness, avoid conflict, and adapt discourse to social expectations. The coexistence of these two aspects confirms that euphemisms play a central role in organizing linguistic behavior and cultural expression. Their usage across different domains from media to daily speech illustrates the constant interaction between cognition, context, and communication. Thus, euphemisms remain not only an essential linguistic phenomenon but also a window into the mental and social processes that underlie human communication in the modern English-speaking world.

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