

NATIONAL–CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF EUPHEMISMS

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The goal of this work is to detect national-cultural specificity of euphemisms in the English and Kazakh languages. We use comparative method allowing to identify national-cultural specificity of euphemisms. The study showed that principal differences between euphemisms in the English and Kazakh languages consist in different types of motivation in each of the languages under consideration, which, in its turn, is caused by extralinguistic factors: 1) religion; 2) social environment; 3) political situation; 4) geographical position; 5) lifestyle, etc.

The novelty of the study is the undertaken approach to euphemisms. It has been traditionally considered that only such language units as nationally biased units, fixed phrases, proverbs, sayings and some speech patterns have national-cultural specificity. However, analysis of language material shows that stylistically marked units, including such stylistic phenomenon as euphemism, also has high national and cultural potential. Cross-culture analysis of language material shows that euphemisms in the English and Kazakh languages originate from different sources and have significantly different types of motivation.

Key words: euphemism, national-cultural specificity, motivation, extralinguistic factors, linguistic worldview.

INTRODUCTION

Various researchers (A.A. Potebnya, W. Humboldt, E. Benveniste, M. Heidegger, Yu. Apresyan, N. Arutyunova, A. Zaliznyak, E. Rakhilina, A.D. Shmelyov) pointed out the heterogeneity of the elements of the worldview, many of them distinguish between the core of the worldview and peripheral areas. According to G.A. Brutyan, who developed a hypothesis of linguistic complementarity, the core of linguistic worldviews is the same in different languages, while peripheral, unmatched areas compose national-cultural specificity (Brutyan, 1976. – P. 58-64).

Study of language phenomena from the point of view of their national-cultural specificity suggests examining the correlation between language and culture, issues of various categorisation of the reality (non-identity of reality “portioning” in different languages) and issues of language influence on people’s behaviour (influence of activity patterns categorised in verbal form and existing in the form of intellectual operations on relevant activity). Representatives of different ethno-cultural community perceive the social realm differently, categorisation of facts and course of events of the real world can be various for different nations, which is related to specifics of life activity of a particular nation and to the existence of certain stereotypes determining the processes of perception and interpretation.

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METHODS

It has been traditionally considered that only such language units as nationally biased units, fixed phrases, proverbs, sayings and some speech patterns have national-cultural specificity. However, the conducted analysis of language material shows that stylistically marked units, including such stylistic devices as metaphors, allusions, antonomasia, euphemisms, also have high national and cultural potential.

Analysis of national-cultural specificity is mainly based on comparative analysis of both related languages and languages with different structure. Comparison of vocabulary of related languages and languages with different structure suggests describing this level in each language by the same criteria. Therefore, first of all, a researcher needs factual material for adequate comparison.

Analysis of language material detects similarity between euphemisms in the English and Kazakh languages: in linguistic mechanism of euphemism formation, in typology of euphemisms, etc. However, in addition to similar (isomorphic) characteristics there are also distinctive (allomorphic) features in each of the languages under consideration. We stress once again that distinctive features are the ones composing national-cultural specificity.

The goal of this article is to detect and identify national-cultural specificity of euphemisms in the English languages using the material of the Kazakh language. The principal and the most productive method of studying the culture is comparing it with other cultures and languages, using intercultural contrast, cross-cultural analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Analysis of language material shows that euphemisms in the English and Kazakh languages originate from different sources and have significantly different types of motivation.
2. Our research has shown that euphemisms are based on moral and social standards of a particular society.
3. Moral and social standards depend on such factors as: a) religion practiced; b) social environment; c) political situation; d) geographical position, etc.
4. Language units of national-cultural specificity are detected within the process of comparative analysis of different languages and cultures.

DISCUSSION

One of the distinctive sources of motivation is race issue. Anti-racist movement emerged in the end of the 20th century as a result of powerful cultural and behavioural and language trend which was called “political correctness”. As Ter-Minasova notes, “this trend was born as a result of “revolt” of the Africans who were disturbed by “racism of the English language” and demanded its “deracialization” (Ter-

Minasova, 2000, P. 215). The phenomenon of political correctness is mainly associated with restriction on the use of a particular word or phrase in a particular situation. In our work such euphemisms are called ethnic euphemisms. Many words which had been used before are considered unacceptable and insulting by supporters of political correctness (Burrige, 1996; Beard H., Cerf C., 1993).

For instance, the word *Negro* is replaced with ***member of African Diaspora, person of black race***. It is known that there are a great number of Latin American expatriates in the USA. “In 1970s a term for Latin Americans was created - *Hispanics*. However, many people avoid using this term, as *Hispanics* is often associated with poor people who had not assimilated well with new conditions” (Allen, 1990, p.73). Such variants as ***Latino/Latina, Chicano/Chicana, Spanish American*** are suggested instead of *Hispanics*.

People also protest against the use of politically incorrect adjective *Oriental* and replace it with a neutral ***Asian***. The word *Jew* acquired its negative connotation long ago, as it was often used in such phrases as *dirty Jew, Jew boy, Jew store* and verbs *to jew, to jew down* – meaning to haggle, to cheat – and is now replaced with a phrase ***Jewish person***.

The reason for the absence of ethnic euphemisms in the Kazakh language is the absence of racial oppression. “Significance of historical experience, mind, will, desire, communication culture of each side, their inner peculiarities, interest are highly important for this process, since such relations and connections are not formed at once. One also should not underestimate emotional aspects which can include different variants – from the feeling of fellowship and friendship to fomentation of nationalistic and extremist passions. Being a flexible religion, Islam skilfully adapted to demands of multilingual nations. The main postulate of Islamic religion itself, the Koran, emphasises such universal values as ethical and moral portrait of man and society, which is also stressed in Hadiths” (Soliyeva, 1994, P. 32-33).

In addition to euphemisms replacing the rude and the shameful with the acceptable, in oral speech there also appear dysphemisms. The function of dysphemisms is to replace a neutral word with a rude and insulting one. Let us look at the examples from the English language: *pickaninny, nigger, Uncle Tom, blackbird, black pigs, black sheep* (black person); *frog, froggy, Frog eater* (French); *Germ, Germy, Kraut, Heinie, Hun, Jerry* (German); *Mick, Paddy, Irisher* (Irish); *Mafiosi* (Italian); *Jap, Nip, slant, slope, yap, zip* (Japanese); *Mex, taco, tamale, greaser, bean eater, chili eater* (Mexican); *squaw* (Indian); *zebra* (one of the parents is black); *Black Muslim* (Muslim); *Pagan* (no religion), etc.

Another group of euphemisms is related to Western feministic movement. In the beginning of the 20th century there were no words for gender discrimination yet. In 1960s activists of the women movement started to use the word combination *male chauvinism*. In a decade people started calling the English language sexist as

there are more masculine than feminine forms in it, which resulted in a number of linguistic changes. For instance, compound words with *-man* component were changed. Instead of traditional *cameraman*, *policeman* there appeared such terms as *camera operator*, *firefighter*, *police officer*. Such group of euphemisms is not found in the vocabulary of the Uzbek language, which can be explained by traditions of the East, in particular, obedient and respectful attitude of women towards men. Religious principles and upbringing traditions in the Uzbek family require deep respect of women to men: fathers, husbands, sons.

Increased requirements for politeness caused by the growing culture of consumption generated a wide range of advertisement euphemisms in the English language – the ones used in the language of advertising. Analysis of existing language material finds quite a number of advertisement euphemisms in the English language and none in the Kazakh language. For one thing, this can be explained by highly-developed market relations in the West and relatively recent transition to market economy in this country. Development of market relations has led to the emergence of the culture of consumption where consumers, their desires, demands, etc., are what is the most important. Being a significant factor of market economy, advertising created “its own language”, “its own texts”. The only goal of an advertisement is to sell! If an advertisement “does not sell”, even the greatest text is useless.

Technically, an advertising copy should: 1) attract the attention of an uninterested reader (with the help of the heading); 2) make readers want to start reading the text (with the help of the subheading, intermediate headings, different types of setting off). It is very important that the reader sees the readability of the text; 3) be interesting enough for the reader to read it in full.

It is known that one of the functions of euphemism is embellishment or exaggeration of some qualities, activities, phenomenon, etc. In this context euphemisms are widely and successfully used in advertising business:

“A salesperson for carpet said he got more business if he told perspective customers that their carpets were heavily soiled. If he told them that their rugs were dirty, he almost always lost the sale” (Myers G, 1994).

In this case the word *dirty* is replaced with a euphemism *heavily soiled*. Carpet seller understands the psychology of a customer and thus uses the lexeme *soil*, which, being synonymous to the lexeme *dirty*, however, does not have negative connotations of the lexeme *dirty*. This can be proved by Roget’s Thesaurus (Roget’s Thesaurus of English Words and phrases, 2012). The word *dirty* has the following associations: *black*, *impure*, *defiling*, *stain*, *nasty*, *muck*, *blot*, *excrements*, *dirty person*, *dirty thoughts*. The word *soiled* is associated with the following images: *begrime*, *stain*, *blot*, *sully*, *tarnish*, *muck*, *spot*, *smutch*, *glebe*, *farmland*, *pasture*.

A foreigner in the USA once remarked that in the US there are no “small” eggs, only “medium”, “large”, “extra-large” and “jumbo” (The Sunday Times, 29 June, 1980).

In this example the word *small* is replaced with *medium*, the word large is replaced with *extra-large* and *jumbo* (after a huge elephant brought to Texas. Texas, in its turn, is nicknamed *Jumbo state*). Washing powder is sold in three types of packs: small, medium, and instead of terrifying *large*, more pleasant *family* is used. Even sizes of tooth brushes are named very carefully: *for small teeth, for standard teeth*, and the next size is *for regular teeth* since English-speakers do not have big teeth – this does not correspond to the idea of a beautiful face. There are also no *big* or *large* packs of cigarettes, which would be too straightforward. A pack of cigarettes can be of *King Size*.

The next example is an advertisement of a medicine for weight reduction: “Who said that you are fat? No, you are *well-fed!*”. To attract or rather not to push away such customers as plus size women, shop owners and managers show inventiveness and make their signboards nice and welcome: *BIB* (abbreviation for *Big Is Beautiful*); *Renoire Collection*.

It is interesting to note that in this case both the word replaced and the euphemism replacing it are used. It is a stylistic function of opposition of the words with positive and negative evaluation.

Beside the above-mentioned euphemisms, this group also includes ones which can be used in the description of goods to attract clients’ attention: *real, genuine, natural leather*, such words as *artificial* or *synthetic* are not used in the description of clothes or shoes in the English language.

However, consumers are not always satisfied with advertised products, for instance, fruit and vegetables which can be stored for a long time without rotting are the result of genetic engineering. Development of genetic engineering in the medical field has resulted in a great number of euphemisms. The issue of consequences of consuming genetically modified food remains unsolved in genetic engineering. Disagreements emerged, and as a result there were people who either supported or were against the mass use of such products. Opponents try to conceal its negative essence, at the same time making a hint about the real nature of such food: *food for thought, seeds of discontent = “F” food* (from “Frankenstein”) instead of *genetically modified food*. The following article appeared in a newspaper: “Another part of the blame, however, lies with an author who died a century and a half ago – Mary Shelly. In the figures of Frankenstein and his creature she managed to create images so powerful that they have haunted medical biology through the headlines for decades. Transplant surgery, in vitro fertilization and the genetically modified bacteria used to produce a number of drugs have all in their days been seen as unnatural, sheleyesque abominations. In these cases researchers were able to exercise relevant by proving the value and safety of their work. In the minds of many, the genetic modification of crops has yet to do that. Only when no writer would dream of using “F” word in an article about it, with the technology truly have been accepted.” (The Star, 4 January, 2003).

Mary Shelley, author of a fantastic novel *Frankenstein*, is not mentioned by accident. Shelley's ideas of the 18th century are implemented today and are called "**F**" *food*.

The next group of words is euphemisms related to "low-prestige" professions. "Professional" euphemisms are quite typical of Americans. In one of her works E. Munatayeva notes that "Americans are very emotional, cheerful and very optimistic. They like to embellish everything they do, they create bright names for their activities so as to stand out of the crowd" (Munatayeva, P.186-190). A great number of euphemisms in the contemporary English language appear in the area of job names.

Specificity of certain professions results in such euphemisms which we call "professional euphemisms" in our work. Their direct naming units may sound insulting for representatives of such professions. Almost all *press-agents* in the USA became *public relations counsels* or *contact managers*, *tree trimmers* became *tree surgeons*; gardeners were replaced with *landscape architects*; *cobblers* with *shourebuilders*. In one of the magazines a reporter writes: "*Business titles are given in America more readily than in England. A dentist is called a doctor. ... I reached the extreme at a theatre in Boston? When I wanted something, I was told that I must apply to the chief of the ushers. Growing interested I examined my programme, with the following result: It is not a large theatre but it has a press-representative, a treasurer (box-office clerk), an assistant treasurer (box-office junior clerk), a head-electrician, a master of properties, a leader of the orchestra*" (Newsweek, July 3, 2000). Emergence of such euphemisms is a result of economic expansion in America in the beginning of the 20th century. This time exhibits a tendency to enrichment of the vocabulary, to development of speech culture and linguistic behaviour. Names of common and everyday positions are in fact replaced with more bright and impressive naming units: *bill-sticker* with *chief lithographer* or *lithographic engineer*, *tractor driver* with *caterpillar-engineer*, *beautician* with *appearance engineer*. It should be noted that this tendency to ennobling some professions is now replaced with another, absolutely contrary one – positive names of some professions are replaced with negative ones, this process is called dysphemisation. For example, agriculture workers and small scale farmers are called *apple knockers* (disparaging phrase meaning *farmer*), *clodhopper*. The word *lawyer* has acquired a negative meaning, so today a really experienced lawyer prefers to be called an *attorney*. Its disparaging meaning is particularly obvious in compound words, such as *armchair lawyer*, *barracks lawyer*. All such phrases imply professional incompetence of lawyers.

Analysis of the language material of showed no similar units (professional euphemisms and dysphemisms) in the Kazakh language.

Further analysis shows that there are euphemisms in the Kazakh language which have no analogues in the English language. The most wide-spread ones are

euphemisms which appeared as a result of tabooed personal names. This taboo prohibits using the name of a relative (husband, father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law). Euphemisms for relatives represent a highly significant factor – factor of respect. For instance, in some regions a wife still cannot call her husband by his name. Unless they have a child, a wife and a husband call each other *ей, еу* (*ey, eu*) (*lit.* Hey, oh); after they have a child they use the words *анасы* (*apasi*), *отағасы* (*otagasi*) or the name of their firstborn.

Instead of the word *ep* they use *қожайын* (*qojain*) (*lit.* owner), *байеке* (*bayeke*) (*lit.* rich), *төре* (*tore*) (*lit.* master), *жәке* (*jake*) (*lit.* man), *күйеу* (*ku eu*) (*lit.* son-in-law), *жолдас* (*zholdas*) (*lit.* friend), *өмірлік серік* (*omirlik serik*) (*lit.* life friend), *зайып* (*zayıp*) (*lit.* living together, spouse), *жезде* (*zhezde*) (*lit.* son-in-law), *үйдің үлкені* (*uidin ulkeni*) (*lit.* head of family), *қосақ* (*qosaq*) (*lit.* friend, companion).

The following words are used instead of the word *қатын* (*qatin*) (wife): *әйел* (*ael*) (woman), *балалар* (*balalar*) (children), *адал* (*adal*) (lawful), *жанұя* (*zhaniya*), *отбасы* (*otbasi*) (family), *өмір серігі* (*omir serigi*) (*lit.* life partner), *жұбы* (*zhubi*) (*lit.* couple), *қалындық* (*qalindik*) (young), *жұбай* (*zhubay*) (*lit.* female friend). A dysphemism *жастықтас* (*zhastiktas*) (*lit.* sharing the pillow) is often used in spoken language.

Young women give other names to brothers and sisters of their husbands. They call them according to their status in the family: *үлкен бала* (*ulken bala*) (elder child), *ортаншы бала* (*ortanshi bala*) (middle), *кенжетай бала* (*kenjetay bala*) (younger child), the same names are used for girls. They can also be called by their profession: *мұғалім* (*mugalim*) (teacher), *шебер* (*sheber*) (master), etc.; they are also called by their special features: *Тәж* (*Taji*) (*lit.* wreath), *Анар* (*Anar*) (*lit.* birthmark), *Артық* (*Artiq*) (*lit.* unnecessary), etc. It is also prohibited to call parents-in-law by their names, they can be called like the wife's own parents: *ана* (*apa*), *ене* (*yene*), *ата* (*ata*), etc.

Euphemisms for some pieces of clothing were detected in the Kazakh language. As a result of specific, oriental way of life, religion, traditions, everyday life, there appeared language units replacing some pieces of clothing, such as: *көкірекше* (*kokirekshe*), *омырау жанқыш* (*omirau zhaqiqish*), *иш киім* (*ish kiyim*), *қос тақия* (*qos taqiya*) (dysphemism) are used for *bra*, *дамбал* (*dambal*) for trousers, underpants.

According to superstitions of the Kazakhs, you cannot use names of some animals, especially predators, so such naming units were replaced with descriptive phrases, which, as they believed, helped people to avoid such animals: *бөрі* (*bori*) – *қасқыр* (*qasqir*), *ит-құс* (*it-qus*); poisonous stinging insects: *шаян* (*shayan*) – *атсыз* (*atsiz*) (nameless), *бес буын* (*bes buin*) (consisting of five parts), *айыр құйрық* (*ayir quiriq*) (with a forked tail). Particular attention should be paid to euphemisms replacing the word *snake*, for example, with verbs *мию* (*tiyu*), *шағу* (*shagu*) (sting). Snakes are the reptiles the name of which was rarely said aloud, for this reason there appeared a great number of euphemisms: *ұзын құрт* (*uzin qurt*) (long worm), *құрт* (*qurt*) (worm).

CONCLUSION

As a result, the conducted analysis allows us to draw the following conclusion: differences between euphemisms in the English and the Kazakh languages are primarily caused by different types of motivation in each of the languages under consideration, which, in its turn, is conditioned by extralinguistic factors: 1) religion;

2) social environment; 3) political situation; 4) geographical position; 5) lifestyle, etc.

Specific features of euphemisation do not only indicate that linguistic means for reflection of the reality in language and speech are specifically chosen, but also show national-cultural specificity of each of the languages under consideration.

Detecting and identifying specific features is conditioned by conceptual areas of use of euphemisms in the English and the Kazakh languages.

The conducted comparative analysis of euphemisms showed national-cultural specifics of euphemisms in the English and the Kazakh languages. Detecting and identifying specific features is mainly conditioned by conceptual areas of use of euphemisms in the English and the Kazakh languages. In accordance with it, the following types of euphemisms were found in the English language: 1) ethnic euphemisms and dysphemisms; 2) feministic euphemisms; 3) professional euphemisms; 4) advertising euphemisms. In the Kazakh language we found the following euphemisms: 1) euphemisms for relatives and everyday life; 2) euphemisms associated with naming units of some pieces of clothing; 3) euphemisms for names of reptiles and stinging insects.

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