

THE ROLE OF EUPHEMISMS IN LITERARY SPEECH

(A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LITERARY WORKS OF GEORGE ORWELL, JANE AUSTEN, ASKAD MUKHTAR, AND MUHAMMAD YUSUF)

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Abstract

Euphemia is a significant stylistic device that enables authors to control the expressiveness of a text. Its use helps to soften harsh formulations, reveal the social and psychological characteristics of characters, avoid taboo topics, and create additional layers of meaning (subtext).

Keywords: Euphemia, euphemization, euphemisms, tonality, linguopoetics, modal meanings, presupposition, intonation, pauses, omission, ellipsis, subtext, speech stylization.

Introduction

In literature, euphemisms serve as a tool for creating a particular atmosphere and tonality within a literary work, reflecting the subtlety and delicacy of the author's intention. They help reveal the inner world of characters, their social status, level of education, and system of values. Furthermore, "euphemisms can be used to stylize the speech of characters, reflecting their social position, professional affiliation, or worldview, as well as to overcome censorship restrictions and address taboo topics" [L.P. Krysin, 2004].

It follows that euphemization, as a stylistic tool, provides authors with multifaceted possibilities. It not only allows them to soften the intensity of statements but also enables them to reveal the social and psychological nature of characters, circumvent existing taboos, and introduce hidden meanings into the text [Sattarova, 2023]. In literary works, euphemisms perform an important function in creating mood and tonality, emphasizing the delicacy and sophistication of the narrative. Through them, the feelings of characters, their upbringing, and interpersonal relationships are



revealed. The author's strategy of euphemization is also aimed at stylizing the character's speech portrait, which helps convey their social background, profession, or mental attitudes. Finally, euphemisms serve as a means of overcoming censorship barriers and addressing taboo subjects.

Euphemization was particularly relevant in the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when direct descriptions of sex, death, illness, and other "embarrassing" topics were subject to social or cultural restrictions. Sometimes, excessive use of euphemisms becomes a subject of irony, as authors ridicule social conventions and the false politeness of society.

George Orwell, in 1984, demonstrates the extremes of euphemization in political discourse: the "Ministry of Love" is, in reality, a place of torture and interrogation.

The words "osvobodit'sya" ("to be relieved") and "razreshit'sya" ("to be delivered") in the meaning of "to give birth" occur relatively frequently in literary works, as they are euphemisms that allow authors to avoid directly referring to the process of childbirth.

Authors of literary works use such euphemized expressions and substitute words in order to avoid naming things directly. Childbirth was often regarded as an intimate and, to some extent, shameful matter; therefore, more polite and indirect expressions were used. The use of the euphemisms "osvobodit'sya" and "razreshit'sya" was considered a manifestation of respect for women and their condition.

In addition to literary works, these words can also be found in historical documents, letters, and memoirs.

The euphemistic verbs "razreshit'sya (ot bremeni)" ("to be delivered of the burden") and "osvobodit'sya" ("to be relieved") were widely used in Russian aristocratic correspondence, memoirs, church parish registers, and official chronicles from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. The use of these expressions was dictated by strict etiquette-based restrictions against the direct nomination of the process of childbirth in secular and public discourse. These substitutes combined a delicate attitude toward women with the solemn formality characteristic of official style.

This is illustrated by both literary texts and historical documents of the period: "Seven months after the wedding, Princess Shestova was safely delivered of an heir..." [N. E. Geinze, V Tyne Advokatury, 1893]; "Her Imperial Majesty the Empress [Alexandra Feodorovna] was delivered of a son, the heir-tsesarevich... Alexei" (official announcement, 1904).

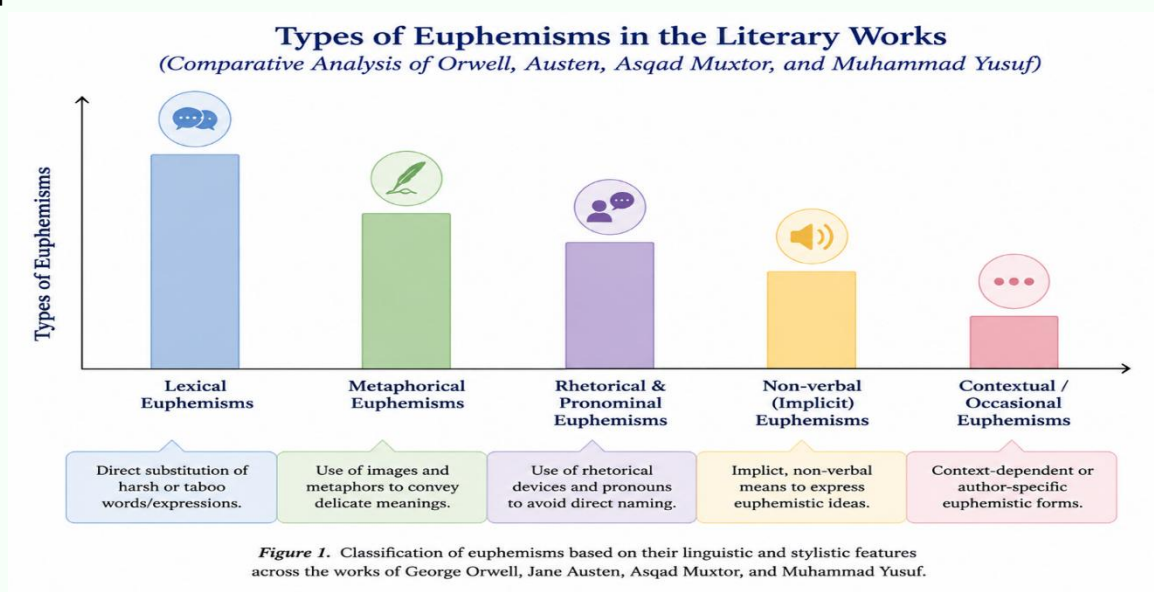
Thus, these speech formulas functioned as regulators of social norms, harmoniously combining the requirements of professional ethics (medical and legal) with the conventions of secular politeness.

In terms of expressiveness, imagery, and originality, two types can be distinguished within speech euphemisms: **1) individual euphemisms and 2) occasional euphemisms**.

This type of euphemism is not widespread and may not even be commonly heard. These are “untouched,” “undisclosed,” and potential linguistic means that introduce such modal meanings into individual speech as expressiveness, attractiveness, imagery, and unexpected surprise.

A special category in linguopoetics is represented by **individual authorial euphemisms**. Unlike commonly used euphemisms, they possess a high degree of expressiveness, novelty, and unexpectedness, performing not only a masking function but also an aesthetic one.

In Uzbek poetry, expressive euphemistic images of this kind include: “U bahorda ketdi, seni yig‘latib...” (“He left in spring, leaving you in tears...”) – a metaphorical representation of death as a departure during the season of blossoming gardens [Asqad Muxtor, poems from *Sizga aytar so‘zim*]; “Bir qizga ikki bor ‘yor-yor’ bo‘lmasin” (“Let ‘yor-yor’ not be sung twice for the same girl”) – an original figurative euphemism that imposes a cultural taboo on the themes of divorce and a woman’s remarriage [Muhammad Yusuf, *She’rlar & Ikki kitob: Saylanma. Uyqudagi qiz*, p. 59].



Thus, poetic euphemisms (metaphors, allegories, and periphrases) enable authors not only to veil negative denotations (death, lack of freedom, and social tragedies), but also to construct a unique artistic idiostyle by transforming harsh realities into a sphere of refined lyrical empathy.

A **subtextual euphemism** is a form of figurative expression in which a tabooed denotatum is not named directly but is logically implied through a hint, irony, or contextual situation.

Subtextual euphemization requires the reader to possess the ability to decode hidden meanings (“to read between the lines”), thereby transforming traumatic or socially dangerous realities into the realm of intellectual figurative expression.

Subtextual euphemization is not merely a stylistic device but a **writing strategy** that employs figurative expressions, hints, and irony to conceal censored or unpleasant subjects, as well as to create multilayered meanings and a comic effect.

In George Orwell’s novella *Animal Farm*, euphemisms function as instruments of ideological manipulation and the legitimization of violence. The author presents them according to functional groups: **concealment of tyranny**: “leadership” (instead of dictatorship), “rationalization” (instead of reductions in food rations), “special measures” (instead of executions); **veiling inequality**: “more equal” (instead of the pigs’ privileges), “voluntary contribution” (instead of forced labor); **propaganda and repression**: “rumors” (instead of inconvenient truths), “enemies of the people” (instead of opposition), “re-education” (instead of ideological indoctrination); **justification of betrayal**: “trade relations” (used to conceal the abandonment of revolutionary ideals) [George Orwell, *Animal Farm*].

The use of absurd and comic substitutions of concepts enables Orwell to satirically expose the hypocrisy of those in power and demonstrate how the distortion of language shapes a false social consciousness.

In euphemology, **rhetorical interrogative sentences** and **pronominal euphemisms** are also distinguished. Through their solemn tone, logical-euphemistic emphasis, and expression of strong emotions, they function as speech devices that contribute to softening or veiling the direct meaning.

In **lyrical and elegiac poetry**, particularly in lyrical and elegiac works, rhetorical questions and solemn intonation serve as instruments for euphemizing tragic experiences such as grief, loss, and nostalgia.

In this context, euphemization enables the author to convey a national catastrophe through subtext, transforming historical realities into powerful artistic symbols.

Rhetorical interrogative sentences in Uzbek poetry serve as a means of expressing grief delicately and reinterpreting historical events, thereby giving literary works a multilayered character: “Qadim Buxoroga laylaklar keldi, / O‘zingiz qaydasiz, Fayzullo bobo?” (“Storks have returned to ancient Bukhara, / Where are you, Grandfather Fayzulla?”). In this quatrain, the image of storks (laylaklar – a symbol of peace and return to Bukhara) contrasts with the rhetorical question concerning the whereabouts of the historical figure Fayzulla Khodjaev, euphemistically expressing the bitterness of loss and historical injustice [Muhammad Yusuf, Qora quyosh. Doston].

Subtextual euphemisms are actively used to camouflage repressive practices and social arbitrariness. The passage “Odamlar taqdiri oddiy tushlik yoki kechki ovqat paytidayoq hal bo‘lardi. Suhbat orasida kimlarningdir nomlari tilga olinardi” (“People’s fates would be decided right during lunch or dinner. In the course of conversation, certain names would be mentioned”) functions as a euphemism for describing political repression, in which a person’s life depended on behind-the-scenes decisions; thus, the passage demonstrates the euphemization of power.

Pronominal Euphemization is used to conceal delicate or tragic concepts, such as pregnancy or the fact of an unwanted child: “Ming turli xayollar bag‘rim etdi chok, / Lekin men uni qilgim kelmadi halok, / Oh, u qanday muhtoj edi onaga, / Uni tashlab ketdim yetimxonaga” [Sh. Salimova, Saodat, 1992, No. 6]. In these lines, the pronouns “u, uni” (“he/him, it”) euphemistically replace the direct mention of a “fetus” or “newborn” who was abandoned in an orphanage, thereby veiling the tragedy.

In addition to verbal means, euphemistic meaning can also be expressed through **non-verbal means**, which become relevant in situations where verbal mitigation is insufficient. Such non-verbal euphemisms, characterized by brevity and contextual dependence, can be divided into the following types:

Implicative: they convey an implied meaning through presupposition, intonation, pauses, omissions, ellipsis, and unfinished utterances. The tabooed reality is not explicitly named but can easily be reconstructed by the addressee (for example, an abrupt interruption of a sentence, silence, or a change in intonation).

Kinetic: these include facial expressions, gestures, movements, and prosodic elements of speech. A. Nurmonov emphasized that the study of these paralinguistic means is extremely important for a complete understanding of the communicative act, as they compensate for the limitations of the verbal code [A. Nurmonov, 1979].

In this case: **a)** the structure of the sentence changes, resulting in incompleteness; **b)** changes also occur in the semantic content of the sentence.

In the literary system of Jane Austen, non-verbal means (kinetic and contextual codes) function as subtle euphemistic instruments. They allow characters to express genuine emotions, attraction, arrogance, or social insecurity within the framework of strict upper-class etiquette, while avoiding direct verbalization.

Based on an analysis of the novel, the following groups of non-verbal euphemisms can be identified:

1. Facial expressions and gazes as euphemistic markers

Avoidance of eye contact: Elizabeth's attempts not to look at Darcy during their first encounters serve as a visual euphemism for her awkwardness, embarrassment, and emerging dislike.

A fixed gaze: Darcy's frequent glances at Elizabeth function as a euphemism for his unconscious romantic interest in her.

A haughty gaze and facial expressions: Lady Catherine de Bourgh's disapproving gaze and her wrinkled nose when people of lower social status are mentioned serve as physiognomic euphemisms for snobbery and class superiority.

A condescending smirk: Darcy's lack of an open smile and his cold facial expression at the beginning of the novel euphemistically convey his contempt for provincial society.

Raised eyebrows: Elizabeth's facial expressions in response to Darcy's remarks replace verbal expressions of her doubt and distrust [Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*].

2. Gestures, postures, and mannerisms as behavioral substitutes

Distancing: Darcy's deliberate decision to distance himself from Elizabeth at the ball and his barely perceptible cold nod instead of a greeting function as kinetic euphemisms for his class-based snobbery and unwillingness to engage in contact.

Touching the hand: Jane's slight, involuntary touch of Mr. Bingley's hand during their conversation replaces a direct declaration of love, euphemistically expressing her tender feelings.

Proud posture: Darcy's perfectly upright posture functions as a non-verbal euphemism for his aristocratic pride and self-confidence.

Restlessness: The constant "fluttering about" of the younger Bennet sisters, their intrusive manners, and their tendency to interrupt one another serve as behavioral euphemisms for their social immaturity and desperate desire to get married [Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*].

3. Contextual Euphemisms (Hints and Social Conventions)

Indirect hints: Mrs. Bennet's constant conversations about Jane's impending marriage (before Bingley's official proposal) euphemistically convey her impatience and social intrusiveness.

Tabooing of financial topics: Delicate omissions and figurative expressions used in social circles when discussing Mr. Wickham's debts and income serve as euphemistic disguises for the guests' social anxiety and idle curiosity.

Rumors and gossip behind people's backs: The practice of discussing other people's relationships within Mrs. Bennet's social circle replaces direct confrontation and functions as an etiquette-based euphemism for social envy [Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*].

Consequently, non-verbal euphemisms in Jane Austen's novel create a profound psychological subtext.

Table 1. Key Aspects of Euphemisms in Literary Works
(Based on the works of George Orwell, Jane Austen, Asqad Muxtor, and Muhammad Yusuf)

Aspect	Description	Main Functions	Examples	Authors Represented
 1. Role of Euphemisms	Soften harsh expressions, avoid taboos, and create subtext.	• Soften expression • Reflect social/psychological traits • Avoid taboo topics • Create subtext and tone	"Ministry of Love" (= place of torture) in Orwell's 1984	Orwell, Austen, Asqad Muxtor, Muhammad Yusuf
 2. Euphemisms for Childbirth	Indirect verbs used to refer to childbirth with respect and politeness.	• Indirect reference to intimate topics • Observe etiquette • Show respect for women	"osvobodit'sya" (= to be relieved) "razreshit'sya ot bremeni" (= to be delivered)	Used in literature, letters, memoirs, official records (18th–early 20th c.)
 3. Types of Euphemisms	By expressiveness and originality, two types are distinguished.	• Individual (authorial) euphemisms • Occasional (contextual) euphemisms	Individual euphemisms are more expressive, novel, and aesthetic.	All authors (through their individual style)
 4. Authorial Euphemisms (Examples)	Unique euphemistic images with strong poetic and emotional effect.	• Metaphorical representation • Deep meaning • Emotional & aesthetic impact	"U bahorda ketdi..." (= death as departure) — Asqad Muxtor "Dard umr bekatida yig'lar yolg'iz..." (= death as a station) — Muhammad Yusuf	Asqad Muxtor, Muhammad Yusuf
 5. Overall Significance	Enrich literary discourse and enhance author's artistic and communicative goals.	• Enrich linguistic expression • Enhance artistic effect • Convey author's intention delicately	Euphemisms are an important tool in linguopoetics and literary communication.	All authors

Conclusion

Euphemization is the process of softening expressions and replacing harsh or unpleasant words with milder, neutral, or more agreeable ones. In a literary context, euphemization is often used to conceal negative or conflictual aspects of an ideology or certain actions, thereby making them more acceptable to the reader.

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