

# **EUPHEMIZATION/DYSPHEMIZATION WITHIN THE DIACHRONIC LINGUOSYNERGETICS**

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The present article examines the processes of euphemization/dysphemization with the help of the transdisciplinary linguosynergetic approach. The transition phenomena in the language are the object of diachronic linguosynergetics. The principal aim of this new paradigm is modelling of language phenomena taking into consideration the outer influence factors [11, p. 28]. It is precisely the diachronic linguosynergetics that reveals such synergetic parameters of euphemisms/dysphemisms as openness, instability, emergence and attractors. On the contrary, the traditional analysis of euphemisms/dysphemisms is focused on their lexical, semantic and functional dimensions.

A euphemism is used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own or, by giving offense, that of the audience, or of some third party. In fact, many euphemisms are alternatives for expressions the speaker or writer would simply prefer not to use in executing a particular communicative intention on a given occasion [1, el. resource]. For example, intimate relationship or affair instead of "sexual relationship".

A dysphemism is an expression with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum or to the audience, or both, and it is substituted for a neutral or euphemistic expression for just that reason. Dysphemisms, then, are used in talking about one's opponents, things one wishes to show disapproval of, and things one wishes to be seen to downgrade, to obfuscate or offend [1, el. resource]. For example, ass, bird-brain, pinhead for "a stupid person".

Since language is in constant flux, as are social values, euphemisms can quickly lose their utility. Good words become bad words and become good words

again in an endless succession [6, p. 13]. Words originally intended as euphemisms may lose their euphemistic value, acquiring the negative connotations of their referents. In some cases they may be used mockingly and become dysphemisms. Dynamic processes gradually give rise to chaotic oscillations (fluctuations) [3, p. 15], which can influence the semantics of euphemisms so that it comes close to the branching point (bifurcation) [10, p. 6] – a point in the selection of future way of perceiving the meaning. For example, the feminine terms which had a neutral or even favourable significance were declined into their various senses of “kept woman”, “whore” (mistress, hussy, puss, lemmman, etc.). The bifurcation – a swing to feminine abuse – was caused by extralingual factor, the spread of venereal disease. D.H. Lawrence asserted that syphilis caused a fundamental rupture in the emotional life of Renaissance England [4, p. 226]. So throughout the centuries the euphemisms lose their euphemistic potential and become dysphemisms.

Some euphemisms have changed their gender trajectory: the word wanton used to have the binary meaning (“a lewd person, a lascivious man or woman”), but now it refers only to a woman. The other euphemisms can change their meanings drastically: profligate used to mean “abandoned to vice, lost to principle, virtue or decency; shameless in wickedness” [9, el. resource], today – “wasting money or other things” (formal) [7, p. 1185].

The word intimacy used to have the meaning “friendship” in the XVIII century [8, el. resource], but now it is a euphemistic substitution for “copulation” [5, p. 229].

Even as some euphemisms go mainstream, others are contaminated by association with the topic they refer to and become just as dubious as the word they replaced.

It should be noted that dysphemisms are more stable than euphemisms due to their formation principles: dysphemisms highlight the negative features,

euphemisms, on the contrary, veil them. For example, the research of the British novels of XVIII –XX c. (by Defoe, Austen, Fielding, Hardy, Lawrence, Wollstonecraft) shows that the concept Prostitute is represented by the following dysphemisms: whore, slut (XVIII c.) < whore (XIX c.) < slut, bitch (XX c.). According to the lexicographic sources the lexeme bitch had been registered since the year of 1400 and the dictionary by Grose defines it as “the most offensive appellation that can be given to an English woman, even more provoking than that of whore” [2, p. 39].

Many euphemisms represent this concept as well but they had undergone some euphemistic changes in the diachronic aspect: courtesan, profligate woman, mistress, lady of pleasure, wanton, strumpet (XVIII c.) < wrong woman (XIX c.) < tart, trollop (XX c.).

The system of euphemia/dysphemia is considered open because it is always in the process of information exchange between the society and the language. Due to the social factors some taboos disappear, on the other hand, people become eager to avoid any kind of discrimination as for sex, age, race, etc. The diachronic analysis reveals the changes in the euphemistic and dysphemistic chains. Throughout the centuries the external factors have corrected the evolution of euphemisms/dysphemisms. To illustrate the point, in the Victorian era the pregnancy was a taboo topic. Respectable English women didn't get pregnant – but were *en famille*. What produced their pregnancy was only referred to in the most oblique terms. There were a lot of other euphemisms for that: in a family way, in a delicate condition, expecting [6, c. 59]. Nowadays pregnancy is not such a touchy topic. Those euphemisms have become irrelevant and have been replaced by ones which reflect the reality of a modern society: surrogate pregnancy, artificial insemination (IVF).

The social factors also influence the dysphemisms: it is not a sin any more to be an unmarried woman that's why the word *bastard* which used to be an

offensive word for a child which was born out of marriage [12, p. 130] is irrelevant nowadays, now it is an insulting word for an unpleasant or annoying man [7, p. 109].

To sum it up the diachronic linguosynergetics reveals the fluctuations in the processes of euphemization/dysphemization taking into consideration the outer factors. Throughout the XVIII–XX centuries the euphemisms lose their euphemistic potential and become dysphemisms. In some cases they can change their meaning or a gender trajectory. Dysphemisms are more stable.

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