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EUPHEMISMS IN MODERN ENGLISH MASS CULTURE

Summary. Cognitive and pragmatic characteristics of euphemisms in modern mass culture discourse are considered. In the focus of research, there is the need to classify the factors that distinguish euphemisms use in mass culture.

Key words: mass culture, taboo, euphemism, euphemization, gender speech differentiation.

In the early twentieth century, mass culture became a named subject area and the specific topic of the study in different fields of scientific knowledge. However, the comprehensive research of ameliorative substitutions in mass culture discourse has not been conducted. The necessity to formulate the concept of euphemization with further determination of psychological factors bringing the euphemisms in mass culture into use so as the need to distinguish cognitive-pragmatic and gender peculiarities of vocabulary reclamation were confirmed.

The problems of euphemisms origin, structure, functions and usage now are in the focus of scientific interest of linguapragmatics and sociolinguistics scholars that proves the indissoluble links of the phenomenon to the cultural and communicative activity of a person. In numerous papers of domestic and foreign scholars, the evident interest to different aspects and characteristics of euphemism as a unit belonging to the ethnic picture of the world is proclaimed.

The theoretical basis of the work is P. Grice's speech politeness theory [8], terminology vocabulary by O. Selivanova [6], linguo-cognitive peculiarity study of conceptual space by M. Poluzhyn [5], the study of euphemisms' pragmatics by V. Zobotkina [3] and V. Velykoroda [2], social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation represented in the works by N. Borysenko [1] and other sociolinguists. These fundamental studies of euphemisms account for the comprehensive investigation of cognitive, pragmatic and gender characteristics of euphemisms in modern mass culture, represented in the discourse of various sources (lyrics, magazines, fiction).

For the dynamic changes in modern society, intensification of the communication problems importance, the contemporary period of linguistic studies proclaims the interest of scholars to the use of ameliorative units and euphemisms in particular. The mechanisms of euphemization have recently attained the significance for the communication studies. Euphemisms became an important polite speech characteristic and contribute to the successful regulation of human relations, form an improved and milder attitude of Speakers to some concepts and notions' appreciation in social, political and everyday life of a state and a citizen, give an opportunity to find and cultivate various ways to effective communication with representatives of different cultures.

The qualitative and quantitative data of euphemism's use is an indicator of the phenomenon significance in the life of modern society. Modern linguists are discussing a problem of euphemistic substitution of tabooed notions. But an essential part of euphemisms role, especially in modern mass culture by women-authors (and written for women) has not been cleared up, some tabooed

concepts has not been classified and the multifarious character of euphemisms in modern culture, its cognitive, pragmatic and gender aspects has not been studied. Thus, **the relevance of the topic** under study is in the necessity of further euphemism's role investigation in various aspects and attitudes, especially in the mental space of mass culture rendered by the mimetic modus of the English language native speaker.

The study aims at representing euphemisms in the mental space by means of analyzed mimetic modus of modern mass culture sources for women. It focuses on peculiarity of euphemisms conceptualization, their pragmatic and gender characteristics, differently interpreted in English speaker's mentality.

The paper sets a **task** of analyzing the problems and tracing the way of specific cognitive, pragmatic and gender characteristics of euphemisms fixed in mass culture. It also intends to clear up their interpretation and definition in linguistics, determine and present classifications of substituted by euphemisms mass culture concepts; find out the signs of gender speech differentiation in the use of euphemisms; describe cognitive, pragmatic and gender characteristics of euphemisms in modern mass culture discourse. To solve the problem, the euphemisms from modern media discourse with the help of sampling procedure were analyzed.

The **object** of the investigation is the role of euphemisms in modern mass culture; its **subject** is the study of cognitive, pragmatic and gender aspects of English euphemisms in mass culture. The choice of the object caused by the fact that there are rather few works on the subject under study and by the task to represent a complex scientific approach to the study of a unique linguistic, psychological and sociocultural phenomenon. "Euphemism is characterized by avoidance language and aversive expression; that is the Speaker uses words as a protective shield against the anger or disapproval of natural and supernatural beings; it is an expression that avoids being offensive, using distasteful expression, infelicitous style of addressing and naming" [7, p. 37], that could damage a face of the Speaker and Hearer. Taking into consideration definitions of euphemism in the works of other linguists, we suggest an extended term: euphemisms are statements of secondary nomination with relatively positive connotation, substituting direct names, the usage of which for social, cultural or psychological reasons is regarded as undesirable.

Though searching the texts in their entirety for euphemisms, the number of units found were maximised and the possible inconsistencies and misrepresentations were reduced. The author, nevertheless, is aware of the fact that interpretation falls entirely on the reader, and depends exclusively on the text; therefore, a universal perspective upon euphemisms cannot be offered.

Since different readers interpret euphemisms differently, on the basis of variables of individual and cultural space such as *age, education, sex, ethnic background, political and religious affiliation*, the last three of which counting as *ideology*. More, users create

new language every day: the possibility to describe a euphemism completely, or exhaust the number or categories of euphemisms is excluded from the beginning.

The **corpus** of euphemisms (total number – 205 examples of collected empirical material) compiled from a variety of mass culture sources (trash literature for women in the genre of “Modern Romance” (D. French, M. Raid, L. Graham, A. Mather, N. Roberts) by the total length of 1279 pages (401393 words)). Woman song discourse (Pink, Blondie, Beyoncé) of 5 331 units [Fig. 1]; materials and articles from magazine (Cosmopolitan – On-line Magazine for Women (an electronic site with the weekly updating (from 10.2009 to 05.2010, 87360 word usages in general) and 32 video films were analyzed.

The aim and tasks of the linguistic study determined the **methods** to be used: descriptive and empirical method to define and describe the language units, positioning analysis with the elements of critical discourse helped to determine the role and place of euphemisms in the structure of the text. Conceptual space analysis was also necessary to describe the basis of contextual functioning of euphemisms from the linguocognitive point of view. The frequency and other quantitative calculations of occurrence of the euphemisms were also performed. The complex multiple analyses of euphemistic substitutions in modern mass culture within their cognitive, pragmatic and gender characteristics manifests the scientific novelty of the results obtained.

All the **results** of the investigation were tabulated. The euphemistic items under study can be classified according to their cognitive, pragmatic and functional characteristics [Fig. 2]. Here you can see excerpts the tables that show the results of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the discourse.

To describe cognitive, pragmatic and gender characteristics of euphemisms various sources of mass culture were studied and the following regularities were sought out:

1. In the women’ fiction discourse under study euphemisms of all functional styles of language are distinguished, euphemistic substitution is characteristic both to men and women speech and is identical in the motive of usage. The emotive and evaluative components characterize the euphemisms. The motives for using euphemistic substitutes are usually intention to avoid taboo, to sound polite or to preserve positive self-presentation. The quantity of euphemisms in the books by different authors may vary according to individual factors, but most of them are somatic euphemisms belonging to the concept “sex” (L. Grehem: 29 from 42; A. Mather: 15 from 16; M Reid: 10 from 12).

2. For the total length of the text (1279 pages, 401393 items under study), there were only 0,015% of euphemistic substitutions that is 63 examples, the most of which were found in the book by L. Grehem “The Italian’s Wife”. In the discourse of modern lyrics, there were few euphemisms found and their usage is not typical for that genre, vernacular masculine-gender marked units are absent. However, insults and offensive language words (“fuck” for instance) were used individually (Pink). Performers of modern English songs prefer neutral style in verbal expressing of themselves, so pragmatically neutral items of nomination are characteristic to this genre, the word-choice is O-prestige oriented.

3. The euphemisms under study were classified and subdivided into substrate and superstrate depending on the taboo word they substitute. The substrate euphemisms in magazine for women belong to the following spheres: defects of the appearance, emotional weakness and different forms of addictions, physiological functions and miasma. Superstrate taboos cause the formation and usage of politically correct euphemisms which are characterized by the ambiguity of the meaning, gender neutral terms, initial use of the word *person*, avoidance of the component *black*, post-adverbial usage of adjectives *advantaged*, *challenged*, *disadvantaged* for the euphemization of an excess or lack of some quality and are commonly used in political discourse. These items perform cooperative, concealing and elevating functions. There is a strong dependence of the quality of euphemistic substitutions and speech situation, different statuses of speech act participants, macro factors of sociocultural significance – cultural dominance, psychology, group values, mental space and gender characteristics that proves the necessity of further detailed euphemisms investigation in cognitive, pragmatic and gender aspects.

4. The increase of threats for the self-presentation of a personality causes the usage of ameliorative language units that predetermine the expansion of positive and negative politeness strategies with the pragmatic motive to hide the content of utterance, to improve own positions and manipulate Speaker’s opinion with the help of pragmatic-marked units of language, euphemisms in particular. Among the motives for using euphemism in mass culture, it is not only a desire to sound polite, an intention to disguise negative aspects of mental space and reality but also to exert a certain pragmatic influence on the addressee.

Multifarious structure of euphemisms is particularly presented in the main sources of mass culture – fiction, lyrics, materials and articles from magazines. In the result of manipulative influence, the attention of a woman is often concentrated on the material side of life and human physiology, rather than on the spiritual one, that extends functions of the euphemism and causes regular enriching of the euphemisms’ dictionary due to the euphemistic “treadmill”.

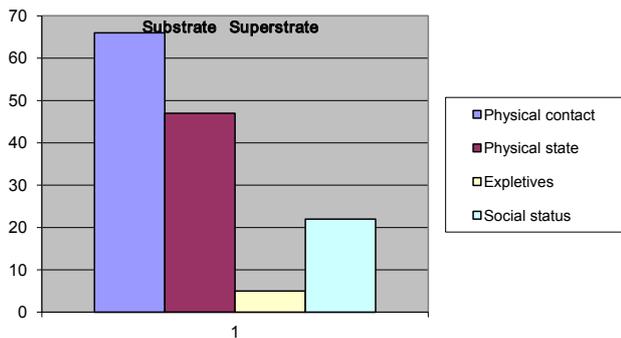
Fig 1

Cognitive, Pragmatic and Gender Aspects of Euphemisms in the woman song discourse

Performer	Song	Examples		
		O-prestige (euphemisms)	P-prestige (low modus units)	Taboo words, dysphemisms, cacophemism, slurs
Pink	Last to know	-	I wouldn't put my heels in the air for you	F*** for parts that's just not how You coulda called me back you stupid fuck

Fig 2

Classification of Euphemisms under Study



For determination and classification of basic mass culture concepts under the euphemization, some basic factors of the euphemisms division into separate groups were analysed. To sum it all up, permanent transformation of euphemisms corpus complicates their detailed classification and is better to be conducted in the form of interdisciplinary research with special attention to their structural, pragmatic, communicative, neurolinguistic and social factors.

The basic concepts subjected to euphemistic encoding in mass culture are defects of appearance, sex (sexual intercourse), addictions, poverty and death. Gender stereotypes form euphemistic connotations and associative links of the gender-marked units (he, him) in the process of cognitive and discourse activity within the euphemization limits. The usage of any gender-marked items in a mass culture reflects the modern attitude to the subject of the euphemization as to the typical and desirable characteristics of man and woman that make possible the expounding of stereotypes' changeability or stability in modern masscult.

To sum it up it is necessary to mention that euphemistic potential of taboo concept expressions in popular culture discourse varies in individual characteristics depending on personal perception. "Mass culture" has become a powerful regulator of modern society life, combining a number of very important, influential determinants of cognitive and pragmatic emphasis. Access to the other, hidden side of life that created the foundation for the transition from classical human values to the spread of moral consequences of sexual revolution and then, paradoxically, set the final return to traditional values.

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Манютіна О. І. Евфемізми в сучасній англійській масовій культурі

Анотація. У статті розглянуто когнітивно-прагматичні характеристики евфемізмів у сучасному дискурсі масової культури. Наголошено на необхідності визначення комплексу факторів, що зумовлюють уживання евфемізмів у масовій культурі.

Ключові слова: масова культура, табу, евфемізм, евфемізація, гендерна диференціація мовлення.

Манютина О. И. Эвфемизмы в современной английской массовой культуре

Аннотация. В статье рассмотрены когнитивно-прагматические характеристики эвфемизмов в современном дискурсе массовой культуры. Акцентируется внимание на необходимости определения комплекса факторов, обуславливающих употребление эвфемизмов в массовой культуре.

Ключевые слова: массовая культура, табу, эвфемизм, эвфемизация, гендерная дифференциация речи.