

## PhR 2019 Philological Readings

### EUPHEMIZATION PROCESSES IN LIGHT OF INTERACTION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CONCEPTUAL SEMANTICS

Irina A. Solodilova (a), Tatiana Yu. Sokolova (b)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Department of German Philology, Orenburg State University, Pobeda Avenue, 13, Orenburg, Russia,  
solodilovaira16@gmail.com

(b) Department of Foreign Languages, Orenburg State Pedagogical University, Sovetskaya Street, 19, Orenburg,  
Russia, sokolova.ty89@yandex.ru

#### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to the analysis of euphemism phenomenon in terms of cognitive linguistics. Primary focus is on euphemization processes considered in light of interaction between language and conceptual semantics. The considering necessity of euphemism phenomenon in cognitive context is caused both by the relevance of linguo-cognitive approach to the language study in general, and by the necessity to explain the formation process of a new – language semantics and to explain changes in the existing – conceptual one during formation and functioning processes of euphemistic units. The proposed study perspective allows us to expand the traditional euphemisms' understanding (as words – synonymous substitutions) by understanding their role in the conceptual content changing of certain negative value parameters of concepts and the value worldview as a whole. From this perspective euphemism is an example for the conceptual content conditionality by the language semantics in general process of linguo-cognitive interaction. The formation process of a new euphemistic unit in language can be viewed as a renaming process based on refocusing (changing in the attention focus) from one features of the nomination object to another. In our opinion this will allow to explain not only the essence of the naming process itself using a different name and its (name's) choice, but also explaining further changing processes in semantic (language) and conceptual content. The refocusing process can be considered within a framework of conceptual integration and derivation theory.

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## 1. Introduction

The cognitive study approach to language and language processes has been actively developed since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century giving rise to a new linguistic branch – cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistics returning to science mental processes as a research subject refers together with such sciences as anthropology, cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence analysis, psycholinguistics to scientific disciplines of the cognitive cycle, on the other hand, it continues (at least within the framework of Russian science) traditions of Russian onomasiology, nomination theory and language semantics (Baranov, 2001).

The main methodologically important ideas of cognitive linguistics that distinguish it from the traditional linguistic direction are as follows: first, it is a disciplinary openness – ability to use methods of natural and human sciences in order to discover universal principles of human cognitive abilities; secondly, explanatory character – application of methods that are explaining linguistic facts, and not describing; thirdly, interest to linguistic intuition and linguistic cognition; fourthly, importance recognition of a human's personality in cognitive processes as a subject of cognitive activity what assigns it to disciplines of the scientific anthropocentric paradigm (Kiose, 2015; Langacker, 2006).

The major priority of cognitive linguistics is a broadly defined semantics. Researchers can consider scientific problems from different points of view. They can interpret linguistic semantics in order to identify the conceptual semantics' features. They can explain the linguistic semantics' characteristics and its expression forms by using the national and cultural features of the conceptual content that is a result of this linguo-cultural community's cognitive activity. In any case, it will be talking about semantics, content side of the language at all levels of its functioning – in dictionary, morphology and syntax (Solodilova, 2012).

Correlations of concepts “linguistic worldview” and “conceptual worldview” differ in varying degrees from research to research (Boldyrev, 2014; Popova & Sternin, 2007; Zavarzina, 2006), but they are united in one setting for close interconnection and interdependence. We suppose that proposition of cognitive linguistics about conditionality of linguistic originality and linguistic semantics by cognitive activity of a person has become axiomatic: content, formal and structural originality of language is a consequence of human interpretive activity on assimilating knowledge obtained from the external world (Boldyrev, 2014).

It should be noted that scientific studies in the logic of this statement are widely represented in modern linguistic studies (Boldyrev, 2014; Kobrina, 2000; Kopnina, 2017). A comparative study of same-name concepts in various linguistic cultures, a comparative description of the grammatical categories' content with a reference to the national identity of temporal and spatial world's structuring occupied and occupies the minds of many scientists and linguo-cognitive scientists. However, despite the recognition of inverse relationship, namely, methods' conditionality of cognitive processing of the obtained knowledge and conceptual content by linguistic forms and methods of representation, number of studies in this logical direction is much smaller.

Particular interest is focused on the study of value worldview, what is a subject to a more or less significant changes from generation to generation and what is expressed in language, primarily in evaluation semantics and names of essentially value concepts (Solodilova, 2010). The fact that language is

very sensitive to changes in public assessments, to replacement of some values by others and to changes in stereotype's system can be demonstrated by the vocabulary of youth slang, phraseological units' modifications, lexical units with evaluative semantics that express stereotype representations (for example, in German *Kaltduscher - Warmduscher*), etc. However not only extra-linguistic reality causes language changes, but also conscious, i.e. linguistic neologisms motivated by certain communicative and discursive tasks are able to cause changes in the conceptual content, conceptual and value worldview over the course of their long and intensive functioning in language. We suppose that similar processes can initiate euphemisms consciously created by native speakers with certain goals, corresponding to one or another communication discourse.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Unlike traditional linguistics, which considers the euphemism phenomenon as means of synonymization or a secondary nomination, cognitive linguistics offers a broader concept that takes the semantics description and euphemisms functioning beyond the boundaries of intralingual system (Krysin, 2000). In our opinion, it is reasonable to understand euphemization as a certain linguo-mental process that is characterized by concepts formation or changes in their content based on the language semantics interpretation of a new lexical unit.

In this case it can be argued that the euphemism phenomenon is a separate case of conceptual derivation consisting in obtaining a new meaning by the language unit on the basis of its rethinking and modification of (or formation of a new) conceptual content (Kubryakova, 2004; Popova & Sternin, 2007; Zavarzina, 2006).

Euphemization as a separate case of conceptual derivation is based on repetitive (secondary) representation of the original knowledge and on changes in evaluation of a subject or a phenomenon of the surrounding world / speaker's personal experience from "minus" to "plus" or to neutral. Nature and essence of the origin knowledge and reasons for euphemism application (euphemistic replacement) influence the choice of one or another linguistic mechanism of euphemization, which include: derivational nomination, borrowing, secondary nomination. Serving as a linguistic mechanism of euphemization these processes are always associated with a change in conceptual content.

In the framework of cognitive linguistics conceptual derivation is interpreted as "a cognitive process that ensures the emergence of a new structure of knowledge in a person's conceptual system based on already existing concepts and conceptual structures" (Babina, 2003, p. 47). The particularity of conceptual areas' content and the nature of their interaction determine the application of one or another cognitive mechanism of meaning formation within the framework of general derivational process. Babina in her article "Models of Conceptual Derivation" writes that "in the process of conceptual derivation the initial concepts are combined into conceptual structures, within which the original concepts are acting as coordinated with each other by some conceptual characteristics" (Babina, 2009, p. 16).

During the process of euphemization the original concept obtains a new name. And thus, it realizes its representation in the language system by means of another concept that already exists in the linguistic world view of native speakers (in the case of secondary nomination), or it can be formed on the basis of a borrowed word and its conceptual content (in cases of borrowing) (Ches & Tjukina, 2017).

During the processes of choice and use of the suitable to some situation euphemistic means the conflict between two worlds occurs: real and ideal one (desired value world system). In other words two worldviews start to interact – real and ideal one, what forms the process basis of linguistic units' rethinking. In order to send a message to the addressee in a format more acceptable to him the addresser gives evaluation to an object or a phenomenon interpreting them through the prism of norms and values existing in society in the present period of time. That means the product of euphemization can be considered as the result of interfering process between the ideal worldview and the real worldview.

Euphemisms' investigation in the aspect of conceptual derivation allows us to consider them as "a way for language interpretation of conceptual content, which can be implemented through such cognitive mechanisms of forming meaning, as: conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, conceptual inference" (Boldyrev, 2014, p. 46). Secondary nomination, derivational nomination, synonymous or antonymic replacement are the linguistic mechanisms of this process. In this regard the euphemia is "a model for changing a certain conceptual content in order to form a new meaning" (Boldyrev, 2014, p. 46). Moreover, the condition for success of euphemistic renaming is interconceptual relations between interacting euphemisms, "because otherwise the connection between the original concept and the euphemistic expression will not be traced and the pragmatic effect of the statement will not be achieved" (Aleksikova, 2010, p. 49).

### **3. Research Questions**

In the mind of every native speaker there is an ideal worldview that includes a system of values, norms, rules. The euphemistic substitution of object name is accompanied by transformation of the original conceptual content and language semantics. What changes will prevail: changes in structure of designated concept under the influence of a new, more "beautiful" name (German: liquidieren (töten), Sanktionen (Zwangsmaßnahmen), Verluste (getötete Menschen, Soldaten)) or changes in semantics of lexical units and formation in its structure neutral negatively connoted semes (German: Invalide, Gastarbeiter), it depends on discursive conditions of euphemisms' functioning. Identification of conceptual interaction's mechanisms during the euphemization process and identification of discursive influence's principles on the changing processes of language and conceptual semantics seems to us the most interesting and relevant in the light of the general – linguo-cognitive – study of interaction between language and cognition.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

So, we see the purpose of this study in analyzing the euphemization processes at the level of language and conceptual semantics.

### **5. Research Methods**

For achieving a purpose what was set at the beginning of our study we have used method of definitional analysis that allowed us to identify the semantic content of an antecedent (direct name) and a corresponding euphemism, opposition method that allowed to determine stylistic and semantic

differences between antecedent and its euphemism, and method of text and discursive analysis that helps to identify the extralinguistic determinacy of euphemism's application.

## 6. Findings

In the course of our research it was found that in texts of foreign media sources (the study is conducted on the platform of German socio-political press) there is a clear tendency to intentionally use of euphemisms with aim to change the estimation sign of an antecedent from negative to positive. In such cases euphemism is acting as a sign in the value world view that is able to radically change the value setting's direction. For example,

**The euphemism *Liquidieren*** – 1. etwas liquidieren; bewirken, dass ein Unternehmen nicht mehr existiert; 2. jemanden liquidieren jemanden besonders aus politischen Gründen töten (lassen) (Duden, n. d.). – The antecedent ***Ermorden*** –töten, umbringen, ums Leben bringen (Dictionary, Encyclopedia and Thesaurus, n.d.).

“Liquidieren” (to eliminate) is a euphemistic replacement for the word “ermorden” (to kill). Denotation of these lexical elements is the same – a murder, but in the word “liquidieren” the focus shifts toward the expression “to get out of the way”, “to eliminate”, “and to get rid of”. For German-speaking people, as for Russian, “liquidieren” and “liquidation” are not connected in the language system with negative emotional connotations what allows them to function as a euphemism in language.

Many works are devoted to the study of euphemia (Aleksikova, 2010; Plotnikova, 2005; Zjat'kova, 2007) and its features in modern linguistics, however, the problem of speech euphemization in the context of human cognitive activity in general, and the problem of the value worldview's formation in particular continues to be an underinvestigated field. Euphemisms of the sociopolitical vocabulary that are created artificially, “on demand” and that are actively functioning in language make their changes in the conceptual system of a person modifying the original image of the named object, and in this regard they are a fruitful material for studying this problem.

## 7. Conclusion

The language changes' dynamics as a reflection of general dynamics of the surrounding world has affected euphemisms and linguistic processes associated with euphemia phenomenon. Life democratization has caused the processes of borders' erasing in “forbidden” content of the language system. Development of politics' language and, more broadly, a lexical-semantic layer that includes lexical units “politically correct” denoting unfavorable social and political phenomena of social life, has significantly expanded and changed vocabulary area. In this regard, euphemistic lexical units certainly reflect the changes taking place in the value worldview.

However, euphemistic signs used today in the media are not so much means of representing conceptual content as means of mind manipulating including the social value attitudes. The data from foreign and Russian studies talk about the powerful potential of euphemisms in influencing the values' system and the formation of social opinion.

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