



Euphemism types in the Washington Times online political articles: a study of semantic change

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ABSTRACT

Background: There is a situation when people are discussing topics that are considered sensitive which labeled vulgar or inconsiderate such as death, religion, sex, racial issues or politics, the use of euphemism is very useful. By using the euphemism, it can turn unmentionable words into mentionable and less offensive. Turning the unmentionable or bad words into mentionable or good words that make euphemism give rise to semantic change through changing the sense of words.

Purpose: The aim of this research is to find the types of euphemism in The Washington Times online political articles.

Design and methods: This research applied descriptive qualitative method, while the data were collected by close reading and observing the words, phrases or clauses that contains the euphemism types in The Washington Times online political articles. This research applies the theory of Allan and Burridge for euphemism types

Results: As the results of representative data, the types of euphemism found in the articles are 3 metaphors, 1 remodeling, 9 circumlocutions, 1 abbreviation, 2 one-for-one substitutions, and 1 hyperbole. All of the euphemism types in this research are often used as the substitute expression in order to have the positive connotation and to save the readers from unpleasant topics or issues.

Keywords: euphemism types; semantic change; political article

Introduction

Euphemism can easily define as another way of words for undesirable expressions and usually use in order to avoid possible loss of face for the reader or receiver. It makes a word sounds good in the ears of the listener or reader so that the speaker or writer can share his idea and purpose comfortably. The reader or listener also feels comfortable in receiving the messages. The words or the phrases become softer and its literal meaning has pushed aside and turn into sweet-sounding and inoffensive.

Sweet-sounding and inoffensive words always be a choice for people to talk whenever there is a sensitive discussion. People often try to select the potential hatred or offensive effect of expressions that are used. Hence, if they keep using it, they will make people be easily offended. Thus, people concern to be politer switching the exact word with its substitution one (Hidayat, 2020). In order to keep away saying the kind of words that might disturb the harmony of conversation or the relationship between them. The euphemism also can easily be found in the mass media.

Euphemism can be found in mass media especially in a politics area because political issues have highly sensitive topics. In writing or conveying news are required to use good or acceptable language. Acceptable in this case means language which is not sensitive or offensive to the readers. In mass media, the journalist mostly uses a feeling to avoid using bad or cruel words to give a good effect to the society.

Hasan (2015) argued that semantic change mostly happens to a language. When languages borrow words, they frequently change the meanings of those borrowings, typically

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making generic words more specific, in the same way that one language's place names often grew out of another language's generic words for concepts. These semantic changes lead to new meaning to be broader, narrower, metonymy, or metaphor. For example, everyone knows is *pretty*, which originally meant "crafty and cunning". Later, it took on a more positive connotation: *clever*, *skillful*, or *able*. For showing differences among the meaning of the words that have experience semantic change, it can be detailed by using componential analysis.

Using componential analysis, it can make easier to find out the meaning of the words taboo and euphemism. Each word has its own meaning features. For example, the term *booze* and *alcohol drink* both of them refer to intoxicating drinks. To show the differences between them, it can be explained by componential analysis. Thus, the components of *booze* are /+ *Intoxicating Beverage*/, /+*drink*/, /+ *Cause Physical Health Problem*/, and /- *Irritation*/. On the other hand, the components of *alcohol drink* are /+ *Intoxicating Beverage*/, /+*drink*/, /+ *Cause Physical Health Problem*/, and /+ *Irritation*/. From the explanation above, it can be summarized that the difference in the component between *booze* and *alcohol drink* is /- *Irritation*/ for *booze* and /+ *Irritation*/ for *alcohol drink*.

Therefore, change in language is unavoidable. All languages change all the time (except extinct ones). Language change is just a fact of life; it cannot be refused or avoided. Regardless of all the worries and fears, life always goes on with no obvious ill-effects in spite of linguistic change. Indeed, the changes going on today which so distress some in our society are exactly the same in kind and character as many past changes about which there was much complaint and worry as they were taking place but the results of which today are considered enriching aspects of the modern language (Campbell, 2013).

Today, the online-based mass media can reach to a wider area, and touch all over the world. The mass media also has a significant role as a part of human life to get information handily. The information is a matter for human life that cannot be separated. From various information in the mass media, the information certainly increases knowledge and insight for people, so that they aware of what is going on outside without going anywhere.

Euphemisms in the mass media, especially in the online article, are essential for the writer of article or editor to use. In order to say something taboo, the writer or editor can use euphemism to turn an unpleasant word into a pleasant word so that nobody will be offended. Because most of the time, people are blindfolded by perception (a political issue). Perception gives people a new vision in which it can be brainwashing thoughts or brilliant ideas. Understanding or engaging with politics is important for people's development.

There are several previous researches on euphemism. Ryabova (2013) analyzed the techniques of euphemism creation and their various functions employed in communication. The research found that euphemism as a process of ideological framing in media communication is a common phenomenon across languages and cultures. Siska (2010) described the meaning relation and semantic change that happened in euphemistic terms that found in the script "Jennifer's Body" movie. Next, Sahnaz (2018) described how the characters of this TV series use euphemism to avoid offensive word. The researcher mainly focuses on analyzing the euphemism construction of three main characters in IZombie TV Series with euphemism formation categories.

However, this research is to identify types of euphemism in political articles online published by Washington Time. The *theory proposed by Allan and Burridge for euphemism types* is used to do the analysis. Theoretically, it is hoped that this research will give a contribution to the development of the linguistics field especially in the study of euphemism. Practically, this research can be used as a reference to give a contribution to society in giving

a better understanding about euphemism, so that people can apply the use of it in their written or spoken communication.

Method

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault (2016), stated that descriptive qualitative method is a research procedure that produce descriptive data containing of spoken or written words from people and behavior which can be observed. Moreover, a descriptive qualitative method aims to look for the comprehension and the meaning of the phenomenon which being studied in detail and deep explanation. Hence, this method is preferred because it is intended to explain the data which consist of euphemism in The Washington Times online political articles.

The data in this research are Washington Time's political articles published on June 1st up to June 30th 2019. The articles finding was focused on Donald Trump and Kim Jong-Un topics. The object data in this research is the euphemism word, phrase and clause founded from the selected articles. Next, euphemism word, phrase, or clause that are going to be listed in the table. The finding was selected and categorized the types of euphemism classification based on Allan & Burrige's theory in data sheet.

Findings & Discussion

Based on the data which have been collected and analyzed, there are 37 euphemisms found in the political article of *The Washington Times* which focuses on Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un Topics in June 2019. 17 data are considered as the representative data which only discuss negotiation topics of Mr. Donald Trump and Mr. Kim Jong-un. Hence, 17 representative data (see table 1) will be analyzed below.

Table 1. Data findings

Types of Euphemism	Total	Percentage (%)
Metaphor	3	17,65%
Remodeling	1	5,88%
Circumlocution	9	52,95%
Abbreviation	1	5,88%
One-for-one substitution	2	11,76%
Hyperbole	1	5,88%
Total	17	100 %

From all of the data analysis, the writer found 6 types of euphemism which are *metaphor*, *remodeling*, *circumlocution*, *abbreviation*, *one-for-one substitution*, and *hyperbole*. It means in that online political article of *The Washington Times*, the writer does not find the other 6 types of euphemism. The 6 types that the writer does not find are *clipping*, *omission*, *acronyms*, *understatement*, *borrowing*, and *jargon*. The highest frequency of euphemism types in this research is circumlocution. It appears in the amount of 52, 94%. Circumlocution is used 9 times out of 17 of the total representative data. Meanwhile, the type of *Abbreviation*, *Remodeling* and *hyperbole* counted as the lowest frequencies with only found 1 datum in amount of 5, 88%

Euphemism as an alternative expression

Euphemism is the alternative word for an uncomfortable expression that the speakers or writers prefer not to use to communicate their messages. According to Pan (2013), the word

euphemism comes from a Greek word, which means to speak favorably, or good speech. So that, from the word's root of euphemism, it can sum up that euphemism is speaking in a polite way. In addition, nowadays, words of euphemism are still widely used in society. In different cultures, things related to sex are considered taboo or avoided to be used. For example, fuck is usually replaced by go to bed together.

In order to erase the harshness of taboo terms, people have created euphemisms (alternative ways to say taboo words). Euphemisms allow people to talk about unpleasant things and neutralize the unpleasantness. In the job area, dozens of expression euphemisms make unpleasant jobs more attractive and pleasant to hear or speak. For example, Janitor becomes custodian, gardener is changed into landscape architect, and garbage collector becomes sanitation engineer (Gao, 2013). Euphemisms seem really effective to use because they replace the trigger; the harsh word form, by another word form that refers to a similar sense. To give a bright explanation about euphemism, Allan & Burrige (1991) stated that euphemisms are alternative ways of words for undesirable expressions, and are used in order to avoid possible loss of face. The undesirable expression may be taboo, fearsome, distasteful, or for some other reasons have too many negative connotations or effect to precisely execute the speaker's communicative intention on a given occasion when telling a piece of information to others (p. 14).

Meanwhile, in semantics, euphemism is defined as an alternative way of describing something which makes it sound more pleasant to hear or read than it really is (Murphy & Koskela, 2010:64). When a phrase or word use a euphemism, its literal meaning has often pushed aside. It is used to conceal terrible thoughts when the term for them is not necessarily offensive. Similar to that statement, based on The New Oxford Dictionary of English, euphemism is a soft or indirect word or expression which substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing (Ren & Yu, 2013).

Additionally, Ren & Yu (2013) pointed out that in every stage and field, why the use of euphemism is mostly used. Why is that so? He answered that because euphemism turns sensitive topics into soften. Thus, the creation and usage of euphemism is a common phenomenon in human language as another way to speak a certain topic in which forbidden to discuss. (p. 45). Wardhaugh (2006) supported that idea, he said those certain things which are not said, not because they cannot be, but because people do not talk or discuss those things, or if those things are talked about, they will talk about it in a roundabout way or another way (p. 238).

To summarize, it can conclude that euphemism is an alternative expression or less offensive expression for word or expression that considered taboo or unpleasant. People created euphemisms (alternative ways to say taboo words) to talk about unpleasant things and neutralize the unpleasantness. For instance, the phrase poor people turns into underprivileged people in which it is preferred to hear or speak, rather than the old one.

Metaphors

Metaphorical is a kind of figurative expression used to replace the real meaning from one word with another explicit meaning that has more soft meaning. Have a look on the following findings on the research data.

*Top North Korean officials on Wednesday said President Trump's diplomatic outreach is little more than a **front** and that Washington is secretly plotting an "aggressive war."* (Wolfgang, 2019, P1, L2)

The *front* in the article above is identified as a metaphor. It refers to political diplomacy between U.S and North Korea. North Korean officials deem that The US diplomacy put on

a *fake* personality or not keep it real about diplomatic outreach with North Korea. The *front* is considered replaces the real meaning from one word with another explicit meaning that has more soft meaning. Thus, the *front* played a role as a figurative expression because the *front* is not pointing directly.

Likewise, the aim of the euphemism *front* in this article is to say in different sense about *fake* that prefers not to use. The reason is that because it has negative connotations such as to become loss of face or offensive so that the language must be not mention directly to avoid an offensive word from the readers. Besides, in order to save the face Top North Korea officials who are considered that President Trump's diplomatic outreach with North Korea just a fake but likely plotting an aggressive war in with North Korea secretly, the author of the article need to refine their language to make the expression sounds more inoffensive and acceptable.

Another metaphor is shown as follows.

President Trump sent Kim Jong-un a letter, the White House said Sunday, saying it's part of "ongoing" correspondence between the leaders as they seek a possible third summit to reel in North Korea's nuclear ambitions.
(Tom Howell Jr., 2019, P1, L3)

The *reel* in the article above is counted as euphemism referring to an act of regulating or having power over someone or something. It also can be said as an instance of controlling so that the euphemism *reel* replaces the *control*. The *reel* is kind of metaphor euphemism that replace that undesirable word with figurative expression. Metaphor euphemism is used to substitute the truth meaning of unpleasant expression with the other words that have politer explicit meaning. For this case, the writer of the article applied the word *reel* as the figurative expression, to cover the truth meaning of the word *control* which sounds negative.

As previously mentioned, the goal of euphemism *reel* is to talk differently about subject which has an impolite meaning for a given occasion. Instead of saying *control*, the writer applied euphemism *reel*. It can be said that the *reel* played a role as a euphemism to cover unpleasant word said by The White House about North Korea nuclear ambition. The *reel* also used as an option by the writer of article in order to make the sense is not pointing directly and to keep the sensibility of the readers and the third person.

Remodeling

Remodeling usually defines as one-for-one substitutions in which either the onset or rhyme of the avoided term. In this case, those two words are not related semantically. The finding sample shows as follows.

And heck, if President Obama received a Nobel Prize for nearly nothing, then I think there is only one obvious thing to do, and that's to make sure Donald Trump receives the award as well. (Harper, 2019, P6, L3)

In the sentence of the article above, the *heck* used to express shock or surprise or for emphasis. The word *heck* is considerably the euphemism, because it replaces the unpleasant word. It refers to the *hell*. The *hell* becomes taboo since it relates to metaphysical subject or object so that it evokes not to mention. The *heck* is kind of remodeling euphemism. It is a kind of euphemism ending up substitution in which either the onset or rhyme of the unpleasant expression is suitable for that of a semantically unrelated word.

Furthermore, the aim of euphemism *heck* in this article to say in different context about *hell* that prefers not to mention. The reason is because it is related to a literal curse associated with death and afterlife. The *heck* is chosen by Mr. Kazianis, the executive editor of The National Interest to emphasizing his opinion regarding Nobel Prize that President Obama

received for nearly nothing. It also used to cover the sensibility of the readers in order to sound more pleasant to hear or read.

Circumlocution

Circumlocution is a way to replace the dislike words with the softer expression that have relation in their meaning component. Have look on the following snippet.

The lengthy document, the release of which coincided with a major speech in Asia by acting Defense Secretary Patrick M. Shanahan, refers to North Korea as a “rogue state.” (Wolfgang, 2019, P2, L4)

The *rogue* in The Washington Times article above refers to a condition where a country called unsafe. In other words, the *rogue* used to substitute the word dangerous. The *rogue* substitutes the dislike word with the softer word. By using the *rogue*, Defense Secretary Patrick M. Shanahan tried to replace the sensitive word with the word that considered less sensitive.

Furthermore, the role of euphemism *rogue* in this text is to have more pleasing expression than the offensive word *dangerous*. It is used by Defense Secretary Patrick M. Shanahan to cover the face of North Korea which he thinks North Korea is a threatening country after taking an issue about diplomacy with The United States. He applied the *rogue* rather than the *dangerous* because he deemed that the *rogue* has a less harsh connotation.

Other finding shows as follows.

“The president has stood by Mr. Kim since their first meeting in Singapore in 2018, despite the North Korean’s authoritarian tactics and unverified reports, he punished his top nuclear negotiators with harsh labor or even death in the wake of failed talks.” (Tom Howell Jr., 2019b, P12, L4)

Based on the article above, the *failed talk* means a failure of spying the negotiation poorly without grasping the negotiating opponent intention. It refers to the word *misconception* which sounds more negative than *failed talk*. Hence, the *failed talk* replaces the dislike expression which is *misconception* with a softer one which has relation around its sense.

Furthermore, the aim of *failed talk* as euphemism is to talk about expression that considerably is not to use in this context. The writer of article believed that *failed talk* has more favorable connotation than the *misconception*. It is applied in the article to make the sense less negative. The word is chosen in order to say indirectly about the failure made by North Korea top nuclear negotiators because they were sentenced death after poorly understanding the USA intention in denuclearization negotiation.

Abbreviation

Abbreviation is a type of euphemism that is written and spoken as a string of letters. The words are created from the initial letter or two of the words in a phrase but do not perform proper words. It is all pronounced as strings of letter, not as a form of word.

“We landed just outside the **DMZ**,” Mr. Pompeo said. (Hurt, 2019, P27, L1)

In the sentence of the article above, the *DMZ* refers to a region on the Korean peninsula that demarcates North Korea from South Korea. The *DMZ* is abbreviation for *Demilitarized Zone*. The *Demilitarized Zone* is considered as taboo because it is a related to a border which forbidden to run across. The *DMZ* is a euphemism getting through abbreviation process or abbreviation euphemism. It is a way created from the initial letter of the words in phrase, and it will be pronounced as strings of letter. Thus, the *DMZ* becomes euphemism by taking the initial letter of *Demilitarized Zone*.

Furthermore, the function of using the euphemism *DMZ* is to replace the *Demilitarized Zone* in order to avoid mentioning an unpleasant expression. The *DMZ* is used by Mr. Pompeo, The United States Secretary of State as an alternative way to say *Demilitarized Zone*. Instead of using the phrase *Demilitarized Zone*, he rather to use the initial letter *DMZ* to keep away from sensitive topics and also to keep the *Demilitarized Zone* vague.

One-for-one substitution

One-for-one substitution uses the monosyllabic words to replace the unpleasant expression which tends to have more than one syllable. There are two groups of one-for-one substitution, they are metonymy and synecdoche. Metonymy (General-for-Specific) is one word that has a general meaning exchange with other terms which have a more specific meaning. In metonymy, the object is referred to as something that closely associated with it. Meanwhile, synecdoche (Part-for-Whole) is used to take certain other things that have wider characteristics.

Here the finding on the metonymy euphemism.

*North Korean officials took issue with that **language** and said it proves that despite Mr. Trump's attempts at diplomacy, the U.S. wants war.*
(Wolfgang, 2019, P3, L1)

Based on the sentence of the article above, the word *language* is an offensive word, insult, humiliation, etc. In other words, the word *language* in this context alluded to the phrase harsh words that has a taboo connotation. The *language* is classified into the euphemism type of metonymy one for one substitution because the general meaning of the *language* exchange with the more specific meaning of the phrase harsh words. The *language* is used by the writer rather than harsh words because it is to express in a different context about the disrespectful or scornfully abusive remark or response.

Moreover, the use of euphemism language is to say an alternative way in referring the offensive expression which is harsh word. It is used by the writer of article to cover a response from North Korea after humiliated by the Pentagon's revamped Indo-Pacific Strategy. It can be said that the word *language* played a role as a protective response to avoid offensive word from the readers which sounds irritating.

The other metonymy is shown as follows.

*On the eve of the first anniversary of his precedent-shattering summit in Singapore with Kim Jong-un, President Trump heaped fresh praise on the North Korean leader Tuesday even as critics, including some conservatives, complained that **Pyongyang** had made no real progress on denuclearization over the past year despite Mr. Trump's intense personal diplomacy.* (Taylor & Jr., 2019, P1, L3)

The *Pyongyang* refers to a group of people who make a policy and decision about denuclearization. It can be said that *Pyongyang* substituted for the *North Korean Government*. The *Pyongyang* is kind of metonymy in one-for-one substitution euphemism which replaces the specific word with the general meaning that closely associated with it. In this case, the writer of the article applied the *Pyongyang* as a metonymy to cover the truth of meaning of *The North Korean Government* in order to cover for pointing directly.

As previously mentioned, the use of euphemism *Pyongyang* is to say an alternative way in referring to *The North Korean Government*. It is used by the writer of article to cover critics from the conservatives to Trump's diplomacy, saying that the diplomacy between USA and North Korea make no progress on denuclearization. It can be said that the *Pyongyang* played a role as a protective response to avoid the word from the readers which sounds offensive and pointing directly.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an excessive language that counts as a figurative expression. It is used for instances of such exaggerations for emphasis or effect. The finding sample as follows.

The North Koreans responded to U.S. officials, sparking “will he-won’t he” drama and hand-wringing over the lack of preparation — assuming the showcase hadn’t been planned in secret. (Jr. & Boyer, 2019, P5, L2)

In the sentence of the article above, the *showcase* refers to a meeting of chiefs of governments or other high officials. It can be seen that the *showcase* is actually referring to the *Summit*. In this context, the *summit* is considered to use because it has sensitive connotation. The *showcase* is counted as hyperbole euphemism where used to exaggerate the meaning and the effect.

Furthermore, the purpose of euphemism *showcase* in this article is to have more pleasing connotation than the *summit*. It is used as a choice language to say softer expression by the writer of article in order to save the North Korea respond to US. Official about another controversial diplomatic summit. Besides, the *showcase* is chosen and applied in the article by the writer of article in order to make the connotation more pleasing and keep the sensibility of the readers and third parties.

Conclusion

Concerning the objective of the study, which is identifying the types of the euphemism in online political article The Washington Times, 6 types of euphemism are found which are metaphor, remodeling, circumlocution, abbreviation, one-for-one substitution, and hyperbole. Meanwhile, the 6 types that the writer is not found, they are clipping, omission, acronyms, understatement, borrowing, and jargon. The euphemism type of circumlocution is dominated in this research because it is used for replace the negative connotation or expression with the less negative or softer one. Circumlocution is found 9 times out of 17 representative data. The lowest frequencies of types of euphemism applied in this research are remodeling, abbreviation and hyperbole with only 1 datum.

The writer of articles uses the euphemism in online political article of The Washington Times mostly in order to avoid the bad effects of taboo or offensive word due to have a sensitive sense, pointing directly, or embarrassment.

Based on the result of the research which have been obtained, some suggestions are stated for further research. The students who are interested in linguistics, especially in the sociolinguistics subfield are considerably expected to research the euphemism, the writer suggests to the next researchers to develop this research in a wider context such as social context of the general public.

This study is relatable in daily life. Many sensitive topics in daily life can be employed with euphemism as the alternative ways to say sensitive topics. From the result of this research, the writer suggests by reading this research can be the benchmark for the readers to know how the important role of euphemism in a sensitive topic and how to apply euphemism in order to keep the topics are acceptable.

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