EUPHEMISMS AS A TYPE OF SECONDARY NOMINATION

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ABSTRACT

Secondary nomination refers to the process of indirect naming, where a term is used to replace another, often to mitigate its harshness or to avoid taboos. Euphemisms are a key example of this phenomenon, serving as polite or softer alternatives to terms that could be perceived as offensive, crude, or unpleasant. The article examines the role of euphemisms in various social contexts, such as death, bodily functions, and social status, illustrating how they reflect cultural norms and social sensitivities. By analyzing several examples, the study demonstrates how euphemisms serve to preserve social face, manage embarrassment, and uphold societal values.

Keywords: secondary nomination, euphemism, function, phrase, social context, phenomenon.

The concept, object, or phenomenon labelling or naming is termed nomination in linguistics. It plays an important role in the concept and understanding of how language captures meaning and assigns meaning to boundaries around us. Euphemistic expressions and euphemisms, within softening context, is a notable form of secondary nomination. Secondary nomination, as a linguistic term, is understood to be a type or category of indirect naming, where terms which substitute other words take center stage. There has been an ample amount of research into how euphemisms have societal impacts and govern the communication process. My goal is to provide with an understanding of euphemisms and their secondary nomination that serves to explain their importance as well as cultural significance.

This paper is based on a broad selection of theoretical and empirical materials from the disciplines of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. Explaining the concepts of secondary nomination and euphemisms requires analysis of several scholarly sources. Some of the primary sources are defined by Yule (2010) and Crystal (2003), where both authors provide foundational frameworks for euphemisms and secondary nomination. Engaging with sociopragmatic perspectives on euphemisms requires an analysis of contemporary discourse that contains illustrative cases of the use of euphemistic expressions.

Secondary nomination is a broad concept in linguistics that refers to a naming process where a term is used in place of another, usually to mitigate a direct or unpalatable reference. According to Yule (2010), secondary nomination occurs when a term does not directly describe an object but evokes its qualities through indirect means, often influenced by social or cultural considerations.

Euphemism, a specific type of secondary nomination, is defined as a word or phrase used to replace one that might be considered harsh, offensive, or unpleasant. Crystal (2003) defines euphemism as "a polite or less direct way of expressing something that could otherwise be considered taboo or inappropriate." Euphemisms often emerge in response to societal norms, taboos, or sensitivities, particularly concerning topics like death, illness, and bodily functions. For instance, terms like "passed away" in place of "died" or "relieved oneself" instead of "urinated" serve to soften the impact of direct language. These euphemisms not only soften the impact of the news but also reflect a cultural desire to avoid confronting the finality and emotional weight of death directly. For instance, the phrase "passed away" implies a gentle transition, often viewed as a more compassionate and less blunt way to address a sensitive topic. This linguistic shift represents a form of "softening" aimed at preserving the emotional wellbeing of both the speaker and the listener. Similarly, in some religious contexts, "gone to be with the Lord" serves a dual purpose of euphemizing death while also offering comfort based on spiritual beliefs. The strategic use of such euphemisms reveals the cultural and emotional need to avoid the harshness of the reality of mortality, showing how euphemisms serve as both a social and psychological function.

In addition to death and bodily functions, euphemisms are frequently employed in the realm of social status, especially in terms of wealth or occupation. A common euphemism for someone who is unemployed or underemployed is "between jobs." This phrase serves as a softer, more socially acceptable way of describing a potentially awkward or stigmatizing situation. Instead of directly stating that someone is without work, which could be perceived negatively, the term "between jobs" implies that the person is temporarily in transition, with the expectation that they will soon secure employment. This euphemism softens the reality of unemployment and presents the individual in a more positive, hopeful light. In addition, it reflects the social stigma surrounding joblessness and the need to protect personal dignity. The phrase helps maintain face and reduces the potential for embarrassment or judgment, thus reinforcing societal expectations of success and stability while avoiding the directness of the term "unemployed."

Euphemisms can take different forms, including metaphors, idiomatic expressions, or circumlocutions. They can be categorized according to the areas they address, such as death, sexuality, or social status. For example, death-related euphemisms include expressions like "gone to a better place" or "departed."

The role of euphemisms as a type of secondary nomination is multifaceted. At the level of social interaction, euphemisms function as tools for managing face-threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, euphemisms can be used to preserve the speaker's and listener's face by avoiding potentially embarrassing or offensive language. By employing euphemisms, speakers create a buffer between themselves and topics that might provoke discomfort or negative emotions.

Culturally, euphemisms reflect social attitudes toward taboo topics. In many societies, direct references to death, illness, or sexuality are often avoided to maintain decorum. For instance, in Western cultures, there is a tendency to use euphemisms

related to death in a bid to soften the emotional weight of loss. Euphemisms related to bodily functions are similarly shaped by a desire to maintain modesty and propriety.

Euphemisms also evolve over time. What is considered a euphemism in one era may eventually become a neutral or even direct term, especially if its use becomes widespread. For example, "senior citizen" was once a euphemism for "old person," but it has become more neutral and less stigmatized over time. Conversely, euphemisms can become overused or lose their impact, leading speakers to create new forms of secondary nomination.

While euphemisms serve as a mechanism of politeness, they can also obscure meaning and limit clarity. This is particularly evident in the realm of politics, where euphemistic language is often employed to hide the true nature of controversial policies or actions. For example, terms like "collateral damage" are used to obscure the reality of civilian casualties during warfare. Such instances show that euphemisms can sometimes be manipulative or serve to sanitize unpleasant realities, leading to debates about the ethical implications of their use. In contrast, euphemisms that focus on sensitive areas like disability or mental health can promote inclusivity and understanding by reframing negative or stigmatized language. However, the line between a genuinely inclusive term and a euphemism that reinforces stigma can be thin. Therefore, a critical approach to euphemism usage is essential for understanding its social and ethical implications.

In conclusion, euphemisms, as a type of secondary nomination, play a crucial role in shaping communication. They allow individuals to navigate delicate topics, mitigate social discomfort, and adhere to cultural norms. However, the use of euphemisms is not without its complexities. They can obscure meaning, reinforce stereotypes, or serve as a form of social control. An understanding of euphemisms as secondary nominations is vital for examining how language reflects and influences societal values. Future research could further investigate the shifting dynamics of euphemism usage across cultures and contexts, especially in an increasingly globalized world where language is continually evolving.

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