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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF EUPHEMISM FORMATION STRATEGIES IN THE RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES²⁶

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a contrastive analysis of the major strategies used to build euphemistic expressions in the Russian and English languages. The study relies on the theoretical works of famous linguists, and uses examples from the English and Russian dictionaries of euphemisms. The article combines quantitative and qualitative analyses, with pragmatic and contrastive approaches to compare the way of forming euphemisms in both languages. The results of the research show that methods such as circumlocution, metaphor, metonymy, substitution as well as generalization are observed in the usage of both languages at a similar level. Understatement and abbreviation, however, are used more often in the Russian language due to its derivational morphology, while overstatement and flippancy were found to be more characteristic to the English language. The findings reveal that the differences between the two languages can create difficulties in the translation process, since some types of euphemisms formed in one language do not have direct equivalent in the other one, requiring the translator to find alternative solutions.

KEYWORDS

Euphemism, euphemism formation strategies, contrastive linguistics, Russian language, English language, lexical-semantic analysis, linguistic comparison.

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RUS VA INGLIZ TILLARIDA EVFEMIZM YASALISH STRATEGIYALARINING QIYOSIY TAHLILI

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ANNOTATSIYA	KALIT SO‘ZLAR
Ushbu maqolada rus va ingliz tillarida evfemistik iboralarni hosil qilishda qo‘llaniladigan asosiy strategiyalarning qiyosiy tahlili keltirilgan. Tadqiqot mashhur tilshunoslarning nazariy ishlariga tayanadi, ingliz hamda rus evfemizmlar lug‘atlaridan olingan misollardan foydalanadi. Maqolada ikkala tildagi evfemizm yasash usullarini solishtirish uchun miqdoriy va sifat tahlili, pragmatik va qiyosiy yondashuvlar kabi metodlar qo‘llanildi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko‘rsatadiki, perifraz, metafora (istiora), metonimiya, o‘zlashtirish, umumlashtirish, shuningdek, so‘zni so‘zga almashtirish kabi usullar ikkala tilda ham deyarli bir xil darajada qo‘llanilishi kuzatildi. Qisqartma (abbreviatsiya) va litota (kamsitib yoki kamaytirib ko‘rsatish) rus tilining so‘z yasash morfologiyasi tufayli rus tilida ko‘proq qo‘llanilishi aniqlandi. Mubolag‘a va hazil-mutoyiba orqali evfemizm yasash usullari esa ingliz tiliga ko‘proq xos ekanligi kuzatildi. Olingan natijalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, ikki til o‘rtasidagi farqlar tarjima jarayonida qiyinchiliklar tug‘dirishi mumkin, chunki bir tilda hosil bo‘lgan ba’zi evfemizm turlari boshqasida to‘g‘ridan-to‘g‘ri ekvivalentga ega bo‘lmaydi, bu esa tarjimondan muammoga muqobil yechim topishni talab qiladi.	Evfemizm, evfemizm yasash strategiyalari, qiyosiy tilshunoslik, rus tili, ingliz tili, leksik-semantik tahlil, lingvistik qiyoslash.

СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ СТРАТЕГИЙ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ЭВФЕМИЗМОВ В РУССКОМ И АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКАХ

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АННОТАЦИЯ	КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА
В данной статье представлен сопоставительный анализ основных стратегий образования эвфемистических выражений в русском и английском языках. Исследование опирается на теоретические работы известных отечественных и зарубежных лингвистов и эмпирический материал, извлеченный из английского и русского словарей эвфемизмов. В статье с целью сравнения способов образования эвфемизмов в обоих языках применялись количественный и качественный анализ в сочетании с прагматическим и сопоставительным подходами. Результаты исследования показывают, что такие приемы и способы образования эвфемизмов, как перифраз, метафора, метонимия, заимствование, генерализация, а также прямая замена слова используются в обоих языках. Вместе с тем, согласно полученным данным, в русском языке чаще встречаются литота и аббревиация, тогда как для английского языка более характерны гиперболизация и шутливая замена. Выявленные межъязыковые различия могут создавать трудности при переводе, поскольку некоторые эвфемистические выражения не имеют прямых эквивалентов в другом языке. В таких случаях переводчику необходимо подбирать альтернативные средства, позволяющие сохранить прагматическую функцию исходного выражения.	Эвфемизм, стратегии образования эвфемизмов, сопоставительная лингвистика, переводоведение, русский язык, английский язык, лексико-семантический анализ, лингвистическое сопоставление.

INTRODUCTION

Euphemism is a very common phenomenon in language. In everyday communication, as well as in literary works, speakers and characters use euphemisms to avoid rude or unpleasant words directly. Instead, they express their thoughts in a softer and more polite way, without causing offense or misunderstanding (Bulaxovskiy L.A., 1952, 455). Euphemisms are most often used when talking about death, illness, crime, sexual matters, and physical or mental deficiencies. This kind of vocabulary exists in almost every language and culture, but because each language has its own grammar and cultural features, the way euphemisms are formed differs from one language to another. The term “euphemism” has been studied and described by many scholars. Russian and English linguists have also made important contributions to this field by studying types, functions, and formation strategies of euphemisms and classifying them. However, there are not enough studies that directly compare the formation strategies of Russian and English euphemisms. Because of this, it is difficult to know which strategies are more common in one language and which are less productive in the other. This problem is important not only for linguistics but also for translation studies, since a strategy that is common in one language may not have a direct equivalent in another. The aim of this article is to find a solution to this problem by comparing the main euphemism formation strategies in Russian and English. The article is based on the following works (Allan K., Burridge K., 1991, 27–39), (Warren B., 1992, 132), and (Moskvin V.P., 2007, 78). For the analysis, a corpus was compiled from (Senichkina Y.P., 2008) and (Holder R.W., 2002). The analysis combines qualitative and quantitative methods with contrastive and pragmatic approaches to analyze the compiled data.

METHODS

Four main methods were used in the process of writing and the analysis of the article: qualitative, quantitative, contrastive and pragmatic analysis. Quantitative analysis was used to determine how the collected examples were distributed across strategies, while qualitative analysis assessed whether the selected euphemisms matched their assigned euphemism types. The pragmatic approach identified the context in which each

euphemism was used and what meaning the writer or speaker intended to convey through it, and the contrastive method served as the main tool to compare the Russian and English examples directly. In addition, elements of conceptual metaphor and lexical-semantic analysis were used to clarify how each euphemism was formed.

To carry out the study ten main euphemism formation strategies were selected from the reviewed literature. Between 10 to 20 euphemistic units were compiled for each euphemism formation strategy in different taboo topics, resulting in about 100 euphemism pairs. The material for analysis was drawn from (Senichkina Y.P., 2008) for the Russian examples, and from (Holder R.W., 2002) for the English examples. In addition, for the purposes of the present study, a strategy was considered relatively productive if approximately twenty euphemistic units representing different taboo domains were identified in the compiled corpus.

RESULTS

At the beginning of this study, it was planned to collect between 10 and 20 euphemistic units for each of the ten selected euphemism formation strategies. Accordingly, the initial goal was to compile a corpus of approximately 100 euphemistic units for each language. However, during the data collection process, the number of examples found in both languages exceeded this target. At the same time, it was observed that while some strategies contained more than twenty examples in one language, the same strategy yielded fewer than ten examples in the other language. The following section presents the analysis and results for each strategy separately.

The first selected strategy was *metaphor*. This strategy forms euphemisms by expressing words or expressions that are considered rude or inappropriate to mention directly through comparison with another object or concept, thereby softening their meaning (Allan K., Burridge K., 1991, 29-33). For example, the Russian euphemism “нераскрывшийся бутон” literally means “an unopened flower bud”, but in a euphemistic context it symbolizes virginity. An English example is “blood money”. Although its literal meaning is “money stained with blood”, as a euphemism it refers to “money received as a result of murder or another person’s death”. The analysis showed that twenty metaphorical euphemisms were collected for each language from different

taboo domains. The findings indicate that metaphor is one of the most productive strategies of euphemism formation in both Russian and English. Within the compiled corpus, metaphorical euphemisms occurred most frequently in the semantic field of death. Other common domains included pregnancy, prison life, and sexual relations.

The second strategy examined was *metonymy*. This strategy forms euphemisms by referring not to the taboo concept itself, but to one of its associated parts or attributes (Moskvin V. P., 2007, 64). A good example is the Russian expression “пойти под нож” and its English equivalent “to go under the knife”. Literally, both expressions mean “*to go under the knife*”, however, in euphemistic usage they refer to “undergoing a surgical operation”. Here, the meaning is conveyed through the instrument used in surgery rather than the procedure itself. The results show that metonymy is a less productive strategy in both languages. The compiled corpus contains nine metonymic euphemisms in Russian and ten in English. In Russian, metonymic euphemisms were found mainly in the semantic fields of body parts and medicine, whereas in English they occurred more frequently in the domains of alcohol consumption and crime.

The third strategy selected for analysis was *substitution*. This strategy creates euphemisms by replacing a taboo word or expression with another word that has a similar meaning but carries a less direct or less offensive connotation (Krysin L. P., 1996, 28-49). For example, the Russian word “безработная” may be replaced by “домохозяйка”, while the English word “pregnant” may be replaced by “expectant”. Both examples illustrate the substitution strategy. The analysis revealed that more than twenty substitution euphemisms were identified in each language. This suggests that substitution is also one of the most productive strategies of euphemism formation in both Russian and English. Within the compiled corpus, Russian substitution euphemisms occurred most frequently in the semantic fields of behavior and crime, whereas English substitution euphemisms were found mainly in the domains of sexual relations and crime.

Another euphemism formation strategy examined in this study is **circumlocution**, which is also referred to as *paraphrase* or *periphrasis* in some

sources. This strategy creates euphemisms by avoiding the direct use of a taboo word or expression and replacing it with a longer, more descriptive, and indirect expression (Warren B., 1992, 128-172). For example, the Russian expression “уйти на заслуженный отдых” is used instead of “уйти на пенсию (to retire), while the English expression “a developing country” is used instead of “a poor country”. Both examples clearly illustrate the circumlocution strategy. According to the results of the analysis twenty circumlocution euphemisms were identified in both Russian and English across different taboo domains. This suggests that circumlocution is one of the productive strategies of euphemism formation in both languages. Within the compiled corpus, Russian circumlocution euphemisms occurred most frequently in the semantic fields of pregnancy, death, and sexual relations, whereas in English they were found mainly in the domains of politics and sexual relations.

The next selected strategy is *borrowing*. This strategy forms euphemisms by expressing a taboo concept through a word or expression borrowed from another language. For example, the expression “bon vivant” was borrowed from French into both Russian and English. Literally, it refers to a person who enjoys the pleasures of life, while in its euphemistic sense it may be used to describe “a sexually active man” or “a womanizer” in a less direct and less offensive way. According to the results of the analysis, twenty borrowing euphemisms belonging to different taboo domains were identified in both Russian and English. These findings indicate that borrowing is also a productive strategy of euphemism formation in the two languages. Within the compiled corpus, borrowing-based euphemisms were found most frequently in the semantic field of sexual relations in both Russian and English.

One more widely used strategy of euphemism formation is *abbreviation*. This strategy creates euphemisms by replacing a taboo word or expression with its initial letters or with an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of a modified expression. For example, in Russian, the abbreviation “БОМЖ” (лицо без определённого места жительства) is used instead of the direct word “бездомный” (homeless). Similarly, in English, the abbreviation “STI” (sexually transmitted infection) is often used instead of directly referring to a sexually

transmitted. Both examples clearly illustrate the abbreviation strategy. (Allan K., Burridge K., 1991, 33-36). In the process of the analysis 20 euphemistic abbreviations were identified in Russian. Most of them were related to the semantic fields of politics and prison life. In English, this strategy was found to be less productive, with 14 euphemistic abbreviations identified across different taboo domains. Most English abbreviations were used to soften slang expressions, swear words, and other offensive language. These findings suggest that abbreviation is a more productive euphemism formation strategy in Russian than in English. It is also worth noting that the shortest Russian euphemistic abbreviations consist of two letters, while most are formed from three or more letters. In contrast, English also employs single-letter euphemisms, particularly in informal speech. For example, the letter “F” is commonly used instead of the swear word “fuck”, while “G” may be used instead of “Jesus” in order to avoid direct profanity or blasphemy.

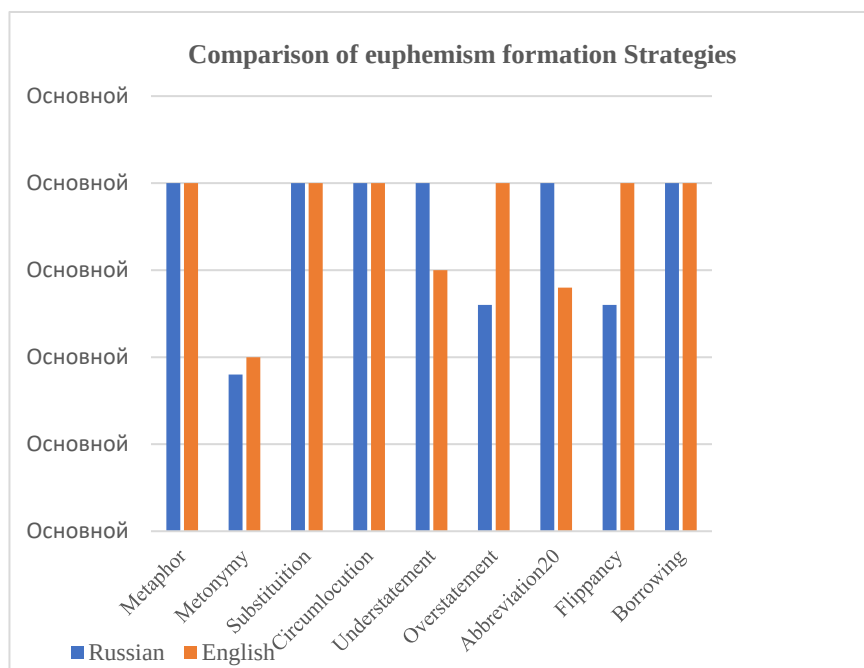
The following euphemism formation strategy to be examined in this study is *flippancy*. This strategy creates euphemisms by replacing taboo words or expressions with humorous, playful, or irreverent expressions. Rather than avoiding the taboo concept completely, flippancy reduces its seriousness through humorous language, making the expression sound less offensive and emotionally less disturbing (Allan K., Burridge K., 1991, 34-36). Examples of this strategy include the English expression “parallel parking”, which is used euphemistically to mean “having a mistress”, and the Russian expression “кричать на белого друга”, which is used instead of the direct verb “рвать” (to vomit). According to the results of the analysis, flippancy occurred more frequently in English than in Russian. Within the compiled English corpus, 20 euphemistic units representing different taboo domains were identified, whereas only 13 units were found in Russian. The findings indicate that humorous euphemisms are more productive in English colloquial speech than in Russian. In the compiled corpus, English flippancy euphemisms occurred most frequently in the semantic fields of death, sexual relations, and alcohol consumption, whereas Russian examples were concentrated mainly in the domains of death, alcohol consumption, and mental state.

The next strategies selected for analysis were *understatement* and *overstatement*. Understatement forms euphemisms by reducing the severity or offensiveness of a taboo expression, whereas overstatement, in contrast, creates euphemisms by replacing an offensive expression with one that sounds more elevated, prestigious, or exaggerated (Warren B., 1992, 128-172). A clear example of understatement can be seen in the Russian adjective “полноватый”, which is used instead of “толстый”, or in the English expression “getting on a bit”, which replaces the direct adjective “old”. Overstatement, on the other hand, is particularly common in occupational titles. For example, the Russian expressions “мастер чистоты” and “специалист по клинингу” are used instead of “уборщик”, while the English expressions “sanitation engineer” and “custodial engineer” replace the simpler word “cleaner”. In these examples, occupations that are usually perceived as ordinary are presented in a more prestigious and elevated way. The analysis identified 20 understatement euphemisms in Russian and 15 in English. These findings suggest that understatement is a more productive euphemism formation strategy in Russian than in English. The opposite tendency was observed for overstatement. Within the compiled corpus, 13 overstatement euphemisms were identified in Russian, compared with 20 in English. This indicates that overstatement is more productive in English than in Russian.

The final strategy examined in this study was *generalization*. As its name suggests, this strategy creates euphemisms by replacing a specific taboo expression with a more general or less specific term. Rather than naming the taboo concept directly, it refers to it in broader and less explicit terms. For example, the Russian word “привычка” may euphemistically refer to various kinds of addiction or undesirable habits. Similarly, in English, words such as “incident” and “case” are often used to describe different unpleasant or socially sensitive situations without specifying their exact nature. The analysis identified 18 generalization-based euphemisms in both Russian and English. These findings indicate that generalization is a productive strategy in both languages. Unlike several other strategies, however, generalization was not associated with one dominant semantic field. Instead, it was found across a wide range of taboo domains, including health, crime, politics,

sexuality, and social behavior. The overall results show that 177 euphemistic units in English, and 173 ones in Russian were analyzed in the process of the research. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the productivity of euphemism formation strategies differs considerably between Russian and English. For the purposes of this study, a strategy was regarded as productive if approximately 20 euphemistic units representing different taboo domains could be identified in the compiled corpus for a particular language. In contrast, strategies represented by noticeably fewer examples and largely restricted to a single semantic field were considered less productive. Based on this criterion, metaphor, substitution, circumlocution, borrowing, and generalization proved to be productive in both languages, whereas metonymy, abbreviation, understatement, overstatement, and flippancy demonstrated different levels of productivity in Russian and English. Brief information about the results is provided in the **Figure №1**.

Figure №1.



DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis clearly indicate that both languages employ a variety of strategies for euphemism formation, and that the productivity of these strategies differs from one language to the other. Metaphor, circumlocution, substitution, and borrowing were found to be widely used and highly productive in both languages.

This can be explained by the fact that speakers of both Russian and English tend to avoid expressing unspeakable or offensive words and phrases directly, preferring instead to convey them in a softer, less face-threatening manner. This tendency is particularly evident in relation to death, sexuality, illness, disability, and social status. Metonymy and generalization, by contrast, were found to be used to a similarly low degree in both languages. This can be attributed to the fact that metonymy does not name the taboo concept itself but rather something associated with it, and therefore conveys meaning less fully than other strategies. A similar pattern can be observed with generalization, where the taboo word is replaced by a term denoting the broader semantic field to which it belongs, making it more difficult for the recipient to infer the exact meaning intended. For example, the Russian words “тюрьма” (prison) or “больница” (hospital) may both be replaced by the more general “учреждение” or “заведение” (institution), which obscures the precise referent and requires additional context for correct interpretation. This appears to explain the comparatively limited use of both strategies in Russian and English.

At the same time, certain strategies were found to be considerably more productive in one language than in the other. Understatement was shown to be more characteristic of Russian, which can primarily be attributed to the morphological structure of the Russian language. Specifically, Russian possesses a range of suffixes and prefixes — such as “-оват-”, “-еньк-”, and the negative prefix “не-” that soften a word's meaning by diminishing its degree or intensity. This can be illustrated by examples such as “полноватый” used instead of “толстый”(fat), “туповатый” instead of “дурак” (fool), and “невысокий” instead of “короткий” (short). English, being an analytic language, lacks such derivational suffixes and instead constructs litotic meaning through auxiliary modifiers such as “not”, “a little”, or “slightly”, resulting in somewhat longer constructions, which may introduce a degree of inconvenience into spoken discourse. For this reason, English speakers tend, for cultural and pragmatic reasons, to avoid overly long utterances and to favor shorter, more direct phrasing, which in turn explains why understatement is used less frequently in English euphemisms than in Russian. Abbreviation was identified as another strategy more

characteristic of Russian. Nearly 100 abbreviation-based euphemisms were found from (Senichkina Y.P., 2008), of which 20 were selected across a range of topics; the majority of these belonged to political, bureaucratic, and military discourse. Numerous abbreviations inherited from the Soviet period were shown to have made a substantial contribution to this category. English abbreviations, by comparison, were considerably less frequent. This suggests that abbreviation as a euphemism-formation strategy is more productive in the Russian lexicon than in English.

In comparison, flippancy and overstatement emerged as strategies more characteristic of English. With regard to flippancy, this strategy was found to occur more frequently in English than in Russian, particularly within the semantic fields of death, alcohol, sexuality, and mental health. This difference may be attributed to broader cultural variation, meaning that English-speaking communities appear to favor humorous and ironic euphemistic expressions to a greater extent than Russian-speaking communities, reflecting differing speaker preferences. Euphemisms formed through humor or irony are also observed in Russian, though considerably less frequently. Turning to the overstatement strategy, it can be seen that overstatement was found to be considerably more productive in English. Many English euphemisms elevate occupational titles or institutional terminology by employing prestigious or technical vocabulary. Expressions such as “sanitation engineer”, “custodial engineer”, and “law enforcement officer” illustrate the tendency to increase the social status of ordinary occupations. Similar examples occur in Russian, but they are less numerous. This difference suggests that English administrative and professional discourse relies more extensively on prestige-oriented words to create euphemistic expressions.

Taken together, the present study also contributes to euphemism research to a systematic contrastive analysis of Russian and English euphemistic dictionaries. While previous studies have often examined individual strategies or single semantic domains, this research compares the relative productivity of multiple euphemism formation strategies across two languages using the same theoretical framework. Consequently, the findings provide a clearer understanding of both the universal and language-specific characteristics of euphemism formation.

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