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FOUNDATIONS OF THE FORMATION OF TABOO AND EUPHEMISMS

Khilola Inomovna Ismailova

Kokand State University, PhD

E-mail: inamovna4909@gmail.com

Kokand, Uzbekistan

ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: The phenomena of taboo and euphemism are closely linked with the emergence of language and human thinking; they have developed through evolutionary stages similar to language itself, based on the necessity of human communication and the demands of oratory, and later formed a distinct layer of speech with their own objects. It is known that since primitive times, humanity has involuntarily used euphemisms. According to linguist A.A. Reformatsky, euphemistic units used in place of taboo are inherently connected with ethnic development. He notes that various superstitions and religious beliefs contributed to the emergence of taboo, while euphemisms serve to obscure its name. From the second half of the 19th century, the phenomena of taboo and euphemism began to be studied from ethnographic and ethnolinguistic perspectives. In general linguistics, Turkology, and particularly in Uzbek linguistics, there are numerous sources and viewpoints on the causes of taboo and euphemism and the purposes for which they are used.

Introduction. Today, the study of taboo and euphemism shows that the means of communication between people are closely interconnected and form three layers according to

the way reality is represented: language (message, communication), speech (attitude, dialogue), and super-speech (euphemistic, expressive-emotional communication).

Speech represents the development of language, while the euphemistic layer represents the development of speech. Euphemistic speech is the highest form of human cognition, expressing intellect and subtlety through a refined, “veiled,” neutralized, and softened figurative depiction of reality. Taboo and euphemism are historical and ethnographic categories. However, there are no texts that clearly demonstrate when they first appeared or in which century they were formed as stylistic devices.

Euphemistic speech, like language itself, is ancient and can be traced back to primitive systems, as well as to the languages of tribes and clans. The practice of prohibiting and using euphemisms manifests itself in a unique way at all stages of language development, among all peoples, and in the speech of all social strata and groups.

Analysis of Literature and Methodologies

Allan Burrij notes that the word tabu (taboo) originates from the Polynesian Tongan language and emphasizes the meaning of prohibition. However, its dialectal synonyms in Polynesian and Melanesian languages, such as tapu, kapu, tambu, are also said to convey meanings of “harmful” (things possessing the power to cause harm or damage) and “prohibition.” The entry of the word tabu and its concept into the language of the Agilshin Empire, which once occupied a large territory, and its subsequent spread as an international term is closely associated with the monumental work of the famous explorer, ethnographer, and scientist James Cook. During his three global circumnavigations, Cook (Captain Cook) studied numerous Pacific islands, the lands of Australia, and local customs. Between 1768 and 1779, he conducted ethnographic research, exploring the peoples of these regions and making geographical discoveries. He understood the first form of establishing morality as tabu, that is, the prohibition of certain actions and objects in primitive societies.

Tabu emerges historically as a form of social control, purification of the human spirit, and establishment of social norms. For example, it was used to forbid the slaughter and consumption of the elderly, women, and children (cannibalism), to evoke public disapproval toward transgressors, punish them, or expel them from society or the tribe. As a result, through elders, tribal activity was directed toward animal husbandry and the refinement of moral and ethical processes.

In early kinship systems, euphemisms were primarily used to formalize social norms and customs related to “revenge” and “death.” In cases where a tribe member fell victim to murder, customs required a response targeting one of the killer’s relatives. In such instances,

euphemistic expressions such as “from death to death,” “from blood to blood,” or “from life to life” replaced direct terminology describing the act of murder. These expressions served not only communicative but also ritual functions, softening the perception of traumatic events and giving them symbolic meaning.

As social relations developed and certain practices were prohibited (ethnographic taboo), the euphemistic system also underwent changes: relative euphemisms emerged, replacing direct revenge with expressions such as “paying the price of death,” “making a payment,” or “compensating for losses.” Such lexical substitutions illustrate the complex process of shifting conflict resolution from physical forms to material or symbolic ones.

Cultural differences among linguistic communities also influenced the perception of death. For instance, ancient English societies did not practice the sacrifice of a relative as a form of vengeance for the deceased. Instead, mourning was observed along with offerings dedicated to the spirit of the departed. This attitude toward death was reflected linguistically: the word death was softened in expression, replaced by euphemisms showing respect for the deceased. The verb to die was euphemized with expressions like “went on a long journey” or “went to God.” Such culture-specific expressions underscore the importance of symbolic and linguistic adaptation in perceiving death across societies.

Thus, the evolution of euphemistic vocabulary across cultures demonstrates its universal role as a tool for mitigating negative emotional experiences and preserving cultural traditions. Historical and ethnographic analyses allow scholars to understand the mechanisms of euphemism formation, their role in intercultural communication, and their significance in maintaining linguistic heritage.

Research on English euphemisms indicates that their conceptual formation occurred under the influence of religious worldview, particularly Christianity, which was the dominant religion for most of England’s population. Christian religious traditions played a key role in the development and spread of euphemisms, which were later widely applied in everyday language. One central aspect of religious influence on language customs was the transmission of ancestral names to subsequent generations, including children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. This practice reflects a deep belief that preserving ancestral names not only perpetuates memory but also honors heritage, ensures generational continuity, and strengthens spiritual connections among descendants.

It is worth noting that this practice, which traces back to ancient times, was widespread among many peoples and has maintained some relevance to this day. Its operation within language and cultural traditions highlights the importance of euphemistic expressions as tools

for softening communication and preserving cultural identity. Therefore, euphemisms formed within such traditions perform not only linguistic but also cultural-symbolic functions, helping preserve collective memory and strengthen social relationships. Studying such phenomena is crucial for understanding the historical and cultural mechanisms underlying the formation and evolution of language norms.

In the context of historical-cultural analysis, the dualism of good and evil played a central role, significantly influencing the development of language and symbolic systems in ancient societies. In particular, the idea of a constant struggle between forces representing virtue and those associated with evil was widespread in ancient times. For instance, the victory of spring symbols over winter was interpreted as the triumph of good over evil. This motif is reflected in Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Diwan Lughat al-Turk*, underscoring its significance for the cultural heritage of contemporary peoples. Similarly, concepts related to the struggle between light and darkness appeared in association with sunrise and the retreat of night.

Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, or famines were also interpreted through this dualistic lens, perceived as manifestations of the triumph of evil forces and embodied in depictions of spirits, giants, or other terrifying beings. Such beliefs were further developed in religious doctrines, demonstrating their close connection with theological systems. Similar ideas existed in ancient English culture, where mythological and religious beliefs were based on opposing forces. During the period of the ancient English kingdoms, euphemistic vocabularies were created. Under the influence of religious and mythological traditions, the euphemistic lexicon was significantly enriched, while archaic elements survived to provide a foundation for new euphemisms still used today.

Fetishistic practices, important in the worldview of ancient peoples, contributed to the development of euphemisms. These practices reflected the complex interaction of linguistic, cultural, and religious components, shaping the distinctive characteristics of euphemistic expressions. Studying such phenomena provides deeper insights into the mechanisms of euphemism formation and their role in intercultural communication.

Not only words (names) but also certain numbers, dates, years, months, days, and human ages were considered to possess magical significance. For example, among the Uzbek people, the number seven plays a role in naming a newborn, cutting hair, placing the child in a cradle within seven days, holding the cradle ceremony or *aqiqa*, sending the child to school at age seven, observing rituals related to death, as well as symbolic groupings such as seven siblings, seven sons' mother, seven stars (*Etagon*), seven robbers, seven treasures, seven-layered bedding, seventh heaven, and other linguistic and practical expressions. These usages

indicate that the number seven is not merely a numeral. Similarly, the number forty (qirq) conveys the notions of maturity and completeness, in addition to its numeric value. For instance, Muhammad received the title of Prophet at age forty, and the Muslim population reached forty under Caliph Umar, marking the beginning of the religion's development (Hadith). Clearly, number-related euphemisms are widely used in folk language and oral traditions.

Unlike Uzbek linguistic culture, in English culture, the number thirteen is considered unlucky. Therefore, in some cases, floor numbers in multi-story buildings omit the number thirteen. It is noteworthy that in both Uzbek and English linguistic cultures, number-related euphemisms occupy a special place.

The phenomenon of euphemism is closely linked to taboo. Euphemisms originated from taboo and were created to veil words. Based on this, euphemisms can be categorized according to societal, communicative, and moral needs:

1. Societal need: In early stages of societal development, productive forces were limited, knowledge of the environment and nature was restricted, and mythological beliefs predominated. People could not explain objective events and natural phenomena, believing that supernatural forces controlled the world and designated future events as fortunate or unfortunate. Early religious views saw humanity as subject to these supernatural powers. Limited knowledge led primitive societies to attempt comparisons of linguistic signs and the realities they represented. From ancient times, people avoided using linguistic signs representing negative events or experiences, believing that language could bring fortune or disaster. Misusing language for negative purposes was thought to invite punishment, while correct use of beautiful words ensured protection. Naturally, this process contributed to the emergence of taboos and the formation of strong societal beliefs. Primitive concepts preserved immutable social norms, creating the need for linguistic signs to express indirect notions, giving rise to euphemisms to meet societal requirements.

2. Communicative need: Euphemisms emerging from the need for communication express interpersonal relations. Through these expressions, a person forms impressions of others, gaining understanding of their character and personality, influencing decisions on continuing interactions. Appearance, clothing, and other factors are relevant, but speech and behavior are most important. Euphemistic usage is an essential factor for assessing whether a person's speech aligns with social etiquette and respect. Applying euphemisms demonstrates respect for others and also addresses personal needs.

3. Moral-ethical need: Etiquette regulates relationships among people, and this moral need underlies the emergence of euphemisms. According to English researcher Leech, as social etiquette develops in parallel with societal progress, the scope of euphemism use gradually expands. Euphemisms consistent with moral-ethical norms allow individuals to recognize and navigate appropriate social behavior.

Results and Discussion. The issues of euphemistic lexicon and its connection with other linguistic phenomena have been scientifically studied by linguists such as J. Vandryes, E. Sheygal, R. Southerland, F. Katamba, B. A. Larin, L. P. Krysin, A. S. Kurkiyev, Y. P. Senichkina, and others. For instance, according to J. Vandryes, “a euphemism is nothing other than a complex and cultured form of prohibited vocabulary.” While we do not fully agree with this view, it can be stated that euphemisms are not only a complex and cultured form of forbidden words and expressions, but, as evidenced in our research, they also serve functions beyond politeness and cultural refinement. In particular, euphemisms in the socio-political sphere help to camouflage facts that could provoke discontent or conflict, i.e., they act as a means of softening the truth to manipulate (control) public perception, a technique that politicians and journalists use effectively.

According to A. N. Turbachev’s studies, European hunters, fishermen, and farmers tend to avoid naming dangerous and harmful animals during hunting, believing that by doing so they can prevent potential danger. L. A. Bulakhovsky writes: “A euphemism is a formula to prevent danger ... speaking of a bad thing or phenomenon without calling it by its evil name, but changing its original name.”

Y. A. Agayan notes that in Armenian villages, the word “rope” is used instead of “snake,” as people believe that saying “snake” might make it appear and cause harm. S. P. Vaynshtein observes that in many cultures, including the Tuvilians, children were not called by their real names to protect them from evil spirits following child mortality. Instead, pseudonyms such as “boy” or “girl” were used. In such communities, it is also customary not to mention the names of a husband, wife, or close relatives. This tradition exists in many peoples around the world and corresponds to Uzbek customs as well.

I. V. Arnold discusses the lexical meaning of euphemisms in the English vocabulary, their definitions, and notes that euphemisms have attracted scholarly attention since ancient times. He also acknowledges that euphemisms were effectively used for moral norms, such as the euphemistic treatment of God’s name.

Sh. Ch. Sat highlights the widespread use of taboos in the language and folklore of the Tuva people. He notes that euphemisms actively appear in folk songs, proverbs, riddles, as well

as in the speech of shepherds, hunters, and women, especially for naming the most common predators, poisonous insects, and death-related processes. Among the Uzbek people, similar practices exist—for example, using “donkey” instead of “scorpion” or calling measles a “flower.” It was believed that one should not talk about the fate of livestock before slaughter, otherwise they might become emaciated or fall ill.

N. Boschayeva explains that under the term “euphemism,” negative activities or realities can be softened through camouflage. In most cultures, euphemisms related to personal names are widespread. Professor Odil Akhmatov notes that in North America, people kept their names secret because speaking them could bring harm or suffering. This custom is also found in Africa, America, Australia, and Asia. For example, the Arakuyen people immediately concealed their names from foreigners who might wish them harm; if someone unfamiliar with their customs asked, “What is your name?” they would reply, “I have no name.”

According to the customs of the Adjibve tribe, people did not reveal their own names; instead, a cousin or another person had to introduce them. If this custom was accidentally broken, it was believed that the person who revealed their name would stop growing taller. The Eskimos also believed in the power of words and even changed their names, thinking that a new name could prolong their life or allow them to start a new life, avoiding old age.

Among the Uzbek people, there are also various beliefs connected to personal names. It is believed that the name given to a newborn can positively or negatively influence the child’s destiny. For instance, if ancestors were wealthy or intellectual, the child is often given a name to ensure a similar prosperous or wise life.

Hiding the real name of a person whose name is believed to possess magical power is a deceptive practice, common among European peoples. V. N. Peretruxhin notes that in Russia, the custom of using nicknames (informal names) instead of Christian names while bathing had largely disappeared. Sometimes a person had three names (first, second, and Christian names): one public, one secret. The unknown name was known only to the priest who baptized the child and the closest friends. The real name of the newborn was hidden to protect them from evil eye and diseases. For example, when a person known as Ivan passed away, the priest called him Nikolay during the funeral, and only then did people learn that the deceased’s real name was Nikolay, not Ivan.

Conclusion. Uzbek linguist E. Begmatov conducted observations regarding taboos and euphemisms related to naming children and related rituals. Taboos and euphemisms concerning personal names have been noted in other studies as well. Based on the above analyses, it is appropriate to study the manifestation of taboos and euphemisms in the Uzbek

anthroponymic system due to the important role of personal names in the emergence and development of onomastics. For instance, in ancient times, according to the customs of Central Asian peoples and Uzbeks, husbands and wives did not call each other by their real names. A husband and wife might address each other as “hey” or, after the first child was born, by the name of the eldest child, reflecting etiquette and respect. Calling a spouse by their real name was considered disrespectful, though today, some families no longer observe this rule.

As mentioned, parents carefully consider the name of a child after birth, not solely for etiquette or respect but for several other reasons. When children were given names associated with omens, superstition played an important role, rooted in religious beliefs. People believed that using real names could allow evil spirits or mythical creatures to hear them and harm the child.

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