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КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ЭВФЕМИЗМОВ ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЙ СФЕРЫ СМЕРТЬ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АНГЛИЙСКОМ, ФРАНЦУЗСКОМ И ИТАЛЬЯНСКОМ ЯЗЫКАХ

Аннотация: Статья посвящена процессам эвфемизации в современном английском, французском и итальянском языках на материале тематической сферы смерть. В ходе исследования были выделены и проанализированы концепты, лежащие в основе эвфемизмов, принадлежащих к данной табуированной сфере. Результаты исследования позволяют понять особенности и логику рассматриваемых языков, а также каким образом идеи, мысли и ценности общества выражаются с помощью языковых средств.

Ключевые слова: эвфемизм, эвфемизация, табу, тематическая сфера смерть, романские языки, концепт, концептуальный анализ.

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CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE EUPHEMISMS OF THE THEMATIC SPHERE OF DEATH IN MODERN ENGLISH, FRENCH AND ITALIAN LANGUAGES

Abstract. The article examines a complex process of euphemization in one of the most productive traditional spheres – the thematic sphere of death. The research is aimed at the understanding of the peculiarities and logics of the considered languages and the reflection of thoughts, ideas and values of the societies through language means. During the research a few conceptual representations in modern English, French and Italian languages were analyzed and compared, thus enabling to make conclusions about the coinciding concepts and the general tendencies in the development of the considered languages.

Key words: euphemisms, euphemization, thematic sphere of death, roman languages, concept, conceptual analysis, taboo.

The very phenomenon of euphemization is regarded as a complex linguistic, social and cognitive phenomenon possessing three interconnected components: sociocultural, pragmatic and linguistic. Due to the fact that the complex of knowledge, cultural values, social norms and stereotypes is reflected in the conceptual areas subjected to declaring taboo, the study of euphemisms is essential for everyone aspiring to proficiency in language. The importance of conducting researches dedicating to the process of euphemization in different languages is explained by the fact that it allows to trace and to compare how the process of formation, transformation of ideas, values and stereotypes can affect the process of formation of conceptual spheres, and through this comparison to understand the logic and peculiarities of the source language.

The notion of euphemism is closely connected with the phenomenon of taboo. While euphemisms are regarded as pragmatically marked language units, which aim is to implement the referential function, as well as to hide the message of the utterance, in Oxford Dictionaries taboo is defined as «a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place or thing» [2].

The study of areas which bans are imposed on, helps to understand the patterns and peculiarities of functioning of the social system as an integral entity, the main elements of which are people, norms and communications [5]. Regularities and specificity of formation and functioning of the taboo areas are related to the social nature of man, with a set of social, political and spiritual processes taking place in society.

The result of comparison and generalization of classifications of taboo areas proposed by linguists, was the allocation of eight spheres, which can be defined as traditionally identified by linguists and one of the largest spheres is the thematic sphere of death and illness [4].

According to John Algeo, «Euphemism is especially frequent when we must come face to face with the less happy facts of our existence» [1]. Death, as an eternal taboo of humanity, is associated with one of the largest and also the most stable

thematic group of English euphemisms. But the fear of death is not the only reason that contributes to the existing of numerous synonyms for dying, the gentler of which are considered as euphemismes. One can be motivated by kindness or politeness, or by the necessity to be very gentle, for example in case when one should announce the death of a beloved one. Hence, euphemisms serve as verbal tranquilizers to help us avoid dealing head on with harsh realities [3].

However, such tendency for the use of indirect nominations for the thematic group of death exists not only in English, but also in French and in Italian language. Mostly, the reasons for the processes of substitution in French and Italian are the same as in English language, still the influence of English language on Italian and French languages in some cases can be observed as well.

Several main concepts transmitting the idea of passing away are similar in these three languages. The idea of leaving or changing a position lies in the basis of such widespread concepts as the concept of leaving and the absence in this world, the concept of returning to the ancestors and the concept of passing into a different life or world as well. All these concepts are reflected in all three languages considered and what is more in many cases they are almost identical. The representation of concepts of the regarded thematic sphere for English language is given in the chart 1.

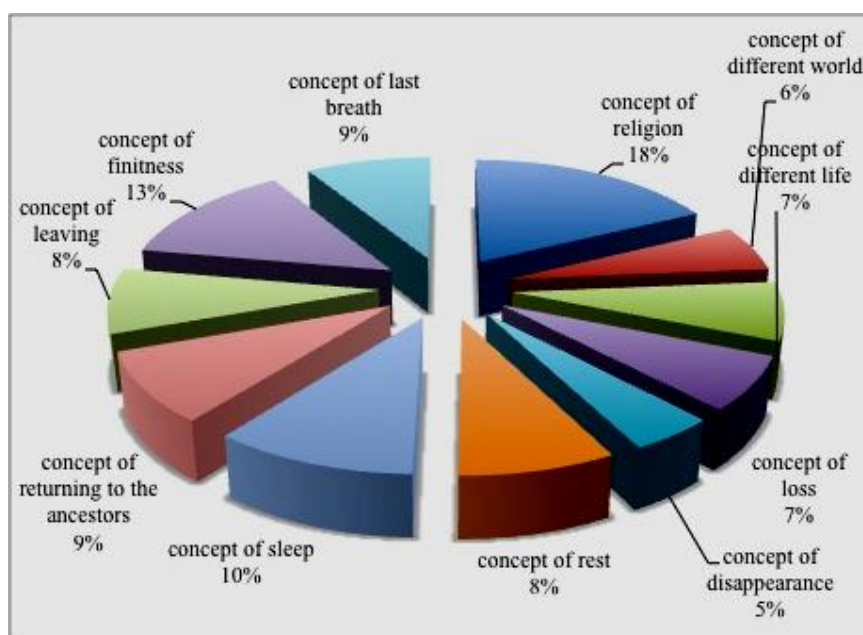


Chart 1 – The ratio of concepts of the thematic sphere of death in English

This assumption is exemplified through the following collocations: an English word combination «go off», an Italian «è andato» and also a French collocation «2s'en aller», all of them transmit the same idea of leaving and represent full lexical equivalents. The same way an Italian euphemism «non è più tra noi» is a lexical equivalent for an English «no longer with us» and a French expression «rejoindre ses aïeux» corresponds with the English «join one's ancestors». The following euphemisms «abbandonare qualcuno» (Italian), «quitter quelqu'un» (French) and «leave somebody» reflect the concept of dying as leaving one's family and they represent perfect examples of full semantic and structural equivalents.

The conceptual representation of dying as the process of passing into a new, better world or starting a better life reflects a natural human desire to believe that death is not the end and they are on the threshold of a better life with new opportunities on their service. This idea is manifested in euphemisms «partir dans un autre monde» (French), «passare ad altra vita/ a miglior vita» and «andare all'altro mondo» (Italian), and also in such English euphemisms as «to enter a better world» or «gone to a better life/ to a better place», which are again full structural and semantic equivalents.

A significant number of conceptual representations relates to religion, the fact that can be explained by the long existence of the taboo and the close interconnection of death and religious views.

It is quite obvious that in terms of religion a vast amount of expressions are connected with God and heaven as a representation of his kingdom. However, in most cases identical expressions can be found only in two languages, and in the third a corresponding euphemism is absent or it coincides only partially. By way of example, in the Italian language expressions «andare in cielo», «andare nel regno dei cieli», «raggiungere il Regno dei Cieli» and «volare in cielo» possess practically the same meaning as English euphemisms «gone to heaven» and «going to the big castle in the sky», however this representation of dying as going to heaven takes a different shape in the French language, where instead of sky a person goes to stars or to the sun: «rejoinder les étoiles» or «aller vers d'autres soleils».

Both Italian and French languages contains euphemisms based on the concept of God, for example, rendering the idea of returning to God and giving him one's soul «andare/ tornare nella casa del Padre», «ha reso l'anima a Dio» (Italian) and «Dieu l'a rappelé à lui», «il a rendu l'âme» (French). Nevertheless, the religious thematic is much more frequent in English, dozens of euphemisms are based on concepts of God, angels, heaven and Biblical themes; among them are: «answered God's calling», «God took him», «found the golden grail», «juggling halos», «angels carried him away», «met his maker», «in Abraham's bosom» and many others.

As it has already been mentioned the idea of moving and changing position is reflected in a number of concepts in English, French and Italian languages. Furthermore this idea finds its realization in some more conceptual representations, creating the image of moving forward or the image of crossing the river that contributes to the people's ideas about the afterlife tracing back to ancient myths and legends. For illustrative purposes the euphemisms from Italian, French and by all means English can be given: «passer de l'autre côté» (French) stands for English «crossed over Jordan» or «crossed over the River Styx», and it is possible to draw parallels between an Italian expression «andare Avanti» (go ahead) and the English «go west» or «go north», representing dying as the process of having way on. For the better illustration the ratio of conceptual representations for French is given in the chart 2.

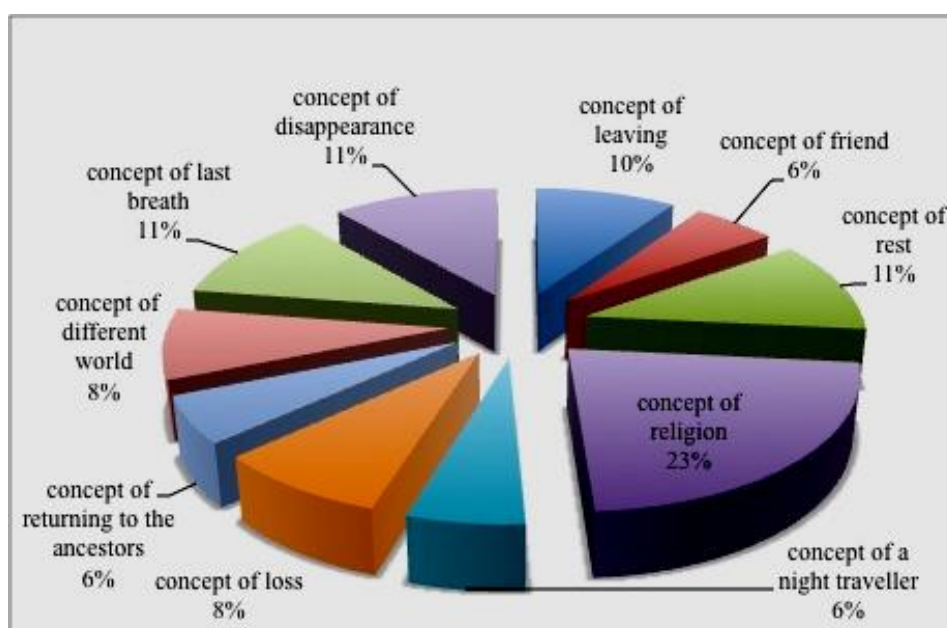


Chart 2 – The ratio of concepts of the thematic sphere of death in French

The representation of the process of dying as giving one last breath is reflected through the full lexical and semantic equivalents in the three considered languages. In such a manner, an Italian euphemism «esalare l'ultimo respiro» corresponds with the French «rendre le dernier soupir» and with the English «breathe one's last breath». The popularity of this concept can be explained by the fact that a man cannot survive without oxygen necessary for the biological process of ventilation. Hence, the stop of breathing tends to be one of the first signs of death and the use of these euphemisms emerge in our minds the mental picture of a dead person.

Other two highly frequent concepts are closely interconnected as far as they regard death as falling asleep or having an eternal rest. The existence of widespread image of a dream as a «small death» as well as assumptions that afterlife is a perfect opportunity to finally have rest led to emerging of quite a considerable number of euphemisms in many languages, and English, French and Italian are not exceptions. Thus, the process of dying is presenting in Italian by the euphemism «addormentarsi» (falling asleep) and in English the concept of sleeping is manifested in a number euphemisms like «sleep City», «sleep of transition», «sleep with the fishes» or «sleephole».

The concept of rest, in its turn, is more frequent in the English language, due to the fact that not only the process of dying, but also the death itself are regarded as rest. This assumption can be illustrated by a numerous euphemisms that exist in the English language. Among them are: «taking an extended rest», «final resting place», «eternal resting place», «place of rest» and many others. This conceptual metaphor of death as an eternal rest is also reflected in French «le repos éternel» and «prendre congé de la vie» that stand for the English «an eternal vacation» or «to be on a permanent vacation². Due to the fact that the notion of rest is quite often associated with piece the Italian euphemism «pace eternal» and the English very common expression «resting in peace» can also be regarded as manifestations of this particular concept.

Turning to the substitutions of the notion of death it should be mentioned that the most frequent euphemisms are based on the concepts, which differ from language

to language. Thus, in Italian the concept of finiteness is very common and it is reflected in a number of euphemisms, for example «l'ultimo fato», «l'ultima quiete», «l'ultima sera» (last fate, last rest and last night respective). This idea of finiteness is quite understandable as everything sooner or later comes to its logical end, however it can be discussed in terms of religious beliefs. According to them the end of one (mortal) life is also a start of the new one and consequently, the end of something (of life in this case) represents just another milestone or a turning point, presupposing a continuation. Hence, the popularity of the concepts of finiteness can be explained by the necessity to mark this turning point. The full range of concepts lying in the basis of euphemism for the denomination of death in Italian language can be observed in the chart 3.

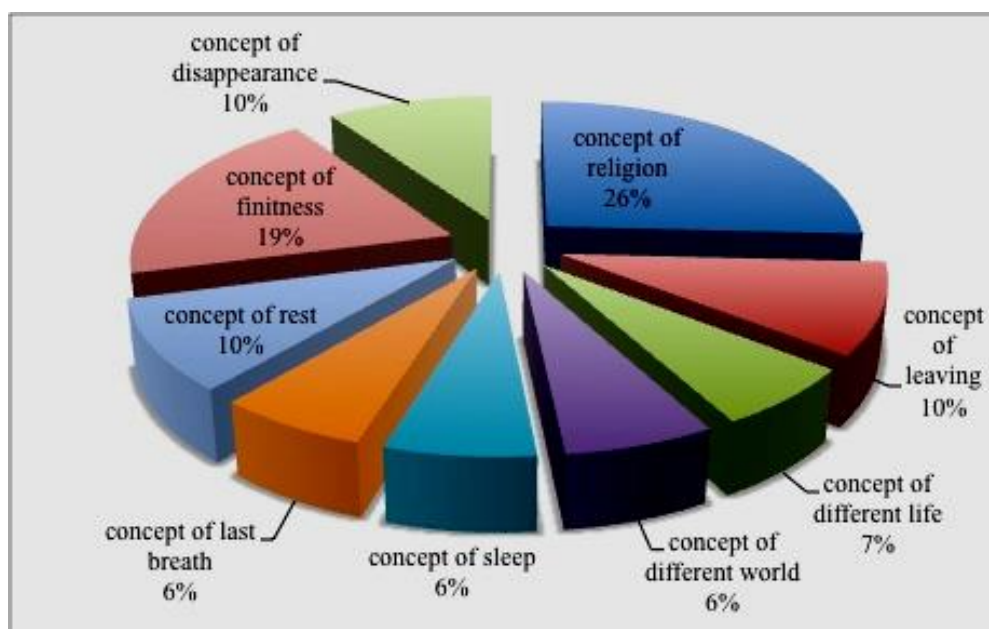


Chart 3 – The ratio of concepts of the thematic sphere of death in Italian

In French death is often regarded as a friend («Camarade»). This conceptual metaphor may serve as a basis for the assertion that the French are not afraid of death, on the contrary they regard it as something positive, as a kind of benefit. Such positive attitude may also be explained by religious beliefs, which assert the existence of an afterlife and death, in its turn, is regarded as a guide to this new better life.

Another conceptual representation of death as a night traveller («la voyageuse de nuit») is based on the metaphorical comparison of death and the darkness of night

and can be interpreted differently. On the one hand, this idea of darkness is linked with the concept of uncertainty and obscurity, as people do not know for sure what happens after death, so they literary find themselves in the dark. On the other hand, there exist a link between the concept of night and the concept of mystery and sacredness. Thus, death is regarded as a sacred ordinance, at the same time hidden from prying eyes.

The concept of loss very frequently used in French, also finds its reflection in the English language. The conceptual representation of death as a cruel loss takes as a semantic basis a feeling of sadness or frustration, as well as a feeling of losing a part of oneself, the typical feelings people experience when their beloved person die. Thus concepts of sadness and loss manifested in a number of euphemisms, as «la perte cruelle» (the cruel loss), «to lose one's life» or «to lose someone», are aimed at emphasizing the bitterness of bereavement.

However, some concepts can be found in all this three languages. One of them is the concept of disappearance, realized in the English euphemism «pass away», in the Italian «sparizione» and the French «la disparition». This concept highlights a rapid and irreversible nature of death and reflects the idea that when someone dies he or she has no place in this world and in this life. In addition to this, the concept of vanishing is closely connected with the one of finiteness, as both of them mark the end of mortal life and the start of a new one.

It is quite obvious that being a flagship in everything concerning the use of euphemisms and creating new ones, English language has at its disposal a surprising number of expressions perfectly suitable for concealing an inappropriate word or an unpleasant notion. Several of this vast range of euphemisms is not deprived of humor. Thus, some of them reveal already discussed concepts, for example euphemisms «got stamped», «return to sender», «kicked the oxygen habit», «gone to sleep city» and «procrastinator's paradise» reflects the concepts of religion, breathing, sleep and rest respectively. Others, in their turn, represent death in a quite unusual manner and connect it with rather distant at first glance concepts.

Thereby, death can be compared with an «an eternal hangover». This particular euphemism reveals definitely negative attitude to the notion of death, due to the fact that in it life is compared with a hard night and death is represented as its very unpleasant consequence.

Furthermore, death can be related even with the children book about Harry Potter, as in the book the protagonist has to face death since the very childhood and got used to this. The euphemism «Potter's field» ironically alludes to this very strange habit of the main character to constantly find himself in a mortal danger.

By all means, the English could not ignore the concept of work while speaking of death. For illustrative purposes the euphemism «to decide that Hell's got a better HR Policy than the office» can be given. The ironic effect of this expression is produced by the clash of the concepts of work, hell and death, presupposing that to die is better than to go to work. Furthermore, the concept of Hell is usually associated with the concept of entertainment, due to the existence of a great number of jokes, according to which everyone who has a great fun in this life is supposed to go to the lower world after Death and to meet a lot of friends there. Hence, in comparison with the office the nether world occurs to be a better place.

It should be mentioned that in English, apart from euphemisms based on the comparison of life with work (for example, «to end one's earthly career»), there exists a number of euphemisms that substitute for death and the process of dying, depending on the occupation.

In the basis of the majority of these euphemisms lies the idea of a last action in a certain professional sphere: for example, «run his last race» refers to runners, «danced his last dance» is about a dancer, and «one last curtain call» is used in the theater community. The concept of finiteness can also be easily found in these examples and it renders the idea that when the professional life is over one's mortal life comes to the end as well. Such representation of death as the end of one's career is frequently used and can be traced in a number of expressions, among which are «that was all she wrote» (about a writer), «taken out of production» (about a

producer), «went 30» (about a journalist) or «reformatted» (about a computer programmer).

Considering death as the sphere of euphemization it is necessary to pay attention to the two very delicate subjects, traditionally subjected to substitution: they are abortion and euthanasia. Even today there is still no consensus on many questions concerning these two themes, and one of the thorny issues is the question about the ethics of these actions. Being a social phenomenon language reflects this uncertain attitude and provides a number of substitutions, which aim is to hide the unpleasant topics.

It is a common knowledge that Italy is considered to be the center of the Catholic faith and the act of abortion is contrary to the religious beliefs of Catholics. Such negative attitude to the issue resulted in a number of euphemisms denoting abortion in the Italian language. The most frequently used euphemisms are based on the concept of failure, for example «falire», «non riuscire» (to fail, do not succeed). In these euphemisms the act of abortion is regarded a huge mistake of failed parents. On the other hand, the expression «non riuscire» can be interpreted as the lost chance of a fetus to develop and to be born. The concept of failure possesses a strong negative connotation and reflects the general negative attitude towards abortion.

The conceptual representation of abortion as disappearance is also quite popular in the Italian language. As it has already been mentioned above, the concept of disappearance is used in the expressions, denoting death. This coincidence of concepts is not accidental, due to the fact that abortion is regarded as death and the concept of disappearance (for example, in the expression «andare in fumo») emphasizes the fact that it is the end of a fetus' life and to create a mental picture of its vanishing from mother's life as well.

Another Italian euphemism for this action «andare a vuoto» is based on the conceptual metaphor, representing the performing of an abortion as returning to the emptiness. In this case the idea of returning to emptiness is understood directly, as the result of abortion is the absence of the baby in the womb. The returning to the emptiness may be interpreted as the returning to the initial state, however the

negative connotation still remains. The concept of emptiness is generally associated with nothingness and if one's initial state is nothing, it seems impossible to find any positive features in this.

In French the situation is quite different. The most popular euphemism and practically the only one that is used to denote abortion, «interruption volontaire de grossesse (IVG)» (voluntary termination of pregnancy) corresponds with the English «to interrupt a pregnancy» or «to terminate a pregnancy», representing the pregnancy as a process and the abortion as its stop. All these euphemisms reflect the English tradition of treating this delicate issue without giving any assessment to this action, thus showing the respect to the right of a woman to make her own choice (for example, «reproductive rights»). The medical aspect finds its reflection in the euphemisms for abortion as well. Thus, the expressions «between a woman and her doctor» or «reproductive health care» emphasizes the importance of the medical point of view on this action and the care of a woman's health as a priority.

Another traditionally tabooed sphere related to death is euthanasia. As in the case of abortion, the community has not reached a consensus on this issue, consequently the attitude towards it may differ.

There exist not so many expressions that serve to denote euthanasia. Thus, in the Italian the most frequent one is the borrowing from English «exit». The exit can be interpreted as an exit from life, however this euphemism reveals the idea that in some cases euthanasia is the only solution and a way to facilitate the suffering of the patient.

In French and in the English practically all the euphemisms lay emphasis on the physician's participation in this procedure. The most frequently used French euphemism «le suicide assisté» is the full lexical and semantic equivalent of the English «assisted suicide» (or «compassionate assisted suicide»). From these expressions the attitude to this procedure becomes clear, due to the fact that euthanasia, despite all circumstances, is regarded as the act of killing oneself, an action that cannot be regarded as positive. Other French expressions as «l'aide médical à mourir» (medical help for dying) or «Intervention des équipes médicales»

(intervention of a medical team) correspond in some way with the English «aid in dying» and «assisted death» as all of them include the concept of aid and regard the implementation of this procedure impossible without a physical assistance.

In such a manner from the given examples it becomes clear that the concepts that underlie the euphemisms of the thematic group of death in the majority are the same, which in its turn indicate the coincidence of the conceptual representations in the three analyzed languages. Despite the fact that several concepts are not presented in some languages, this is not a testimony of the penury of one or another language. On the contrary, this state of affair can be regarded as a premise for the emergence of new words and expressions in these languages.

According to numerous scientists the language is social by its nature and it is often understood as the reflection of culture and changes in the development of society. The phenomenon of euphemization obtains a great importance, as it gives an idea about the problems of society and people's attitude towards them.

The study of the processes of euphemization allows us to understand better the peculiarities of foreign culture and traditions, different views and beliefs, as well as to try to understand a different set of mind. The study of euphemisms gives perfect an opportunity to understand and to compare linguistic views of the world, which is essential for everyone who devoted himself to study of languages and whose goal is to achieve proficiency in them and thus, such productive sphere of euphemization as death with its numerous examples represents a great field for research and analysis, contributing to the formation of language competence.

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