

EUPHEMISM USE IN MILITARY-THEMED CONVERSATIONS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A COMPARATIVE PRAGMATIC AND DISCOURSE-ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada evfemizmlarning ingliz va o'zbek tillaridagi harbiy mavzudagi suhbatlarda qanday ishlashi ko'rib chiqiladi. Tadqiqotda ommaviy axborot vositalaridagi intervyular, memuar uslubidagi hikoyalar va suhbat rekonstruksiyaalaridan olingan dialogik parchalarning qiyosiy pragmatikasi va diskurs tahlili yordamida takrorlanuvchi evfemistik strategiyalar aniqlangan. Natijalar agentlik niqoblash va institutsional ramkalashda madaniyatga xos naqshlar bilan bir qatorda, yuzni saqlash va yumshatishda tillararo yaqinlashuvni ko'rsatadi. Ushbu hissa shakllarni o'zaro ta'sir maqsadlari bilan bog'laydigan tipologiyada yotadi.

Kalit so'zlar: evfemizm, harbiy nutq, suhbat, pragmatika, xushmuomalalik, yumshatish, qiyosiy tilshunoslik.

Аннотация. В статье исследуется функционирование эвфемизмов в беседах на военную тематику в английском и узбекском языках. На основе сопоставительной прагматики и дискурс-анализа диалогических фрагментов из интервью, мемуарных нарративов и реконструированных разговоров выделяются стратегии эвфемизации. Полученные результаты демонстрируют общие механизмы смягчения и сохранения лица при различиях в маскировании агента и институциональном фрейминге. Научная новизна состоит в типологии, связывающей формы с коммуникативными целями.

Ключевые слова: эвфемизм, военный дискурс, разговорная речь, прагматика, вежливость, смягчение, сопоставительная лингвистика.

Annotation. The article investigates euphemisms in military-themed conversations in English and Uzbek. A comparative pragmatic and discourse-analytic approach is applied to dialogic fragments drawn from interviews, memoir-like narratives, and reconstructed conversations. Findings reveal shared mitigation and facework functions but language-specific preferences for agency suppression and institutional framing. The study contributes a functional typology aligning euphemistic forms with interactional goals.

Key words: euphemism, military discourse, conversation, pragmatics, politeness, mitigation, comparative linguistics.

Introduction. Military-related communication has long been recognized as a domain where linguistic choices are unusually sensitive to interpersonal risk, institutional constraints, and the need to manage uncertainty. In conversational settings, speakers often avoid direct naming of events associated with injury, death, tactical failure, or moral responsibility, substituting alternative expressions that reduce emotional shock and limit accountability. Euphemism, understood here as a socially motivated replacement of a potentially face-threatening or distressing expression with a more acceptable one, becomes especially salient when interlocutors negotiate roles such as servicemember and civilian, superior and subordinate, or witness and interviewer. Although euphemism has been widely discussed in studies of political language and mass-media framing, research focused specifically on military-themed conversations, as opposed to monologic

institutional texts, remains comparatively less systematized. The problem becomes more pronounced in cross-linguistic perspective: English-language scholarship has generated extensive descriptions of institutional euphemism and indirectness, while Uzbek-language discussions have often concentrated on general stylistics and norms of speech culture, leaving conversational military euphemism under-described and weakly typologized in comparative terms.

A further gap concerns the relationship between euphemistic form and interactional function. Many accounts identify euphemism lists or semantic fields, yet provide limited explanation of how specific forms become relevant in sequential talk, for example when responding to a question about casualties, correcting a sensitive detail, or shifting responsibility away from an agent. Without linking euphemistic strategies to conversational goals, comparison between English and Uzbek risks becoming purely lexical. This article addresses that gap by examining euphemism use in military-themed conversations in both languages through a combined pragmatic and discourse-analytical lens, focusing on mitigation, facework, agency management, and institutional alignment. The aim is to describe and compare the main euphemistic strategies employed in dialogic military contexts in English and Uzbek and to explain what communicative tasks these strategies solve for speakers. The objectives are to identify recurrent semantic domains prompting euphemization, to classify linguistic mechanisms used for euphemistic effect, to map these mechanisms onto interactional functions in conversation, and to highlight cross-linguistic similarities and differences relevant for discourse studies, translation, and intercultural communication.

Methods. The study adopts a qualitative comparative design grounded in pragmatics and discourse analysis. The theoretical foundation draws on pragmatic accounts of indirectness and facework, complemented by discourse approaches to institutional language and framing [1; 2]. Euphemism is treated not as a purely lexical phenomenon but as a context-dependent pragmatic choice that becomes observable through contrast between what could have been said and what is actually said in a given conversational move. This requires attention to sequential context, speaker roles, topic sensitivity, and anticipated audience effects. Therefore, the analysis prioritizes dialogic fragments where the military topic is interactionally consequential, such as when interlocutors navigate traumatic experiences, operational secrecy, or evaluative judgments about events.

Empirically, the material consists of two language-specific corpora of conversational excerpts compiled for research purposes. The English corpus includes dialogic fragments from public interviews with veterans and military professionals, broadcast talk formats, and memoir-style narratives containing reconstructed conversations. The Uzbek corpus includes comparable fragments from interviews, documentary-style conversations, and narrative texts where dialogue is used to represent

military experiences and their social consequences. The focus on reconstructed conversations is methodologically justified because military topics are often constrained by confidentiality and because public conversational data may be limited; reconstructed dialogue, while mediated, still reflects conventionalized pragmatic choices and culturally available euphemistic patterns. To reduce the risk of overgeneralizing from any single genre, the selection was balanced so that both corpora included institutional interview settings and more personal conversational scenes. All excerpts were screened to exclude overt ideological evaluation; the analysis concentrates on linguistic mitigation and interactional management rather than on political positioning.

Analytically, the procedure involved iterative coding in three passes. First, candidate euphemistic expressions were identified by examining points where speakers avoided direct naming of prototypically sensitive referents such as death, injury, killing, bodily damage, tactical loss, punishment, and psychological breakdown. Second, each candidate was coded for mechanism, such as lexical substitution, generalization, metaphor, metonymy, bureaucratic nominalization, passive or agentless constructions, modal hedging, evidential distancing, and concessive framing. Third, each instance was coded for primary interactional function in context, including face-saving for self or other, emotional mitigation, agency masking, institutional alignment, confidentiality management, and conversational topic control. The comparative stage examined how frequently certain mechanisms and functions co-occurred in each language and how cultural norms of politeness and respect modulated euphemistic choices [3; 4]. Reliability was supported through repeated re-coding of a subset of excerpts after a time interval and through discussion of ambiguous cases with reference to established descriptions of euphemism and politeness in the relevant scholarship [5; 6].

Results. The analysis shows that in both English and Uzbek military-themed conversations, euphemism is not an ornamental feature but an interactional resource activated at predictable conversational pressure points. The first pressure point concerns death and killing, where both languages display systematic avoidance of direct verbs and nouns naming fatality. English conversations frequently replace direct terms with generalized predicates and outcome-focused phrases that emphasize completion rather than agency, such as references to someone not making it back, being lost, or an incident resulting in fatalities. Uzbek conversations likewise prefer softened outcomes and socially bearable labels, often framing death through generalized loss or fate-oriented formulations and through honorific or respectful naming practices for the deceased. In both corpora, the euphemistic choice tended to appear in responses to direct questions, suggesting that euphemism functions as an interactional compromise between informativeness and emotional manageability.

A second recurring domain is injury and bodily damage. English excerpts show a notable pattern of technicalization, where clinical or procedural terms replace vivid bodily

descriptions, and where speakers shift from concrete injury to treatment pathways, using phrases that foreground evacuation, medical attention, or recovery status. Uzbek excerpts similarly show avoidance of graphic description, but more often employ relational and social descriptors that highlight the person's condition in a socially empathetic way, sometimes using generalized terms for being unwell or harmed while leaving specifics implicit. Across both languages, euphemism in this domain frequently co-occurs with prosodic or textual markers of hesitation and with short narrative detours, indicating that speakers manage both the interlocutor's face and their own emotional exposure.

A third finding concerns agency suppression and responsibility management. English military-themed conversation exhibits extensive use of agentless constructions and nominalizations that background who acted, especially when describing harm or error. The linguistic mechanisms include passives, event nouns, and institutional subject selection, such as attributing outcomes to operations, decisions, or circumstances rather than to identifiable agents. Uzbek conversation also demonstrates agency masking, though it often surfaces through generalized subjects, impersonal expressions, and pragmatically motivated ellipsis where the agent is inferable but unspoken. Importantly, in Uzbek material, agency suppression was frequently accompanied by respect management in hierarchical contexts, where avoiding explicit attribution can serve as deference to superiors or institutions. In English material, the same strategy more often indexed institutional alignment and the avoidance of blame talk, particularly in interview settings.

A fourth result is the prominence of institutional framing as a euphemistic pathway. English excerpts show a strong tendency toward bureaucratic lexis and standardized categories when sensitive events are discussed, such as referring to engagement, assets, collateral effects, or neutralizing a threat. These terms reduce emotional intensity and encode a professional stance. Uzbek excerpts also contain institutional vocabulary, especially in formal interview contexts, but a distinctive pattern is the blending of institutional terms with culturally conventional politeness and indirectness, producing hybrid expressions that sound both official and relational. This hybridization appears to help speakers remain within acceptable public speech norms while maintaining interpersonal warmth.

A fifth result relates to conversational control and topic navigation. In both languages, euphemism frequently functions as a pivot enabling topic shift without explicit refusal. English speakers may offer a softened formulation followed by a general statement, thereby acknowledging the topic while limiting detail. Uzbek speakers often use indirectness coupled with generalized evaluative phrases that close the topic politely. In both corpora, euphemistic pivots were common in sequences involving confidentiality or traumatic content, indicating that euphemism serves as a boundary-management tool.

Finally, the comparative analysis indicates partial convergence at the level of function but divergence at the level of preferred linguistic resources. Mitigation and

facework are shared functions across English and Uzbek, yet English data more strongly privileges technicalization and bureaucratic abstraction, while Uzbek data more strongly integrates indirectness shaped by respect and relational norms, with broader reliance on generalization and context-dependent omission. These differences do not imply that one language is more euphemistic than the other; rather, they demonstrate that each language draws on its own pragmatic repertoire to satisfy similar interactional demands in military-themed talk.

Discussion. The results support the view that euphemism in military-themed conversations is best explained through pragmatic and discourse-functional accounts rather than through lexical inventories alone. The shared tendency to soften death, injury, and responsibility aligns with theories of facework and politeness, where speakers manage both negative face, by limiting imposition and emotional burden, and positive face, by maintaining a socially acceptable self-presentation [2]. In military contexts, this facework is intensified by institutional constraints and by the moral weight of the referents. The current findings extend this framework by showing that euphemism is also a sequentially organized device: it emerges at question-answer junctures, at moments of potential blame attribution, and at boundaries of narratable experience. This supports discourse-analytic claims that institutional talk shapes what can be said and how it can be said, not only through explicit rules but through routinized linguistic options [1].

The stronger English preference for technicalization and bureaucratic abstraction resonates with descriptions of euphemism in English public discourse, where official registers can reduce experiential vividness and relocate meaning into procedural frames [5]. However, the present study's conversational focus suggests that such abstraction is not merely imposed by institutions; it can be voluntarily adopted by speakers as a protective stance that signals professionalism and emotional control. This complements Allan and Burridge's argument that euphemism is motivated by social pressures and communicative goals rather than by semantics alone [6]. In interview interactions, adopting institutional lexis can also stabilize the speaker's epistemic authority and reduce vulnerability, because technical terms imply competence and distance.

Uzbek patterns, particularly the integration of indirectness with respect management, can be interpreted through cultural-pragmatic descriptions emphasizing deference, social harmony, and the maintenance of relational equilibrium [3]. While the study avoids essentializing cultural norms, the data indicate that euphemistic avoidance of explicit agency frequently corresponds to hierarchical sensitivities. This finding aligns with broader observations in Uzbek linguistics that politeness strategies often rely on indirectness and on the careful calibration of explicitness depending on role relations [4]. The contribution here is to show how these general norms become operational in military-themed talk: euphemism becomes a means to preserve respect toward persons and institutions while still participating in public narration.

A key interpretive point concerns agency suppression. Prior research on military and institutional discourse notes that passives and nominalizations can obscure responsibility and reframe actions as events [1; 5]. The present analysis confirms this for English conversational material but also demonstrates parallel mechanisms in Uzbek through ellipsis and generalized subjects. This suggests that agency suppression may be a cross-linguistically robust euphemistic function in military contexts, though realized through language-specific grammatical and pragmatic resources. The implication for comparative pragmatics is that functional equivalence should be prioritized over formal equivalence: similar interactional needs can yield different linguistic realizations, and direct translation may fail if it preserves form but not pragmatic effect.

Another important discussion point is the dual status of euphemism as both mitigation and control. In both languages, euphemistic pivots enable topic management, allowing speakers to acknowledge sensitive issues while limiting detail. This supports the idea that euphemism can function as a conversational gatekeeping device, especially under confidentiality pressure. By offering an acceptable label and then shifting to generalities, speakers can appear cooperative without violating implicit constraints. This dynamic is consistent with pragmatic accounts of cooperative principle management, where speakers balance informativeness with other social obligations [2]. In military-themed conversations, those obligations include emotional protection of interlocutors, self-protection against stigma, and adherence to institutional norms.

The study also has implications for translation and intercultural mediation. Because English euphemism in this domain often relies on institutional terminology, translators into Uzbek may need to consider whether direct borrowing of bureaucratic lexis preserves acceptability in a relationally oriented conversational context. Conversely, Uzbek euphemism relying on omission and generalized phrasing may, when translated into English, appear evasive unless compensated by appropriate hedging or institutional framing. These observations echo applied linguistic discussions that pragmatic meaning is frequently lost when euphemism is treated as a simple lexical substitution [6]. A more adequate approach is to translate euphemistic strategies by function, preserving mitigation, respect, and agency management in ways consistent with target-language conversational norms.

Conclusion. The comparative analysis demonstrates that euphemisms in English and Uzbek military-themed conversations are systematically deployed to manage sensitive referents, interpersonal face needs, and institutional constraints. The study identifies recurring euphemization domains, including death, injury, and responsibility, and shows that speakers in both languages use euphemism as a sequential tool for mitigating emotional impact and controlling topic boundaries. At the same time, the languages differ in preferred resources: English conversational euphemism more often relies on technicalization and bureaucratic abstraction, whereas Uzbek euphemism more often

integrates indirectness shaped by respect and relational norms, including generalized phrasing and context-based omission. The article's main scientific contribution is a functional typology linking euphemistic mechanisms to interactional goals in dialogic military contexts, supporting function-oriented comparison and improving prospects for pragmatic translation. Future research may expand the corpus to include spontaneous spoken interaction, examine prosodic cues accompanying euphemism, and test the typology in interpreter-mediated communication and professional training settings.

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