

Discursive-Ideological and Pragmatic Analysis of Euphemisms in Islam Karimov's Speech

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to examining the history of the study of the concept of political discourse in English and Uzbek linguistics, describing the role of euphemisms in political discourse, and conducting a pragmatic and discursive-ideological analysis of euphemisms found in authentic Uzbek political speech. The euphemisms identified in the selected Uzbek political discourse are analyzed from a discursive-ideological perspective based on Teun van Dijk's theory of the ideological square, and from a pragmatic perspective based on Kate Burridge's classification of euphemisms according to their communicative purposes. These theoretical approaches are also shown to be applicable and valid within Uzbek political discourse.

Keywords: Euphemism, political discourse, Ideological Square, protective, underhand, uplifting, provocative, cohesive, ludic euphemisms.

INTRODUCTION

Western scholars who have conducted research in the field of political linguistics have provided in-depth analyses of its ideological, pragmatic, and conceptual purposes. They have revealed both the positive and negative characteristics of euphemisms within political discourse. Political discourse constitutes a complex linguo-pragmatic system in which euphemisms function as one of the central strategic tools. In

political speech, euphemisms not only ensure politeness and rhetorical tact, but also serve to mask inconvenient realities, mitigate negative situations, manage public consciousness, construct a positive image in the minds of the audience, and legitimize political decisions. Moreover, scholars emphasize that euphemisms are not merely expressions of politeness and speech culture; they are frequently employed as instruments of political manipulation or “doublespeak.”

However, although the scope of political discourse studies in Uzbek linguistics has expanded in recent years, there remains a clear need to investigate the role of euphemisms within it, particularly their discursive-ideological, linguo-pragmatic, and cognitive-conceptual functions.

Although political linguistics is recognized today as a modern field of linguistic inquiry, its origins can be traced back to the period of classical rhetoric in Ancient Greece and Rome. During this era, Aristotle, through his work *Rhetoric*, examined the art of political oratory and explored how orators persuade society and motivate audiences to action [3: 5]. Aristotle's approach laid the foundation for the study of political speech within the framework of pragmatic and strategic discourse. With the advent of the feudal monarchy period, the systematic study of politicians' oratorical skills declined. Subsequently, as democracy developed, research in this field began to take shape in Western Europe and the United States. These studies focus on analyzing the extent to which politicians employ linguistic resources in order to exert influence [11: 24]. By the twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure, while investigating the distinction between “language” and “speech,” explained that language is capable of expressing various concepts within social and political contexts [17: 2]. During this period, the concept of discourse was not yet regarded as an independent social phenomenon. In his article ‘Discourse Analysis,’ first published in 1952, Zellig Harris analyzed discourse as a linguistic unit that extends beyond the sentence level [12: 1]. Although Harris did not address political discourse in this article, his research later provided a methodological foundation for the study of political discourse. By 1972, Michel Foucault's investigation of the

concept of political discourse contributed to viewing this type of discourse as an ideological force [10: 225]. In 1989, Norman Fairclough examined political discourse within the framework of language and power [7: 33], while Teun van Dijk investigated this type of discourse as a means of controlling public consciousness [27: 13]. By the twenty-first century, George Lakoff emphasized the role of frames in political speech, arguing that the influence of political discourse on audiences is shaped through cognitive models [18; 4].

In Uzbek linguistics, political discourse has not been studied as an independent field in the same way as in Western scholarship; rather, it has mainly been analyzed within the frameworks of speech culture, political oratory, pragmatics, and journalistic style. For instance, by 2008, Shahriyor Safarov, within the scope of pragmatolinguistics, investigated the extent to which political views influence language use [22: 152]. The study of political discourse within the framework of linguistics has intensified in Uzbek linguistics in recent years. The contributions of Muhammadjon Ergashev [6: 8], Nadejda Zubareva [28: 9], Nilufar Fayziyeva [9: 9-10], Utkirbek Shukurov [24: 8], Maxmudaxon Safarova [23: 9], and Zilola Alimova [2: 8] to this field serve as important methodological benchmarks for contemporary Uzbek linguistics. Although Uzbek scholars have examined political discourse using various research approaches, there is still a clear need for the pragmatic and discursive-ideological analysis of euphemisms found in authentic political speeches.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Political speech is one of the primary tools that shape a politician's image and prestige [20: 71]. A single mistake made in a speech delivered at a formal assembly can either enhance a politician's reputation or, conversely, provoke negative public debate and damage the speaker's credibility. For this reason, politicians pay close attention to their public speeches. In this process, they are supported by reliable and professional teams of speechwriters [4: 37]. These specialists construct speeches by

exploiting all the expressive resources of language, taking into account both the intended purpose of the speech and its anticipated impact on the audience.

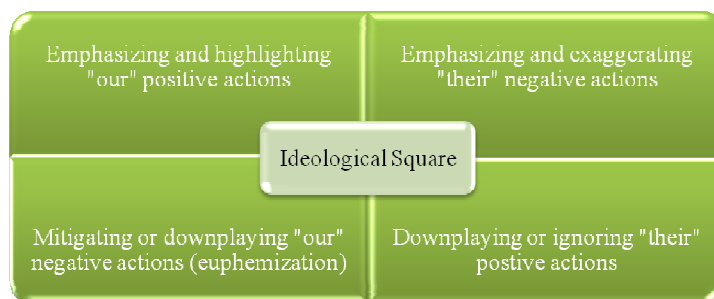
This phenomenon is referred to by George Lakoff as “framing.” Framing is language that reflects ideas aligned with one’s worldview [18: 4]. Once these ideas are articulated, they are activated in the minds of others in the same form. Lakoff explains this with a simple exercise: one is asked not to think about an elephant. However, the moment the word “elephant” is uttered, the image of that animal immediately appears in the audience’s mind. This illustrates a distinctive feature of language-its role as a tool for implementing political actions and achieving political goals. Through this mechanism, a politician’s ideas are embedded in the listener’s consciousness. Lakoff emphasizes that such ideas are realized through metaphors, comparing the nation to a family, the people to children, and the head of authority to a father (“strict father”) [18: 6].

The analysis of political speech is carried out through the method of critical analysis. Critical analysis aims to explain the behavior of all members of society-politicians and ordinary citizens alike-how they conduct themselves in public, and how society is governed [8: 8]. Through this research method, political speeches are examined and conclusions are drawn regarding the implicit meanings politicians intend to convey. The linguist Halliday, known for her work on English grammar, notes that politicians often employ grammatical structures that create ambiguity or vagueness in their speeches [11: 298]. This strategy enables politicians to evade responsibility.

Politicians frequently structure their speeches around the dichotomy of “in-group” and “out-group.” In this context, dysphemisms play a central role. Dysphemisms are associated with hatred and contempt and often provoke internal conflict. They are expressions used by political groups to demean and discredit their opponents [1: 31]. Thus, presenting one’s own actions in positive connotations while depicting opponents’ actions in negative (dysphemistic) terms becomes a dominant strategy [27: 25]. Teun van Dijk further argues that racism, discrimination, and prejudiced attitudes in society are

disseminated precisely by elites-politicians, journalists, and academics [25: 253]. Through the use of “civilized language,” they apply strategies of excluding other groups. When speaking about themselves, however, they actively employ euphemisms, thereby preserving their public “self-image” and maintaining their “self-respect” [1: 33]. From this perspective, political discourse makes extensive use of both euphemisms and dysphemisms.

According to Teun van Dijk’s theory, the fundamental aim of politics is built either on warning society about potential threats or on promises to improve existing socio-economic conditions [27: 27]. In this process, concepts related to the audience’s national sentiments should carry positive connotations as much as possible, while any coarse or offensive elements must be masked through euphemisms [27: 30]. In analyzing political discourse, examining the linguo-pragmatic load of the pronouns “We/In-group” and “They/Out-group” reveals the manipulative nature of this discourse. This process is known in linguistics as the “Ideological square,” [26: 267] in which the following four principles are dominant:



Graph 1: *Ideological Square by Teun va Dijk*

Within this principle, not only are “we” and “they” positioned in opposition, but the dichotomy between the present and the past is also actively employed. According to this framework, the present is portrayed through positive connotations, whereas the past is represented in predominantly negative terms.

From the perspective of political etiquette and communicative culture, euphemisms function as instruments that help speakers avoid terms capable of placing interlocutors in uncomfortable situations. As noted by the well-known researcher Ralph Keyes, euphemisms have undergone a long historical evolution and often serve to mitigate moral and social taboos within society [16: 4].

The concept of euphemism was first introduced into Uzbek linguistics in 1964 through the dissertation entitled *Эвфемизмы в современном узбекском языке* by Ismatullayev N. The scholar regarded euphemisms as one of the important expressive devices of the Uzbek language and defined them as elements that “not only make speech gentle and pleasant, but also enrich it and add vividness” [13: 23].

Anvar Omonturdiyev, in his study of taboo and euphemisms, characterizes them as phenomena formed on the basis of religious–mythological worldview, word magic, ethical – aesthetic norms of speech, political and ideological necessity, and the speaker’s subjective communicative needs [21: 199].

The research entitled *Fransuz va o‘zbek tillari evfemizm va disfemizmlarning lingvopragmatik xususiyatlari* by N. Jo‘rayeva provides an opportunity to analyze Uzbek euphemistics at a new stage of development. Based on the scholar’s views, it is appropriate to formulate the following fundamental conclusions regarding the use of euphemisms in Uzbek communicative practice.

In the formation of the euphemistic layer of the Uzbek language, Islamic values and linguistic ethics (speech etiquette) inherent in the national mentality play a decisive role. According to Islamic teachings, the power of words and their influence on the human psyche are of particular importance; therefore, any coarse or offensive expression (dysphemism) that causes emotional harm to others is evaluated negatively from both moral and religious perspectives. Consequently, in the Uzbek communicative system, avoiding verbal aggression and conveying meaning in a softened (euphemistic) manner is interpreted not only as a matter of rhetorical skill, but also as a moral obligation [14: 14].

In her scholarly research, Z. Mo‘minova examines euphemisms not merely as lexical units, but as integral components of a specific conceptual domain. According to her approach, the formation of euphemistic units in both English and Uzbek is grounded in the linguistic picture of the world characteristic of each nation [28: 12].

Based on the motivation for euphemism use, K. Burridge classifies euphemisms into the following six main categories [5: 67-71]:

1. **The protective euphemism:** This is the oldest and most classical type of euphemism. Its primary purpose is to protect the listener or a third party from discomfort, prevent psychological harm, and maintain social decorum. This type performs a “shield” function. For example, when speaking about death, expressions such as “passed away” or “departed” are used to preserve the emotional state of grieving relatives.
2. **The underhand euphemism:** Burridge describes this type as a deliberate means of deception and reality concealment. It frequently appears in political and military discourse as “doublespeak”. The aim is to obscure the frightening essence of an event. For instance, the expression “collateral damage” presents civilian deaths as a technical error, thereby reducing emotional reaction.
3. **The uplifting euphemism:** This type of euphemism is used to artificially elevate the social status of an object or activity. It is commonly employed in the labor market to enhance the prestige of professions. For example, instead of “garbage collector”, the term “sanitation engineer”, or instead of “rat-catcher”, “rodent officer” is used.
4. **The provocative euphemism:** This type represents one of Burridge’s original contributions and serves to legitimize views on taboo topics in social or political terms. For example, in the abortion debate, the terms “pro-choice” and “pro-life” function as strategic euphemisms designed to present one’s position as morally superior and to corner the opposing side.

5. **The cohesive euphemism:** This type is used to strengthen solidarity within a particular social group (for example, doctors, military personnel, or criminals) and to distinguish insiders from “outsiders.” Group-specific jargon and coded names – such as security service personnel referring to themselves as “men in black” – foster mutual trust among group members.
6. **The ludic euphemism:** Burridge associates this type with the aesthetic and humorous potential of language. Here, the aim is not to avoid fear-inducing topics, but to joke about them. Such euphemisms often emerge through slang and wordplay. For example, “kick the bucket” (used instead of “die”) trivializes a serious topic through humor and irony. In Uzbek linguistics, this usage is classified under the function of producing satire and humor. In speech, phenomena that cannot be expressed directly – such as humor, mockery, irony, sarcasm, or insinuation – are conveyed through semantic euphemistic devices. For instance, Amir Temur’s address to enemies fleeing the battlefield as *yo’l bo’lsin* (safe journey) implied that they would not escape death, despite the seemingly polite wording.

According to the concept proposed by K. Allan and K. Burridge, euphemisms arise from pragmatic needs and perform both “shield” and “weapon” functions. This classification is particularly significant for political discourse, where euphemisms serve as tools for mitigating uncomfortable political realities, managing public consciousness, and reducing social tensions. These linguistic mechanisms provide the speaker with the following pragmatic possibilities:

1. **Psychological protection:** Neutralizing negative emotions.
2. **Maintaining social status:** Demonstrating politeness and tact.
3. **Political manipulation:** Presenting uncomfortable realities under the guise of vague or professional terminology.

The above-mentioned studies serve as a methodological foundation for analyzing euphemisms in Uzbek political speech.

As the object of analysis, the speech entitled *Mamlakatimizning mustaqilligi biz uchun eng oily boylikdir* (“The independence of our country is our greatest wealth”), [15] delivered in 2014 by the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, was selected from Uzbek political discourse. The analysis of euphemisms in this speech is based on Kate Burridge’s theory from a pragmatic perspective, and on the theories of George Lakoff and Teun van Dijk from a discursive-ideological perspective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the speech delivered by former President Islam Karimov on the occasion of the 2014 Independence Day, complex socio-political processes are often expressed in a mitigated form through the use of euphemistic units.

The expression *o’ta og’ir, mashaqqatli sinov va kurashlar* (extremely difficult and arduous trials and struggles) is used in the following fragment: *Biz o’ta og’ir, mashaqqatli sinov va kurashlarda qo’lga kiritgan Vatanimizning Mustaqillik kunini nishonlar ekanmiz....* This euphemism avoids directly naming hardships such as war, loss, death, and famine, and is employed to protect the psychological state of the audience and to soften these linguistic realities. In Uzbek mentality, the word *sinov* (trial) is commonly used to convey the meaning of a temporary and transient process. From a discursive-ideological perspective, independence is legitimized as a sacred value achieved through hardships.

Another euphemism, *tarixan qisqa davrda nimalarni boshimizdan kechirdik* (what we have gone through in a historically short period), appears in the following passage: *...biz bosib o’tgan tarixan qisqa davrda nimalarni boshimizdan kechirdik, nimalarga erishdik....* Here, the socio-economic problems that emerged in the post-independence period are not listed explicitly but are concealed behind a euphemistic expression. This euphemism does not provoke blame or harsh judgment but guides the listener toward a neutral conclusion. Discursively and ideologically, a strategy is implemented in

which difficulties are backgrounded while achievements are foregrounded.

In the sentence *O‘zbekistonimiz faqatgina xomashyo yetkazib beradigan, iqtisodiyoti biryoqlama rivojlangan o‘lkaga aylantirilgan*, the expression *iqtisodiyoti biryoqlama rivojlangan* (economy developed in a one-sided manner) avoids directly naming economic dependency, industrial underdevelopment, and crisis. This euphemism replaces negatively evaluative terms such as “crisis” or “backwardness” with a more neutral economic description, thereby protecting the psychological state of the audience. It fosters an attitude of objective assessment toward the past rather than sharp dissatisfaction. From a discursive-ideological standpoint, the problem is presented not as personal or institutional fault, but as a product of historical circumstances.

The expression *mustabid tuzum* (authoritarian regime) is used in the sentence *Kechagi mustabid tuzumda yashagan insonlar yaxshi biladi....* This euphemism does not fully and explicitly name the former totalitarian system and the restriction of freedoms. The word *tuzum* (regime/system) conceals specific responsible actors. This expression allows criticism of the past without provoking sharp political confrontation. Discursively and ideologically, the current political path is justified through contrast with the past.

Within the speech, euphemisms such as *o‘ta og‘ir, mashaqqatli sinov va kurashlar, tarixan qisqa davrda nimalarni boshimizdan kechirdik, iqtisodiyoti biryoqlama rivojlangan*, and *mustabid tuzum* are employed. Pragmatically, these euphemisms serve the purposes of avoiding negative impact on the audience – namely, protecting their psychological state (*o‘ta og‘ir, mashaqqatli sinov va kurashlar* and *iqtisodiyoti biryoqlama rivojlangan*) – and masking or concealing reality (*iqtisodiyoti biryoqlama rivojlangan* and *mustabid tuzum*). From a discursive-ideological perspective, these euphemisms are mainly constructed through the opposition between past and present, with the aim of encouraging appreciation of independence.

CONCLUSIONS

This article analyzed four euphemisms used in the speech delivered by Uzbekistan's former President Islam Karimov on the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence from pragmatic and discursive-ideological perspectives. The findings show that euphemisms in this political speech are employed for two main purposes based on their motivation: protection and concealment. The previous period is depicted as difficult, whereas the present is portrayed in a positive light. This result serves as evidence of the present–past opposition described in Teun van Dijk's theory of the ideological square.

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