

The cultural connotation of euphemisms



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

the other hand, we are greatly influenced by the language we use in our daily life. Most of the time, we have to admit that the key to successful communication does not lie in what we say, but how we say. Euphemisms, ever since their creation, have gradually developed into one of the most important linguistic devices and have played a significant part in our social life. They are embedded so deeply in our language that few of us, even those who pride themselves on being plainspoken, ever get through a day without using them.

To some extent, actually, euphemisms are the basic language of the society. As a very common but powerful linguistic phenomenon, euphemisms have been arousing the interests of those linguists from different perspectives. At the very beginning, researches into euphemisms could only be found in some books in which most of the researches into them were rather superficial. It was not until the recent decades that euphemisms begin to be combined with some other subjects.

The cultural connotation and translation of euphemism play an important role in euphemism study, since the translation of euphemism is closely related with its cultural connotation, which is rather complex. Therefore, in order to translate euphemism much better, we have to get a further understanding of Chinese and Western cultures. The analysis of euphemisms is made in this thesis from the two perspectives: the cultural connotation of euphemism and some skills in the translation of euphemism.

This thesis aims to help people to understand and translate euphemisms much better. ? A. Definition of Euphemism ? The earliest euphemism was

derived from Greek. The word euphemism comes from the Greek eu, meaning good, well, and pheme meaning speech or saying, and thus means literally to speak with good words or in a pleasant manner. As a special mode of expression, euphemism has been defined differently in different books. Here are some definitions: Euphemism is that figure of speech which consists in the substitution of a word or expression of comparatively favorable implication or less unpleasant associations, instead of the harsher or more offensive one that would more precisely designate what is intended (The Compact Edition of Oxford English Dictionary.

? 1971). Word, etc. used in place of one avoided as e.

g. offensive, indecent, or alarming. (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics, Shanghai Foreign Language Publishing House, 2000, 12) In China, Chen Wangdao is the first one who gave euphemism a definition, in his 1930s, the definition says, euphemism is one kind of figures of speech, saying something indirectly but connoting and substituting with roundabout and implicit words or even metaphorical expression.

(All in all, a euphemism is a substitution of an offensive word with an inoffensive one. The evolution of these differences proves that researches on euphemism has been deepened and expanded as time goes by. In spite of the differences in wording and perspective, these definitions do not differ from one another in the essential sense. ? B.

Formative Devices of Euphemism ? As far as linguistic patterns are concerned, both English and Chinese euphemisms can be created through

the following devices: phonetic device, lexical device, figurative device and grammatical device. ? 1. Phonetic Device ? Euphemism may be created by phonetic device??” light reading and phonetic distortion. Light reading means that when you meet something you are too shy to mention, usually you may say it in a low voice.

Phonetic distortion refers to the changing of a sound in the word for the purpose of euphemizing. It includes abbreviation, acronym(?????) and clipping(???), etc.. Usually crude or inauspicious words can become acceptable by using these devices. There are abbreviations like ??? SOB??? for ??? son-of-a bitch???, ??? BS??? for ??? bullshit???. There are clippings like ??? ladies??? for ??? Ladies??™s Room???, ??? daily??? for ??? daily girl???.

There are acronyms like ??? BO??? for ??? body odor???, ??? BS??? for ??? bullshit???. On the contrary, in Chinese communication, people try to avoid words such as songzhong(??) which means sending a clock, because its sound is similar to that of songzhong(??) which means unpleasantly ??? pass away???. ? 2.

Lexical Device ? Though English and Chinese euphemisms are similar in quite a few ways in lexicon, each of them has their own unique means. English euphemism includes the following sources: ? Combination of the Initial Letters:? By combining the initial letter in every word altogether, and then capitalizing them, thus forming a new expression. For example, WC stands for water closet, VD stands for venereal disease, and BO stands for body odor. ? Adding Prefix:? By adding prefix to express the negative

concept of euphemism as well as its formative devices, it is no wonder for us to find that euphemism is deeply rooted in our daily life and daily language. As language is the keystone of culture, reflecting and reshaping culture in a sense, euphemism can be regarded as a mirror of language, or even a mirror of culture, reflecting and influencing the culture in multiple and complex ways.

To soundly render a euphemism from the source language to a target language, it is significant to explore the cultural connotation hidden behind the superficial forms of euphemisms. The following session will focus on two parts. On the one hand, how did the euphemisms come into being will be discussed, that is, it will explore the origins for the cultural connotation of euphemisms. On the other hand, in accordance with those origins, the thesis will go further on the main pragmatic functions of euphemism from the linguistic practice.

?? ? A. Origins for the Cultural Connotation of

Euphemisms ? 1. ? ? ? ? Religious Belief ? As is known, religious belief is an important part of culture, which is closely and mutually dependent on culture. Influenced by religious belief, the origins of euphemisms can be dated back to ancient times when some expressions had been forbidden into use due to the limitation of the dominant religion. It is because of the religious belief that euphemisms has come into being. In many Western countries, Christianity plays an overwhelming role in people??™s mind, especially for the religious followers. Thus, the word of ??? God??? has become sacred and mysterious among them.

None of the Christianity dares to say God's name directly, for it would be considered to be disrespectful to the God, which is manifested from the Ten Commandments of Christianity. Meanwhile, when people make curses or swears, they used to associate what they claimed with God in order to show their seriousness. Generally speaking, it is obvious that the religious belief has taken a sharp impact on euphemisms and their evolution and oppositely, the outcome of euphemisms has contributed to the harmonization and balance of culture in a large extent.

2. Social psychology As language is the reflection of social life, euphemism can be regarded as a mirror social psychology. The outcome of so many euphemisms reflects the different stated of social psychology.

To avoid taboo is one of the most typical psychological reasons of producing euphemisms. In modern society, euphemisms have scattered into every corner of daily social life. They are in a large extent, as a reflection of people's mood, feeling and life mode. For instance, to avoid prejudice on careers, many unpleasant expressions have been retreated and produced as follows: Sanitary engineer to refer to cleaner, Beautician, Landscape architect and etc. Likewise, it shares the very universal social psychology when referring to certain awful diseases and death. That is the reason why the word death has so many euphemistic expressions in every language.

3. Codes of Conduct When mentioning the codes of conduct of an individual society of language, it seems impossible to avoid discussing euphemisms, which, in a large extent, are tokens for certain codes of conduct in that specific society. As we all know, every society has its own

specific codes of conduct. Which codes are legal and which are illegal are usually conventionalized with the development of society as well as the civilization of human beings. From this point of view, it is obvious that many euphemisms are culturally loaded on the basis of codes of conduct.

One of the most sensitive topics is about sex. But most persons would feel embarrassed when unconsciously talking of them. Judging from the social codes of conduct, it is regarded to be under civilized or indecent. Even in the Western countries where sex is open ended, sex is also a topic that is to be avoided. We may verify it from the several hundreds of euphemistic expressions about sexy conducts, such as ??? connubial rites (????)???, ??? art of love (????)???, ??? conjugal rights (????)???, ??? conversation (??)??? and so on. Moreover, even for the homosexual conduct, there are a lot of euphemisms due to the codes of conduct regulated by laws and social criteria, like the expressions of ??? gay???, ??? the third sex???, ??? sexual orientation??? and etc. ? 4. Political Life ? Up to now, what we have talked about is mainly focused on the daily life, which are used for politeness or avoiding taboo.

But as for the origins of euphemisms, we could not neglect the euphemisms in political life. The euphemisms in political life are usually deceivable and with certain intended purposes. That is the reason why they are extremely favored by politicians. Thus, Western Politics is also an important source of the production of euphemisms in English. The main features of euphemisms in political life are to exaggerate or understate the fact. When referring to the exaggeration of fact, we can see the following example of ??? tax

relief???, which was put forward by Mr. Bush, the former President of the United States during the presidential campaign.

The intended purpose was to obtain more votes. Here ??? relief??? is used to conceal the heavy burden caused by the tax casted. What seem more popular among politicians are the understatements. There are too many to examples to prove this phenomenon. The strike of student was understated as ??? student unrest??? and the serious relationship between labor and employment as ??? industrial dispute???. The invasion of American armies was euphemized as ??? police action??? and or ??? preventive war???.? ? In a word, the euphemisms in politics are used to exaggerate or conceal the intended purposes.

Those euphemisms are served for politics in certain periods. ? 5.

Commercial Activities ? Not only is the political life immersed in a large amount of euphemisms, but also the commercial activities are full of vivid euphemisms. To attract more business, the ??? pawn-shop??? is euphemized into ??? loan office??? Words of ??? cheap??? and ??? expensive??? are replaced by ??? low-cost??? and ??? premium-priced??? respectively, which are more attractive in commercial events and commerce deals. Besides, to take the customers??™ self-respect into consideration, many expressions are also needed to be euphemized. For instance, the expression concerning the room levels in hotels have been changed into Deluxe (???), First Class (???) and standard (???) instead of unpleasant expressions like Second Class (???) and Third Class (???). It is almost the same on air plane. The original ??? First Class??? has been euphemized as ??? Deluxe/Premium

Class???, ??? Second Class???, as ??? First Class???, and the ??? Third Class???, as ??? Business/Economical/Tourist Class???

In summary, we can figure out that some of the euphemisms are closely related with commercial activities. ? B. Pragmatic Functions of Euphemisms ? Judging from the origins for the cultural connotations of euphemisms, it is easy to see the pragmatic functions of euphemisms that can be concluded as the following three aspects: to avoid taboo, to avoid offending others and to achieve entertaining effect. ? 1.

? ? ? ? ? To Avoid Taboo ? The original reason for euphemizing is to avoid taboo, which is present in every human society. Euphemism is deeply rooted in the production and application of taboos. It is the overcoat of taboos. So there is a close relationship between euphemisms and taboos.

Before the study of euphemism, the author will first make sure of the things concerning with taboos.?? In human language communication, there are some words or phrases that can not be used for certain reasons. They are regarded as being dangerous, holy, miraculous, or even vulgar.

Therefore, they are restricted to be used only on some particular occasions. Such words are called taboo words. In the early stage of human society, people had difficulty in distinguishing between names and things to which they referred, regarding such names as intrinsic properties or parts of their referents. They had a strong conviction about the magic power of words. As a result, they dare not name directly those mysterious forces or supernatural beings that they held awe in their life and invented alternative expressions to address them in order to placate these mysterious forces.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-cultural-connotation-of-euphemisms/>

In Chinese culture, for example, Qin Shihuang(???), the first king of Qin Dynasty, styled himself Ying Zheng (??), among which ??? Zheng(?) ??? was a homophone with the word ??? zheng(?)???— the same sound but different meaning and spelling. January, in Chinese called zheng yue (??), just for the reason of taboo, was changed into yuan yue(??), or pronounced as zheng(?). In western culture, people uttered ??? Jiminy Cricket??? instead of ??? Jesus Christ???. The Devil got some wonderful names like ??? His Satanic Majesty???, ??? Old Gentleman???, ??? Old Harry???, and ??? Old Nick???

Apart from taboos on directly naming the mysterious? forces, death, disease, sex. In addition, there are numerous taboos on many other unpleasant aspects of human society such as unemployment, poverty, physical shortcoming, killing, etc. These taboos constitute rich sources for euphemisms. Taboos may threaten the positive face of the hearer, since they reveal that the speaker does not care about the hearer??™s sensibilities or values. Therefore, euphemisms for taboos can also be said to serve as an important communicative function: to save face. ? 2.? ? ? ? ? To Avoid Offending Others ? Thanks to euphemisms, it becomes easier for people to accept things that are likely to make others feel embarrassed or unhappy. It is a general character of people to express their ideas as mildly and tactfully as possible.

Euphemisms make people realize that they are not excellent but they can make embarrassing speech elegant. Old age, in the west, has always been considered as the worst age to be, esp. for female. People like to flatter the old linguistically to show their respect and pity to the old. Let??™s look at the following: ??? Old people? did not like that description of them, and

liked? aged? or? aging? not much more; soon they came to be called ??? the elderly??™. Even this euphemism seemed unduly doddering, so we were treated to? senior citizen? and? golden? ager, and old women keep their thins up by calling themselves mature.??? On the contrary, in Chinese culture, old age is the symbol of wisdom, experience, power and authority. This can be reflected in our famous saying :?????????,? ?????????? and the earnest teachings to the young to respect and be obedient to their elder family members :????????????,????????????.

In daily life, we often hear some expressions for the old:??,???,???,???,???,???,???, etc., which are the highly respectful titles to a minority of men with great fame. In the English speaking world, speakers or writers always manage to express themselves with some euphemistic terms to show their dignity and respect to others in some other fields such as illness, birth, poverty, occupation, and some social problems, including theft, suicide, drunk, drug-taking, etc. Here, the author will not list other examples.
?