

PAPER

# REPRESENTATION OF ENGLISH EUPHEMISMS IN POLITICAL TEXT

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## Abstract

This article aims to reveal how English political euphemism reflected in political texts. This article displays how linguistic phenomenon provides evidence that language is not only a reflection of the objective world but also a process of social construction. The methods of linguocultural analysis, content analysis and lexico-semantic analysis were used to analyse the representation of English euphemisms in political text based on the materials of two reputable American newspapers such as The Washington Post and The New York Times. Having conducted the research, the following findings were revealed: (1) Euphemisms play a central role in softening political competition and crisis rhetoric. (2) Economic and diplomatic reporting often uses euphemisms to avoid negativity and maintain neutrality. (3) Furthermore, in sensitive areas such as war, human rights, and public opinion, euphemisms soften harsh realities, conceal violence, and guide how audiences perceive political actions. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of applying its results in such fields as Linguistics, Journalism, Language Teaching, and Intercultural Communication. The identified features of English political euphemisms can be useful to linguists in creating and analysing political texts, as well as to teachers and students studying political texts and intercultural communication.

**Key words:** Political euphemisms, The New York Times, The Washington Post, culture, public opinion, political correctness, political text.

## Introduction

Political euphemisms are a powerful tool for political leaders to control information transmission. The impact on mass audiences through political language is purposeful and should be carried out in accordance with the requirements of cultural correctness. Each euphemism has its own nationally specific characteristics (Ashurova and Galiyeva, 2019). The usage of polite words depends on different aspects of different culture. Language is a tool that is used to explore and experience our cultures and the perspectives that are embedded in our cultures” (Maslova, 2001). The English language is rich in euphemisms, especially in the sphere of politics. English euphemisms are used to control over emotions of the audience, to manage the perception of events and to support political correctness.

## Literature review

The study of linguistic and cultural characteristics of political euphemisms, especially within the context of English print media, offers a fascinating insight into the ways in which language is employed to shape public opinion and perception. Political euphemisms are used to soften or obfuscate the harshness of certain concepts or policies, effectively influencing the audience’s understanding of the issues at hand. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of existing research on this topic, analyzing the specific linguistic and cultural nuances inherent in political euphemisms in English political texts. Galperin concludes that Euphemism is “an understatement of the meaning of words in order to mislead public opinion and express the unpleasant more subtly”. Political euphemism is created in political life and serves political purposes. It is a tool for political participants to hide scandals, disguise the truth, and guide public thoughts when discussing social issues or events. In spite of some common features political euphemism shares with

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others, it has three typical features. Lakoff (1990) claims that politics is language and language is politics. Political euphemism is similar to political propaganda in that both aim at persuading and influencing the public. Political discourse is characterized by continuity: it is inextricably linked to the previous stages of its development, but at the same time it acquires new features and takes new forms. This literature review focuses on how English political euphemisms function in the context of major American newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Despite some differences in editorial policy, both newspapers actively use euphemisms to soften harsh political judgments and shape certain images of political events. Such euphemisms serve not only to avoid direct expressions, but also to manage the perception of a wide audience. “*The New York Times*” is a daily newspaper founded in 1851. It is one of the most influential and well-known American publications in the world. It also has a significant impact on global political discourse and public opinion. The newspaper is known for its investigations and investigative journalism, as well as its support for truth and transparency in political matters (*The New York Times*, thebtw.com, 2024). “*The Washington Post*” is a daily newspaper that has been published since 1877. The newspaper has a significant influence in political and legislative contexts, especially in Washington, where it actively covers the work of federal authorities, including Congress and the executive branch, and focuses on issues related to American politics, government, economics, as well as international relations, security, and human rights (*The Washington Post*, ru.wikipedia.org, 2025).

## Research Methodology

The primary research methods for this study are linguocultural analysis, content analysis and lexico-semantic analysis. The linguocultural method was applied to analyse political euphemisms in English print media, such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*. This allowed for a deep exploration of the relationship between language, culture and politics, determine how euphemistic language reflects, shapes and is shaped by cultural values, political contexts and socio-cultural dynamics in linguistic and cultural environments. The Linguocultural method explored the links between language use and cultural context through a combination of linguistic and cultural analysis based on literature sources. The method of content analysis was focused on the frequency and distribution of themes, words, or ideas of usage of political euphemisms. While the method of lexical-semantic analysis were used to analyse the meaning and function of euphemisms in political articles. For a more in-depth and qualitative assessment, euphemisms were examined according to the following criteria: article topic, euphemism, example of use, meaning, function, emotional connotation, cultural characteristics, political correctness, newspaper/source, and translation.

## Analysis and Results

In order to understand how English euphemisms are reflected in political texts, the main categories were identified based on the data collected on their areas of usage.

**1. Elections and political struggle.** Euphemisms that soften the rhetoric of competitive struggle and describe pre-election manipulation are particularly relevant in connection with the 2024 US presidential election. For instance, “*My America PAC massively improved the Republican ground game in the swing states,*” *Mr. Musk told conservative commentator Tucker Carlson in an interview at Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump’s residence and private club in Florida. He posted a meme of himself in the Oval Office for his 203 million followers on X,*

*his social media platform*” (*The New York Times*, 2024, November 6). The euphemism “ground game” means a ground campaign, direct work with voters on the ground (campaigning, organising elections, etc.). Euphemisms serve to soften the intensity and competition of political struggles, creating the impression that the campaign is being conducted on a more human level, with direct interaction with voters. This euphemism is widely used in political vocabulary and does not evoke negative associations.

“*President Joe Biden on Wednesday praised Vice President Kamala Harris’s effort in the presidential election, shortly after she delivered a speech conceding defeat to former president Donald Trump*” (*The Washington Post*, 2024, November 6). The euphemism “conceding defeat” refers to the official acknowledgement that the election results are not in her favour. It is a standard phrase used to describe the moment when a politician admits defeat. The euphemism softens the negative connotation of the word “defeat” while maintaining a formal and diplomatic tone. It helps to avoid more aggressive or emotional phrases that could be perceived as too harsh. This euphemism maintains a high level of political correctness. In US political culture, acknowledging defeat with such a phrase is a necessary element of a civilised political process.

**2. Economics and Finance.** Euphemisms used to describe economic measures in a veiled manner to avoid panic or negativity. For example, “*Wall Street applauded Donald Trump’s victory in the presidential election, powering the Dow Jones Industrial Average on Wednesday to its biggest single-day gain in two years as investors flooded into bets that would benefit from his return to the White House. The Dow closed about 1,500 points higher for a gain of more than 3.5 percent*” (*The Washington Post*, 2024, November 6). In this context, “applauded” denotes a positive reaction, as if expressing support or approval. The euphemism is used to convey the positive mood of the market without directly stating “celebrated”. Instead, a more neutral but positive word is chosen to avoid excessive emotionality in the wording. In the United States, such euphemisms are often used in economic and political journalism in order to avoid direct and sometimes emotionally charged expressions and to present the situation in a more neutral way, while maintaining a positive tone.

“*Europe’s new pact with South America could be a sign of how countries will diversify trade relationships as President-elect Trump threatens tariffs*” (*The New York Times*, 2024, December 7). The word “threatens” indicates an intention or possibility of taking some action, but without precision or commitment. This creates an atmosphere of anticipation, uncertainty, and even caution regarding Trump’s economic policy. The euphemism “threatens tariffs” serves to soften possible negative associations. In American politics and international relations, such euphemisms are often used to avoid direct threats or conflicts. This allows one to save face in diplomatic negotiations, providing room for manoeuvre while maintaining a tough political stance.

**3. Public policy and governance.** Euphemisms used to soften the perception of political crises and create a more positive image of reforms. For instance, “*Germany’s Coalition Collapses, Leaving the Government Teetering. After months of disputes, Chancellor Olaf Scholz ousted one of his governing partners, adding to the challenges for Europe amid Donald Trump’s election*” (*The New York Times*, 2024, November 7). The euphemism ‘Leaving the Government Teetering’ means the collapse of a coalition government. It softens the harshness of the situation by avoiding direct reference to conflict and the collapse of the political system. It is used in various political systems where coalition governments exist.

“*South Korea’s President Apologizes, but Doesn’t Resign Ahead of Impeachment Vote. President Yoon Suk Yeol said he would not impose martial law again. Large protests, including one supporting him, began in Seoul ahead of Saturday’s vote*” (*The New York Times*, 2024, December 7). The euphemism “Impeachment Vote” refers to the procedure for removing an official from office. It softens the negative nature of the removal process by presenting it as a formal

procedure. In Western political culture, impeachment is seen as a serious but legitimate means of controlling power. From the point of view of political correctness, this euphemism is used to comply with formalities and avoid more harsh wording.

**4. Euphemisms used to describe military actions.** For example, “The assassination spread some fear among Russia’s military and political elites. It also **eliminated a top military leader** who, according to Ukraine, had ordered the use of banned chemical substances” (The New York Times, 2024, December 19). The euphemism “*eliminated*” is a verb meaning “removed” or “liquidated”, which is often used in military rhetoric. It softens the perception of violent death, making it part of a strategic necessity. In official reports, it is used to refer to the death of an enemy without mentioning specific actions, such as murder or assault. This euphemism is characteristic of political and military rhetoric in the English-language political texts.

“... help Ukraine’s forces on the battlefield, who are steadily losing ground, my colleague Michael Schwirtz writes” (The New York Times, 2024, December 19). The euphemistic expression “*steadily losing ground*” describes the process of gradual retreat or loss of control over territory. It is used for Ukraine’s military defeats, instead of the more direct “losing territory”. The euphemism softens the defeat and destruction of positions and indicates a gradual loss of influence, showing the situation as controlled.

**5. International relations and conflicts.** Euphemisms used to mask harsh actions with diplomatic language. For instance, “Syrian rebels advanced in the direction of Damascus” (The New York Times, 2024, December 6). The euphemism “*advanced*” describes the rebel forces movement towards the capital. “*Advanced*” sounds less aggressive than “attacked” or “invaded”. In political discourse, this euphemism is often used to create a more objective and neutral description of events.

“A day after the regime of President Bashar al-Assad fell, civilians poured into the streets of Damascus, weeping in disbelief” (The New York Times, 2024, December 10). In this context, the euphemism “*fell*” is used to refer to the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad’s regime. However, it carries a softer, less dramatic connotation compared to more direct expressions such as “was overthrown” or “was forcibly removed from power”. This euphemism helps to create a more objective and neutral tone in the narrative, avoiding evaluative judgements. The use of the euphemism “*fell*” demonstrates the author’s desire for political correctness. He avoids more harsh expressions that could provoke a negative reaction from certain groups of readers, such as supporters of the overthrown regime.

**6. Social issues and human rights.** For example, “The police said they were *investigating messages found on bullet casings at the scene of the shooting, including “delay” and “deny,” possible references to ways that health insurance companies seek to avoid paying patients’ claims*” (The New York Times, 2024, December 6). The euphemism “*investigating messages*” describes the actions of the police aimed at determining the motives behind the crime. It softens the seriousness of the situation. The phrase “*investigating messages*” sounds less dramatic than, for example, “searching for evidence”. The use of this term is consistent with the professional ethics of journalists, who strive for objectivity in their materials and the preservation of social human rights. The euphemisms “*delay*” and “*deny*” describe the actions of an insurance company in delaying or refusing to pay medical insurance claims. The euphemism serves to soften the negative perception of the insurance company’s actions. The words “*delay*” and “*deny*” are less emotionally charged than, for example, “*refuse*”. They create a more neutral image of the company’s actions. Euphemisms are used to avoid directly accusing insurance companies of fraud or dishonest actions.

**7. Media and public opinion.** Euphemisms that influence public perception of information. For instance, “*The Campaign Moment: Will Biden issue more pardons? Pete Hegseth, President-elect*

*Donald Trump’s embattled pick for defense secretary, digs his heels in. And the growing backlash over President Joe Biden’s pardon of his son Hunter*” (The Washington Post, 2024, December 6). The euphemism “*backlash*” refers to a negative reaction to actions or decisions, especially at the level of public opinion or political reaction. Here, it refers to growing discontent over the pardon of Hunter Biden. The word implies that the reaction is significant in scale, but does not directly indicate the intensity or degree of this discontent. In American political culture, the use of the euphemism “*backlash*” is a common practice, especially in the context of public discontent. This word is often used to refer to political or social protests, but with a minimisation of emotions and an emphasis on the consequences of the action rather than the emotional reaction itself. This may reflect a desire to avoid direct confrontation and demonstrations of fierce resistance.

“*His victory lap was the culmination of an effort that began only six months ago and depended on a risky gamble: Mr. Musk’s new super PAC effectively led Mr. Trump’s get-out-the-vote operation in battleground states — and Mr. Trump entrusted a crucial campaign function to a political neophyte*” (The New York Times, 2024, November 6). The euphemism “*victory lap*” is a striking example of how language can be used to create a positive image and manipulate public opinion. This expression carries a strong emotional charge and is often used in politics and other areas of public life to emphasise success and the achievement of goals.

Thus, an analysis of political euphemisms in the American newspapers demonstrates that the language of politics is not only a means of communication, but also a tool of influence used to shape public opinion and manage political rhetoric. Euphemisms in political texts perform many functions: from managing the emotions of the audience to veiling controversial or conflicting aspects of political activity.

## Conclusion

The analysis of euphemisms in English political discourse, based on data from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (2024), demonstrates that euphemisms are systematically employed across key thematic domains, including elections, economy, governance, warfare, international relations, social issues, and media representation. The findings suggest that in American political communication euphemisms reflect core cultural values. The main peculiarities of English political euphemisms are the following: (1) they are rooted in individualism and pragmatism; (2) English media reports directly on conflicts, without being over emotional; (3) English euphemisms suggest media freedom and open critique; (4) euphemisms often acknowledge problems while reframing them positively; (5) English political euphemisms include military conflicts, immigration, diversity, and economic policy openly.

In conclusion, this article highlights the significant role of political euphemisms. An analysis of political euphemisms in English-language newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* has shown that euphemistic vocabulary plays an important role in contemporary political texts. It helps to soften the sharpness of statements, shape a certain image of political events, and manage the public’s perception of information. In addition, euphemisms support the norms of political correctness, which is especially noticeable in topics such as elections, the economy, social issues, international relations, and government reforms. Replacing harsh or negative wording with more neutral and mild expressions makes political language more acceptable to the audience. Thus, the results of the article can be used in such spheres like journalism, teaching political linguistics, and in the field of intercultural communication when analysing media texts.

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