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Role of Euphemisms: An Analysis of English Language Newspapers' Headlines

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the euphemisms employed by three Pakistani English-language newspapers, namely Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International. This study also identifies the types and functions of euphemisms in Pakistani English language newspapers. For this purpose, Random-sampling model was deployed to select the Pakistani English language newspapers published in Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International. Furthermore, purposive sampling is adopted to make the decision regarding the selected 15 headlines possessing euphemisms in each newspaper. A checklist is implied to identify the types and functions of euphemisms being used in English language newspapers in Pakistan. Qualitative methodology as a data analysis approach and exploratory methodology as a research design were implied to answer the research questions about the types and functions of euphemistic words being used in headlines of Pakistani English language newspapers. The findings indicated that Pakistani English newspapers writers were abundantly using major types of euphemism, namely semantic change, shortening, and borrowing in their headlines. The results revealed that functions of euphemisms, such as modalizing, criticizing, evaluating, informing, accusing, and requesting are identified in the headlines of these Pakistani English-language newspapers. The current study is beneficial for making people cognizant of the usage of words that replace the triggers/harshness with gentle and polite impressions.

Keywords: English language, euphemism, headlines, Pakistani English newspapers, Pakistani newspaper writers

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Introduction

Euphemisms are not only expressed with respect to the meaning they convey but they also play a positive or negative role in the contextual use. The current research has been conducted by relating the use of euphemisms in the headlines of newspapers to give a precise view of euphemisms occurrence in the headlines of Pakistani English Language newspapers, which is the real attention-capturing point, while reading a newspaper or listening to the news. This research focused on the role of euphemisms in Pakistani English language newspaper headlines' especially in order to identify the major and minor types and functions along with the positive and negative effects of euphemisms employed in the selected newspapers. The main identified problem is that nowadays people are not much conscious about their usage of language in different sociolinguistic environment. Research particularly related to identify the use and function of euphemisms in English language newspapers has not been conducted in Pakistan. To fill the identified gap this research has certain objectives and future implications.

Objectives of the Study

The current study has certain objectives listed below:

1. To identify the major and minor types of euphemisms used in three Pakistani English language newspapers' headlines, namely Dawn, The Nation and The News International.
2. To highlight the function of euphemism in the headlines of three Pakistani English language newspapers, namely Dawn, The Nation, and The News International.

Significance of the Study

The current research is beneficial in making people aware of euphemisms and its replacement with a polite substitute, which often triggers the negative effects on human mind. A proper use of euphemism is a pathway, which leads to politeness that enables conversation to create nondestructive impacts. Identification of functions and major and minor types of euphemisms is a way to give realization that how the words in language are designed by going through the complex strata to satisfy the moral ethics of a society. Therefore, the current study was conducted to make awareness about the use of euphemistic words within variant types and functions, how they influence our speech and writing patterns

Furthermore, this study fulfils the gap as no research has yet been conducted to highlight the euphemisms in the headlines of Pakistani English language newspapers.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited based on the headlines of three Pakistani English language newspapers. This research intended to analyze the headlines of Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International newspapers.

Research Questions

The current study answers the following research questions:

1. What are the major and minor types of euphemisms used in the headlines of Pakistani English-language newspapers?
2. What are the functions being performed by different euphemisms in headlines of Pakistani English language newspapers, namely Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International?

Literature Review

The use of euphemistic words creates an unseen impact of protection on the human mind “as a protective shield against the anger or disapproval of natural or supernatural beings” (Allan & Burrige, [1991](#)). Ayto ([1993](#)) also conducted an analysis regarding the use of euphemisms in which he calls attention to how the force of euphemism relatively depended upon its context more than often. Valentine ([1998](#)) executed an analysis on calling names as a consideration of supremacy and arguable elements to the use of euphemisms. Experiments were escorted to find out the role and relations of metaphors in the use of euphemistic and dysphemistic expressions (Pfaff et al., [1997](#)). LaRocque ([2000](#)) said, “euphemisms deal with political, military and commercial concepts that can be particularly deceptive and controversial”. He focused on the pragmatic and lexical perspectives, which majorly discussed the use and meanings of euphemisms in terms of denial and refusal. The findings of the research revealed that hyperbole, denial, metaphor acronym, and borrowed terms were most frequently used in the Pakistani English Language newspapers. Mihas ([2005](#)) stated that “euphemizing, undoubtedly, serve as a linguistic bridge to indirectness that tends to dominate human communication in the modern era”. Brind and Wilkinson ([2008](#)) threw light on the issues correlated to war, death,

disability, and sex by arguing that these are the main concerns of euphemism.

Halmari (2011) conducted a study on language modification and euphemisms. Pan (2013) also argued that euphemisms are cultural words within the context they have vast cultural associations and when they are spoken in different cultural contexts they generate confusion among the people. Kis (2014) stated that the use of euphemisms in some discourses has removed the distinction between chaos and peace. By using different techniques of analysis Harkova and Shigapova (2014) conducted a research to find out the etymological procedures involves in the development of euphemisms. One of the researches has presented the identification of socio-cognitive aspects, to find out the society and cognition role towards euphemism. It was revealed that euphemisms are no more in use in contemporary times for the sake of relieving the harshness of society and the meaning that specific words convey. Rather they are in use today as a deception of convincing others (Arif, 2015).

Xiaobing and Qiong (2017) revealed that the socio and psychological aspects lead to the creation of euphemisms by declaring the expansion of euphemisms, which is crucial for the survival of the world as they give a way of dealing with politeness in the social, psychological, and cultural aspects. Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) carried out research on the visual identification of euphemisms by investigating a brutal act of terror attacks in the visual description of Nigerian newspapers. Khakhramonova and Mengliyev (2019) classify the euphemistic language based on gender and focused on the euphemism used by females of Uzbek in their language. Olimat (2020) considering the blues of the pandemic that halts the world and confided people to the corners of their homes, conducted a research on Jordanians use of euphemisms and ignorance of dysphemistic techniques to talk about Covid-19. Yildiz (2021) conducted a similar research to highlight the use of euphemisms by common youth in Turkey. The findings of the study indicated that most euphemisms used by youth were in the context of going to the toilet, gaining weight, and news about someone's death. The euphemism -ybetmark (someone's death) was most frequently used by the youth. Many other similar studies were conducted to highlight the different aspects of euphemisms in variant dimensions but the current study particularly focused on the use of euphemisms in Pakistani English

language newspapers published in the non-native countries and how the euphemism performs a particular function.

Theoretical Framework

A checklist introduced by Allan and Burridge, (1991), Neaman and Silver (1989), Rawson (1995), Shipley (1977), and Williams (1975) was used to identify the minor and major types of euphemisms in the headlines of Pakistani English language newspapers. In the checklist, the researchers discussed the major and minor types of euphemisms. According to the checklist, euphemisms are divided into five major types and functions, which are further classified into subtypes and sub- functions.

1. Shortening

- a) Words or phrases changed into a shortened form such as abbreviations.
- b) Apocopation: The words which are written or read or pronounce by omitting the last syllable.
- c) Backformation: Prefix or suffix being removed from an older root word, such as suffix being removed from the word burglar and the word is formed into burgle, which is the euphemism for rob.
- d) Diminutive: This is a term that is being used to shorten a name and a suffix used to be added for showing affection. For example, the word 'hind end' is euphemized by 'heinie'.
- e) Omission: use of words by skipping a letter or some letters of a word. For instance, people use 'bitte' instead of using 'bitter'.
- f) Clipping: this is the form of word in which a part or some parts of a word are deleted but without changing in the meaning. Such as the use of 'bra' instead of using 'brassiere'.

2. Circumlocution

A word or phrase that can be used at the place of word or phrases, which people do not like to use publically. For example, instead of using 'toilet' people use little girl's room.

3. *Remodeling*

- a) This is phonological distortion in which words are remodeled intentionally by using different pronunciations. For example, people use ‘crisp’ as a substitute word for ‘christ’.
- b) Blending the words by squeezing two or more words together phonetically and orthographically. For example, the phrase ‘goes under the bed’ is blended with the word ‘Gezunda’.
- c) Reduplication and repetition of a word and a syllable, which is particularly in the children’s vocabulary. For example, ‘rantum-scantum’’ (copulate).

4. *Semantic Change*

- a) Semantic Shift: this is the shift of meaning from general to specific. General for specific is a strategy as one-to-one replacement of words such as the use of ‘go to bed’ instead of ‘have sex’.
- b) Metaphorical Transfer: this is a strategy that compare things. For example, ‘blossom’ is used instead of using ‘pimple’.
- c) Widening is the omission of particular features of the words or phrases in which the referent can be identified unequivocally. For example, the word ‘growth’ is widen with ‘cancer’.
- d) Liotes; this is used to replace a word to make the less negative expressions, which can be created by an actual word. For example, word ‘fair’ is use instead of using ‘not bad’.
- e) Understatement: these kinds of terms are used to change the phrase with a proper term, such as, instead of using ‘out of control’ the word ‘critical’ can be used.
- f) Indirection: term which can be used to show something in a formal way indirectly. For example, ‘prison’ word can be replaced with the phrase ‘an assembly center’.
- g) Abstraction is an economic thing, which might refer to the state of slump, recession, or depression.

5. Borrowing

- a) External Borrowing: these kinds of terms are mostly taboos. For example, a word 'affaire' is used instead of using 'love'.
- b) Internal Borrowing; this can be done by using jargons and technical terminology from different sub languages.

Methodology

The current section presents the methods and strategies deployed and followed to conduct the current research. It comprises of research design, research method, population, sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedure.

This research was based on the phenomena of euphemisms found in the headlines of three Pakistani English Language newspapers, namely Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International. The data was analyzed in the form of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences used in the headlines.

The data of this research were euphemistic words were used by different journalists in the headlines of three different newspapers, namely Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International newspapers was published in May 2021.

Research Design

An expository research design was followed to analyze the major and minor types and functions of euphemisms in the headlines of variant newspapers. The researcher scrutinized an in-depth analysis to elucidate the required data in the form of euphemistic words, which revealed their function in relation to the use of major and minor types in the headlines of Pakistani English Language newspapers.

Research Method

This study deployed a qualitative data analysis approach, as it focused on the major and minor types, and functions of euphemisms, which were found in the headlines of English language newspapers published in Pakistan. Moreover, the current research aims to identify the correlation between Pakistani English language newspaper headlines and the use of euphemisms among Pakistani writers/journalists.

Population and Sampling

English-language newspapers were used to conduct the current research to study the role of euphemisms. The role of euphemisms here designates major and minor types and its functions. Keeping in view the random sampling, three English-language newspapers, namely Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International were selected to conduct the analysis. Furthermore, a purposive sampling model was adopted to collect 45 headlines for the data analysis. A number of 15 headlines from each Pakistani English language newspapers were used as sample size for the findings.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure includes; the collection of newspapers from online official websites of Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International to identify the headlines consisted of euphemisms and relevant headlines were typed on MS Word with underlined euphemistic words to quote the instances in the analysis section.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data was analyzed inductively through the analysis of headlines of English language newspapers published in Pakistan. The text of the selected headlines was examined manually for checking out types, subtypes, and functions of euphemisms based on the checklist and the contextual usage of euphemisms.

Data Analysis Instruments

Pakistani English language newspapers were used to collect the headlines possessing certain dominant examples of euphemisms. A checklist given by Allan and Burrige (1991), Neaman & Silver (1989), Rawson (1995), Shipley (1977), and Williams (1975) was used for the analysis of euphemisms in terms of major and minor types. Furthermore, functions of euphemisms as discussed by Rusman (2000) were used to highlight the function of each euphemism being used in headlines of English language newspapers.

Data Analysis

Data of 45 headlines from three different Pakistani English language newspapers, namely Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News

International were analyzed to answer the questions regarding major and minor types and functions of euphemisms. To identify the minor and major types of euphemism data was analyzed according to the checklist given by Allan and Burridge (1991), Neaman & Silver (1989), Rawson (1995), Shipley (1977), and Williams (1975). The analysis of headlines revealed that euphemisms are profusely used in headlines with their different major and minor types. The following types were specified in the selected headlines based on the checklist, such as, external borrowing, abstraction, blending, understatement, indirection, acronyms, idioms, circumlocution, liotes, metaphorical transfer, semantic shift, appocation, widening, and clipping were found in the analysis of euphemistic based headlines in the Pakistani English language newspapers.

Major and Minor Types of Euphemisms in Headlines of Pakistani English Language Newspapers

Data was analyzed in terms of shortening, circumlocution, remodeling, semantic change, and borrowing as major types of euphemisms. Semantic change along with shortening and borrowing as major types of euphemisms were used abundantly by Pakistani journalists in the selected data. Table 1 presents a clear image of major and minor types of euphemisms found in the selected headlines of Pakistani English language newspapers.

Table 1

Types of Euphemisms found in English Language Newspapers' Headlines.

Sr. No.	Euphemisms	Major Types	Minor Types
1	Amicable	Borrowing	External Borrowing
2	Collusion	Semantic Change	Abstraction
3	Enhanced ties	Remodeling	Blending
4	Parleys	Borrowing	External Borrowing
5	Okayed	Semantic Change	Understatement
6	Field day	Semantic Change	Indirection
7	Beefed up	Semantic Change	Idiom
8	Probe	Semantic Change	Indirection
9	Booked	Semantic Change	Indirection
10	Ameliorated	Semantic Change	Indirection
11	Claim	Circumlocution	NA
12	PCR	Shortening	Abbreviation

Sr. No.	Euphemisms	Major Types	Minor Types
13	Humiliates	Semantic Change	Abstraction
14	Decline	Semantic Change	Liotes
15	Spar	Semantic Change	Abstraction
16	Perusal	Semantic Change	Indirection
17	Dip	Semantic Change	Metaphorical Transfer
18	Asks	Semantic Change	Liotes
19	Climb	Semantic Change	Understatement
20	Detain	Semantic Change	Abstraction
21	Undermines	Semantic Change	Understatement
22	Step Down	Circumlocution	NA
23	Reiterates	Semantic Change	Abstraction
24	Friction	Semantic Change	Indirection
25	Surge	Semantic Change	Understatement
26	Hurl Barbs	Semantic Change	Semantic Shift
27	Opp	Shortening	Appocation
28	Grim Outlook	Circumlocution	NA
29	Junta	Borrowing	External Borrowing
30	Sinking into Oblivion	Semantic Change	Idiom
31	Battered	Semantic Change	Abstraction
32	Int'l	Shortening	Appocation
33	Held	Semantic Change	Indirection
34	Undemocratic	Semantic Change	Liotes
35	Hails	Semantic Change	Widening
36	Volt-face	Semantic Change	Semantic Shift
37	Tax Evasion	Borrowing	External Borrowing
38	Reiterates	Semantic Change	Abstraction
39	Review	Semantic Change	Widening
40	Flock	Semantic Change	Understatement
41	Roughed up	Semantic Change	Widening
42	Hyd	Shortening	Clipping
43	Defying	Semantic Change	Liotes
44	Reinstated	Semantic Change	Abstraction
45	Verbal slugfest	Semantic Change	Semantic Shift

Different major and minor types of euphemisms appeared with certain variations in Pakistani English language newspapers. Major and minor types of euphemisms in headlines were noted with different functions. The analysis showed that euphemisms carried out different functions in the form of modalizing, evaluation, criticism, requesting, informing, and accusing. Table 2 below shows a clear image of functions performed by euphemisms used in the headlines of Pakistani English language newspapers.

Table 2

Functions of Euphemistic Words Used in Headlines of Pakistani English Language Newspapers

Sr No.	Euphemisms	Functions
1	Amicable	Requesting
2	Collusion	Criticizing
3	Enhanced ties	Ordering
4	Parleys	Informing
5	Okayed	Informing
6	Field day	Modalizing
7	Beefed up	Informing
8	Probe	Ordering
9	Booked	Accusing
10	Ameliorated	Ordering
11	Claim	Informing
12	PCR	Informing
13	Humiliates	Cursing
14	Decline	Informing
14	Spar	Criticizing
15	Perusal	Criticizing
16	Dips	Evaluation
17	Asks	Requesting
18	Climb	Evaluation
19	Detain	Informing
20	Undermines	Criticizing
21	Step Down	Ordering
22	Reiterates	Requesting
23	Friction	Accusing
24	Surge	Criticizing

Sr No.	Euphemisms	Functions
25	Hurl Barbs	Accusing
26	Opp	Criticism
27	Grim Outlook	Evaluation
28	Junta	Accusing
29	Sinking into Oblivion	Evaluation
30	Battered	Modalizing
31	Int'l	Informing
32	Held	Accusing
33	Undemocratic	Criticizing
34	Hails	Modalizing
35	Volt-face	Accusing
36	Tax Evasion	Accusing
37	Reiterates	Requesting
38	Review	Modalizing
39	Flock	Accusation
40	Roughed up	Evaluation
41	Hyd	Informing
42	Defying	Informing
43	Reinstated	Evaluation
44	Verbal slugfest	Modalizing
45	Undermines	Criticizing

Function of euphemism was dependent upon the context in which they were being used in the text of selected headlines in English language newspaper. The analysis showed that euphemisms were carried out in the form of different functions, such as, modalizing, evaluation, criticism, requesting, informing, and accusing.

Conclusion

This research aimed to identify types and functions of euphemisms used in the headlines of three Pakistani English language newspapers. A qualitative methodology to conduct data analysis and an exploratory research design was followed to analyze the euphemistic words in the headlines of the selected newspapers. This research conducted an in depth analysis of euphemism by using Random sampling and purposive sampling model to identify and highlight the use and function of euphemisms in English language newspapers, namely Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News

International. This study further emphasized the familiarization of euphemisms in newspapers pertaining to headlines and its contextual usage. Hence, the findings indicated that Pakistani journalists incorporated all the major types of euphemism including shortening, circumlocution, remodeling, and semantic change to write down the headlines of English language newspapers. However, on the other hand ten (10) minor types of euphemism were identified in the text of headlines including abbreviation, appocation, clipping, blending, semantic Shift, widening, liotes, understatement, abstraction, and external borrowing of euphemisms. Understatement and abstraction occurred as minor types of euphemisms excessively in the headlines of three different Pakistani English language newspapers. Moreover, functions of euphemisms were concerned with informing, requesting, ordering, accusing, evaluating, modalizing, and criticizing. Therefore, the current study is significant to provide practical and theoretical knowledge about euphemisms, which is useful for survival in society as it serve as a basic root for communication.

Implementation

The current study contributes in every phenomenon of life, as language is the crucial substance that has a prodigious role either in deteriorating or in enhancing mental, emotional, and physical stress.

Recommendations

Further research can be conducted on the types, functions, and effects of euphemisms not only in international newspapers but also in different fields of language to make people cognizant of language by enabling the reader to comprehend the usage of words and their reflect on others.

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