CD-4: Euphemism

Page | Discussion | Read

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

Definition

The communicator uses an implicit reference rather than explicitly referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.[1][2]

Types of Euphemism

1) Euphemistic metaphors

Replacement of a direct or offensive term with a figurative or metaphorical expression to soften its impact.

Example

انتقلت إلى رحمة الله.

She transferred to the mercy of God.

Explanation

It means "She died," where "transferring to the mercy of God" is an euphemism for death.

2) Antonymic euphemisms

A euphemism that replaces a negative term with its positive or desirable opposite, reflecting optimism or cultural norms. Examples include مُعافى "healthy" to refer to someone who is sick, بصير "sighted" to refer to someone who is blind, and عائدون "returnees" to refer to refugees.

3) Circumlocutions

A euphemism that uses a roundabout or descriptive phrase to avoid stating something unpleasant or taboo directly.

Example

لم يُحالفه الحظ.

Luck did not ally with him.

Explanation

This means he failed.

4) Remodeling / phonetic play

A euphemism formed by intentionally distorting the sound or structure of a taboo word to mask its directness while preserving its implication.

Example

يلعن ديكك.

Damn your rooster!

Explanation

This is a euphemism for يلعن دينك "Damn your religion!" where the word ديك "rooster" is used instead of دين "religion".

5) Understatements

A euphemism that downplays a serious or negative event by choosing a milder or less emotionally charged word, such as the use of the word نكسة "setback" instead of هزيمة "defeat".

6) Borrowing of foreign words

A euphemism achieved by substituting a native term with a foreign loanword that carries more prestige or social acceptability, such as the word مادام "Madame" instead of مرأة or زوجة "wife".

7) Use of euphemizers

A euphemism-supporting strategy where polite phrases are added to soften the effect of taboo or undesirable words, such as the use of حاشاك meaning "May this not apply to you!" after mentioning something distasteful like حمار "donkey".

References

1. ↑ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 251, ISBN 9780415386098. DOI: 10.4324/9780203965399
2. ↑ Mohammed Farghal, 'Euphemism', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics Online*, ed. Lutz Edzard and Rudolf Erik de Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

Categories: Arabic Rhetorical Devices | Linguistic Embellishments ('ilm al-badī') | Indirectness & Ambiguity

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