

## Euphemism in Shakespeare's Play : Othello

### A Discourse Analysis

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#### الخلاصة:

ان اللغة دورا مهما في حياتنا اليومية ويمكن ان تمثل على انها ممر لانتقال المفردات من اذهان الناس الى الواقع ويمكن تطويرها بمرور الزمن ويتطور المجتمع نفسه .

تحاول الدراسة تسليط الضوء على استخدامات التلطفية من قبل الناس وذلك من خلال التخاطب فيما بينهم، وتحاول الدراسة ايضا تحليل مسرحية شكسبير ( اوثلو ) وتحديد التعابير التلطفية التي استخدمها الكاتب، تتبنى الدراسة الفرضيات الاتية : استخدام المجاز والتي تعتبر الاستراتيجية الرئيسية التي استخدمت لعرض التلطفية في المسرحية ، يعتمد تفسير التلطفية على سياق النص في مسرحية شكسبير " (اوثلو)، كما ان الكاتب قد استخدم التلطفية الخاصة بالموت والجنس اكثر من استخدامه للتلطفية الدينية.

اثبتت الدراسة صحت الفرضيات وذلك بان المجاز هو الاستراتيجية الرئيسية المستخدمة من قبل الكاتب وان التلطفية الخاصة بالموت والجنس اكثر استخداما من التلطفية الدينية، بالإضافة الى ان سياق الكلام له التأثير الكبير على تأويل التلطفية .

الكلمات الدالة : التلطفية، تحليل خطاب، اللغة .

#### Abstract

Language has a very important role in our lives . Language also, can be viewed as a path of transmitting of words from peoples mind to the realistic world and it is developed through the passage of time and this development depends upon the evolution of our society. The study aims to shed light on the uses of euphemism by people through their communication and the study also attempts to analyze the Shakespeare's Play: Othello and assign the expressions that the writer uses euphemistically .

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The present study proposes the following hypotheses: 1- Euphemism is the main strategy used in the play 2- the interpretation of euphemism in the Shakespeare's play (Othello ) is contextually used. 3- The death and sexual euphemism are more frequently used in the text rather than the religious euphemism.

The study proves the validity of the hypotheses as : metaphor is the strategy used by the writer and the death and sexual euphemism are used rather than the religious one , in addition , the context of situation has a great role in the interpretation of euphemism in the play .

**Key Words:** Euphemism , Discourse Analysis, Language

## **1. Introductory Remarks**

Language can be considered as a very powerful tool which people use it to express their wishes and desires.

One of permanent and effective techniques is euphemism term ( belongs to semantic component of any language ).

The way of communication between people varies from one culture to another. Such varieties rebirth as a result of many norms which depends on specified interlocutors of certain cultures. One of the communication strategies is euphemism. Allan and Burridge (2006:237-238) point that how people use the euphemism in their communication and they mention how the social , linguistics and psychological aspects are integrated in the euphemistic strategy.

Hudson (2000:261) defines euphemism as the extension of the ordinary words and phrases which express about unpleasant and embarrassing ideas.

Euphemism can confusing and problematic because of most of its uses are ambiguous or vague and they can change the addressees' mind to wrong places .So , in order to sail within users implied thinking of euphemistic items ,it is required to proceed the context which plays a vital role in the interpretation of the text . Moreover ,to form euphemism sometimes ,the users of language violate the of Gricean maxims (ibid) .

The study comprises from the introductory remarks , euphemism ,the types of euphemism and processes, data analysis of the text (Othello) and assign the euphemism in it.

The research ends with conclusions which summarize what the researcher arrives at. In relation to the results of the study, it is noticed that euphemism can be used in different ways :a nice way of talking to replace unpleasant words and it is usually used in order to avoid a certain type of thoughtfulness and correctness with a suitable ones among the addressees . In addition, the psychological factors effect on using euphemism such as: culture , religion , and the traditions (Hudson, 2000: Ibid).

The present study deals with euphemistic expressions in the Shakespeare's play (Othello) . The model adopted in this study is Grice (1989) theory of implicature .The current study assigns the euphemistic expressions used in the play. Lyons (1981:151) illustrates euphemism as "the avoidance of taboo words" . So, there are a lot of vulgar and trivial words which are forbidden in some languages according to different religion and taboos.

**e.g. In the Bible , Adem knew Eve. (euphemism)**

Off course this expression means that Adem had a sexual relationship with Eve .(Alego and Pyles ,2009:220).

e.g. **'that I have passed.'** (Act 1, Scene111)

Here, in the previous example ,it is not clear whether the word **'passed'** means **'dead'** or **'he walked on'**. This study aims to clarify the implicit meaning of the language and by using the euphemism to avoid the rude words and replaces it with a gentler words. The researcher presents the definition of euphemism and identifies it's processes (abstraction, indirection, litotes, and mispronunciation ) , purposes ,and the euphemism and the Grice Maxims.

The model of the data analysis is adopted from Grice 's (1989) model of cooperative principles ,conversational maxims and the conversation implicature . Finally, the research ends with conclusions that the researcher arrives at . The present study is hoped to be benefit to the researchers and the students that are involved or interested in studying such a field of linguistics.

## **2- Euphemism**

Euphemism is a powerful linguistic means which the speakers use in order to change the unpleasant or harsh words with something pleasant or less direct (Rawson, 1981:1) .

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Bloor and Bloor (2007 : 73 ) clarify euphemism as substituting a less distasteful word or phrase for something pleasant . For example : **demonizing , rationalization , staff economies , increasing efficiency .**

The idea of euphemism is manifested by Woods (2006 : 25) who illustrates that euphemisms are those words and phrases that may be used to avoid explicit reference to taboo or distasteful topics . For example , instead of saying **someone has died** , it may be said : **he passed away** (Ibid).

Concerning the taboo and euphemism , in Oxford dictionary of euphemisms (2007) , Holder notes that in speech or writing ; euphemism is used for dealing with taboo or sensitive subject . Therefore , it is used the language of evasion , hypocrisy , prudery , and deceit .([http://grammar –about visual : Euphemism – term . html](http://grammar-about-visual:Euphemism-term.html) ) .

Euphemism is used to avoid the embarrassing situations by the speaker who does not feel comfortable in saying a word or a phrase.

There is an overlap between euphemism and synonym as nouns: euphemism (uncountable) is the use of a word or a phrase to replace another one which is less offensive e.g. "**pass away**" means "**die**" while synonym means the same or very similar word or phrase e.g. "**happy**" is synonym to "**glad**" (<https://wikidiff-com/synonym/euphemism>).

### 2-1 The uses of Euphemism

Euphemism viewed in various languages around the world

and fulfill certain important functions . Pavlenke (2006:260) illustrates euphemism " to protect speakers from undesired emotional arousal".

There is a need , in most of the languages around the world, to find roundabout , indirect ,and socially acceptable ways to refer about a specific concepts. According to Miller

(1999 ) who views that euphemism can fulfill this function by

sanitizing the language which the speakers use .

( <https://moluch.ru/archive/116/31661/>)

Furthermore, people use euphemism to avoid the speaking directly . There are certain types that the people use it , such as:

**1-Religious euphemism** : This process is connected to peoples' believes .Thus , people use to belief that the words possessed immense power . Therefore , they fear from mentioning evil spirits because they believes that these spirits bring bad chance (Keyes , 2010 : 130).

**2- Deed euphemism** : Everybody feels uncomfortable and unpleasant when they hear about dead persons . Death is still a great mystery in our lives , until now people cannot understand what are the reasons of annoying behind talking about it.

(Alego and Pyles 2009:216)

**3-Sextual euphemism** : Sex can be considered as a very subjective matters , so, it is unsuitable matters to be discussed publically .

Euphemisms for sex are much older than Shakespeare' puns ; some of the oldest ones may be found in the Bible " **Adem knew Eve** " , this is a euphemistic expression , it means that there is a sexual correlation between them .(Ibid :220).

### **3- 2 The processes of Euphemism**

Euphemisms are those words or phrases that substitute provocative or emotionally charged terms , employed for various reasons :-

- 1. Abstraction** some euphemisms serve to distance people from unpleasant or embarrassing truths as for example , **a dead person = passed away** or **celebrity who has canceled an appearance is suffering from exhaustion** .
- 2. Indirection** euphemism may replace an explicit description of an action , **as when people speak of going to the bathroom or of other sleeping together** .
- 3. Litotes** Sometimes , euphemism occurs in the form of this rhetorical device in which the gravity or force of an idea is softened or minimized by a double negative **as in the reference to someone as being not un attractive** .

**4-Mispronunciation** alteration of pronunciation is a form of

euphemism , for example , it is said **frigging or shoot or jeez or**

cripes, so as not to offend people by using profanity

utterances whether (figurative or literal).

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([http://grammar-about visual :Euphemism-com](http://grammar-about-visual:Euphemism-com) ). <https://www.dailywritings.com/7-types-of-euphemism/>

**5- Modification** can be transformed into euphemism by converting to an adjective , as e.g. **when someone has a socialist learning** rather than **socialist outright**.

(<https://www.dailywritings.com/7-types-of-euphemism/>)

**6- Personification** when people prefer something not mentioned candidly , e.g. **gentles** referred to **the persons' names**.

**7- Slang** a type of euphemism through which much of slangs derived to produce an exclusive vocabulary to a social group such as ,**the use of joint for marijuana( this is a slang term , derived from Spanish names Mary and Juana** .(Ibid)

### 3- 3 Purposes of Euphemism

Euphemisms are those words that people in order to soft the reality of what are communicated to a given listener or reader . They are a universal feature of language usage ,cultures typically use them to talk about things they find terrifying ( e . g : **war , sickness , death** ) because . anthropologically , to speak a name was to evoke the divinity whose power then had to be confronted " ( Neaman and Silver, 1983 : 1 – 2 ) .

Similarly, euphemism uses to express taboo , as we feed some instinctual level , euphemism keeps us at safe distance from the taboo itself .

Euphemism is also used to elevate the status of something e – g : **using educator , attorney for lawyer** ) ; but , in general , people use euphemisms to express what is socially difficult to express in direct terms . ( [http://iteslj – org / Lessons / Alike – euphemisms – hltm /](http://iteslj-org/Lessons/Alike-euphemisms-hltn/) ) .

### 3- Euphemism and Grice's Maxims

Euphemism can be viewed as a linguistic mechanism through which the speakers replace the unsuitable words with suitable ones.

Within the act of communication , the participants achieve a successful cooperation in their speech. Thus ,this cooperation requires a set of rules such as :Gricean Cooperative Principles

as: "Make your contribution such as it is required at the stage at which it occurs by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice ,1989:26) .

The Cooperative Principle has four main and sub-maxims that the users of a language need in their intentions ,as follows:

1-Maxim of Quantity : gives the right amount of information.

A: Make your contribution as informative as is required .

B: Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2-Maxim of Quality : Try to make your contribution one that is true.

A: Do not say what you believe to be false.

B:Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3-Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

4-Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous.

1-Avoid obscurity of expressions.

2-Avoid ambiguity.

3-Be brief.

4-Be orderly.(Ibid) .

For euphemism , speakers violate the Gricean maxims because euphemism is the implicit meaning which is expressed about explicit undesirable words. As for examples :

1- "God as the Supreme ". Religious euphemism means the "Almighty ,the Father ,and the Exalted" ,violates the maxim of manner "avoid the obscurity expressions"

2- "He passed away" . Death euphemism, violates the maxim of manner "avoid obscurity of expression".

3- "the union of your bed with weeds so loathly" . Sexual euphemism ,violates the maxim of quality "do not what you believe to be false".

#### **4- Data Analysis**

##### **1 - I know my price , I am worth no worse a place . (Act I , scene I)**

Iago tells Rodrego that his position as a lieutenant ( should be bloody and unkindly ) , So , he says that he deserves better place than this . Shakespeare hints euphemistically in the

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Rodrego's speech between him and Iago about Iago's position as a lieutenant .In this case, the writer violates the Gricean maxims of quantity " give the right amount of information". However it is still cooperative in order to make a successful contribution. Thus, the euphemistic expression : no worse place (bloody place) .

### **2-Your heart is burst , you have lost half your soul . (Act I, Scene I) .**

Iago tells Brabantio that his house is robbed while he was sleeping , Iago wakes him and tells him that his heart will be damaged and he will lose his life when he hears about the thieves. Here, the writer infringes the maxim of relation "Be relevant" .He uses an explicit expression (burst) to show his sadness .The euphemistic expression : burst ( deep sadness) .

### **3-Keep up your bright swords , for the dew will rust them . ( Act I , Scene II) .**

Here , Othello orders Iago to make his sword ready to kill the thieves tightly and do not make it rusted . Here ,Shakespeare uses a metaphor expression by saying: .....bright sword,...euphemistically ,he hints about killing . Moreover, he violates the maxim of quantity "give the right amount of information " . He uses implicit expression to refer about something wrong. The euphemism expression : bright sword (killing) .

### **4-To keep us in false gaze (Act I , Scene III) .**

The first Senator talks to the Duke of Venice that he has a bad idea about the importunacy of Cyprus to the Turk and their preparation to control on it . As for euphemism ,the writer violates the maxim of manner because he uses implicit idea(bad idea) to express about something unfavorable one(false gaze).

### **5-That it engults and swallows other sorrows . (Act I , Scene III)**

Brabantio describes his grief about his daughter (whom stolen from him ) to Duke of Venice as a gate of blood which (Swallows kills people and things sorrowfully . Shakespeare symbolizes the killed people as if they were swallowing .In this way, he violates the maxim of manner " avoid the obscurity of expression" (swallow other sorrows). The euphemistic expression : swallows other sorrows ( innocent people are killed aggressively) .

### **6-That I have passed (Act I , Scene III) .**

Othello speaks to the Duke that he travels far away in order to escape from his early life (his boyish days , his beloved , and his father ) . Euphemistically , the author violates the maxim

of manner " avoid using the obscurity expression " .Death euphemism, the euphemistic expression : passed : (travel a way = (die) ).

**7-To spend with thee : we must obey the time . (Act I , Scene III) .**

Othello talks to Brabantio that they should benefit from each minute with love and kind . Here, Shakespeare personifies the time as animate thing. The writer violates the maxim of quantity "Make your contribution as informative as required" .The euphemistic expression : obey the time ( faith the fate) .

**8-I never did like molestation view .**

**9-On the enchafed flood . (Act II , Scene I) .**

Here , the second gentleman tells Montano about the horrible battle which a sect of Turkish fleet commits that he (second gentleman ) hates this molestation view and describes it as (enchafed flood) a harmful part of the human's body or as if something chafes against it , the skin become sore because something is rubbing against it . In the previous lines, Shakespeare violates the maxim of manner "avoid the ambiguity". He uses a metaphor expression(enchafed flood) to use it euphemistically as ( invasion) to soft the utterance.

**10-It is mercly a lust of the blood and a permission of the will . Come , be a man . Drown thyself ! drown . (Act I , Scene III) .**

Iago speaks to Roderigo and describes the bloody battle as a sexual desire just like the desire of gathering money or power . The writer resembles the lust of killing just as a sexual desire .So , he violates the maxim of quality "Do not say what you believe to be false" in spite of this ,it is still cooperative to maintain a successful contribution. The euphemistic expression : lust of the blood ( killing) .

**11-May the winds blow till they have wakened death . (Act II , Scene I) .**

Othello personifies to Desdemona that the blow of wind wakened the death or sent the death to take the people's soul . The writer violates the maxim of manner " avoid the obscurity of expression" .The euphemistic expression : wakened the death ( bloody battle) .

**12-Nay get thee gone (Act II , Scene III) .**

Here, Iago directs his speech to Roderigo through which he describes the hours of pleasure as a very short. It is death euphemism through which the writer violates the maxim of manner" avoid using the obscurity expression" . The euphemistic expression : gone ( die) .

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### **13-Out of the way , that your converse and business .**

*(Act III, Scene I) .*

Iago talk to Cassio that Desdemona is impolite person whether in her speech or in business . Euphemistically , there is a reference to a sexual relationship by using (out of the way) and the writer uses it implicitly in order to smooth the expression and replaces it with a suitable one .Additionally, he violates the maxim of manner " avoid the obscurity of expression". The euphemistic expression : out of the way ( dishonor) .

### **14-As if there monster in his speech . (Act III, Scene III) .**

Othello talks to Iago that there is a devil in Cassio's thinking . Shakespeare portrays the monster inside the person's mind as a devil to express about something undesirable . So, the writer violates the maxim of quality "try to make your contribution one that is true" . The euphemistic expression : monster ( bloody thinking) .

### **15- As thou dost ruminare , and give thy worst thought . The worst of words .**

*(Act III, Scene III).*

Othello tells Iago that Cassio has a shame ideas , and he utters a shame words which reflects his personality or soul from inside . Shakespeare , euphemistically , violates the maxim of quality "do not say that you believe to be false". The euphemistic expression : worst thoughts and ideas ( shameful) . Moreover , he uses an explicit expression (worst thoughts and ideas) to refer about implicit and unfavorable one (shameful).

### **16-Swallow them up . (Act III, Scene III) .**

Othello talks to Iago that the war is like the monester which swallow the people .The writer expresses the "swallow" expression which is unpleasant term . Euphemistically, Shakespeare uses implicit meaning (slaughtering) which effects on the recipients. He violates the maxim of manner " avoid the ambiguity". The euphemistic expression : swallow( slaughtering) .

### **17-Nay , that's not your way . (Act IV , Scene I) .**

Here ,Iago talks to Othello after he describes his heart as a stone (hard hearted) toward his beloved , so I ago says that Othello is far away from this description . Euphemistically ,the writer violates the maxim of quantity " make your contribution as informative as required" .In this phrase , the writer uses implicit meaning (bloody way) which is not preferable to

express about an explicit expression. The euphemistic expression : that's not your way ( bloody way ).

**18-Cousin , there's fallen between him and my lord .**

**19-An unkind breach : but you shall make all well . (Act IV , Scene I) .**

Desdemona talks to Iago about Cassio , she said that he is impolite person and there is a big problem between him and the lord .The author violates the rules and she adds that Iago will make everything well. Euphemistically , Shakespeare violates the Gricean maxim of manner "avoid the ambiguity" .The euphemistic expression : unkind breach ( violation the custom rules) .

**20-Alas the heavy day ! (Act IV , Scene III) .**

Desdemona talks to Othello about the heavy day , she means that the day of judgment through which every man takes what he deserves or the day that fills of troubles and problems . Euphemistically ,the writer violates the Gricean maxim of manner " avoid obscurity of expression" .Here the author uses a horrible explicit words (heavy day) which effects on the hearer's feeling to express about implicit meaning (the day of punishment) .Religious euphemism ,the euphemistic expression : heavy day ( the day of punishment ) .

**21-Tis but a man gone . Forth, my sword : he dies .**

**(Act V , Scene I) .**

Roderigo talks to Iago that man is died by his sword . Euphemistically ,the writer violates the Gricean maxim of manner " avoid obscurity of expression" . Death euphemism : gone (died) .

**Figure (1) illustrates the types of Euphemism in the Text**

The types of Euphemism	Frequency of Use	Words of Euphemism
Abstraction	٧	Burst –bright sword- swallows other sorrows- passed –gone –swallows- gone
Indirection	3	False gaze- out of the way – worst the thoughts and ideas

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Mispronunciation	2	Lust of blood- monster
Litotes	2	No worse place-that's not your way
Modification	2	Bright sword – false gaze –enchafed flood
Personification	0	.
Slang	5	Burst- swallows other sorrows- obey the time – heavy day –wakened the death

### 5 – Conclusions

Euphemism always functions as two faces of one coin . In our society , life is gradually changed and through this changing very wide words are coined in various fields of life by different individuals .As a result , the scope of linguistics is inevitably change and because these changes , the euphemism certainly is enhanced with new ones.

It is concluded that:

- 1- Euphemism is used in Shakespearian text 'Othello' to avoid the unsuitable words or phrases by suitable ones.
- 2- Euphemism is used heavily in our daily life even so, the people have a confusion in using it.

Moreover, euphemism is very beneficial between the encounters people although it is not overused.

As a matter of fact there is a controversial case about how to differentiate between euphemism and a synonym, thus , the

best way is to test euphemistic word or phrase with something

else if it is accepted it is euphemism , if it is not it would be no more than synonym .

It is observed that the high percentage lies in the use of the death euphemism , while the less one is the religious euphemism in this play.

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#### Internet Resources :

- <https://iteslij-org/lessons/Alike-euphemism>

- <https://grammar-about-visual:Euphemisms-term.html> .

- [https://www.wikidiff-com/synonym/euphemism-words-term-\(https://moluch.ru/archive/116/31661/\)](https://www.wikidiff-com/synonym/euphemism-words-term-(https://moluch.ru/archive/116/31661/))

-<https://www.dailywritingtips.com/7-types-of-euphemism>

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