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FEMININE EUPHEMISMS AS MEANS OF ACTUALIZING THE CATEGORY OF POLITENESS

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The purpose of the article is to reveal the semantics of English feminine euphemisms as means of implementing gender politeness. Gender politeness is regarded to be a speech behavior strategy aimed at a respectful, non-discriminatory attitude. Euphemic vocabulary as a result of speech representation of reality through secondary nomination of both language and speech nature is an integral part of the picture of the world of a native English speaker. Euphemisms as types of linguistic and expressive tendencies of usage are used to avoid direct naming of mostly negative objects of reality and are designed to reflect the social agreement on replacing direct nominations with secondary ones. The selected dictionary euphemisms characterizing occupation, appearance, and social peculiarities of women can be divided into two groups: traditional gender-polite euphemisms; politically correct gender-polite euphemisms.

Four thematic groups of the feminine euphemistic thesaurus are distinguished: euphemisms expressing all kinds of evaluative characteristics; euphemisms hiding, "veiling" various physical disabilities; euphemisms associated with the "beauty industry" (including cosmetology, plastic surgery) and euphemisms for physiological processes and body parts.

The politically correct euphemisms created on the principle of gender politeness and eliminating the manifestations of sexism (as a form of discrimination) in the language are of particular interest. Comparing traditional and politically correct gender-polite euphemistic units, current linguistic studies turn to the differentiation of euphemisms into "proper" and "negative" ones. It was defined that the positive and negative types of politeness are intersected in the area of language political correctness.

Traditional feminine euphemisms refer to the field of personal and interpersonal relations, and euphemisms arisen within the framework of the phenomenon of political correctness are associated with the social sphere and imply professional realization of women in modern society. The prospect of research is to study feminine and masculine euphemisms in the comparative analysis.

Key words: euphemisms, secondary nomination, gender politeness, political correctness, thematic groups.

Сорока Т. В. Фемінні евфемізми як засоби актуалізації категорії ввічливості. Мета дослідження полягає в розкритті семантики англomовних фемінних евфемізмів як засобів реалізації гендерної ввічливості. Гендерну ввічливість розглянуто як стратегію мовної поведінки, спрямовану на шанобливе, недискримінаційне ставлення. З'ясовано, що евфемічна лексика як результат репрезентації дійсності засобами вторинної номінації мовної або мовленнєвої природи є невід'ємною частиною картини світу носія англійської мови. Евфемізми потрактовано як один із видів лінгвістичних і експресивних тенденцій узусу, які використовуються для того, щоб уникнути прямого найменування переважно негативних об'єктів дійсності і які покликані відобразити суспільну домовленість про заміну прямих номінацій вторинними. Дібрані словникові евфемізми, що характеризують рід занять, зовнішність і соціальні особливості жінок, розділено на дві групи: традиційні гендерно-ввічливі евфемізми; політкоректні гендерно-ввічливі евфемізми. Виділено чотири тематичні групи жіночого евфемістичного тезаурусу: евфемізми, які виражають всілякі оціночні характеристики; евфемізми, що приховують, «вуалюють» різні фізичні недоліки; евфемізми, пов'язані з «індустрією краси» (включаючи косметологію, пластичну хірургію); евфемізми для фізіологічних процесів і частин тіла. Зазначено, що особливий інтерес представляють політкоректні евфемізми, які створені за принципом гендерної ввічливості і які включають прояви сексизму (як форми дискримінації) в мові.

Порівнюючи традиційні та політично коректні гендерно-ввічливі евфемістичні одиниці, автори сучасних лінгвістичних досліджень звертаються до диференціації «власне» евфемії і «негативної» евфемії. У дослідженні аргументовано перетинання позитивного і негативного типів ввічливості в контексті мовної політкоректності.

Узагальнено, що традиційні жіночі евфемізми належать до сфери особистих і міжособистісних відносин, а евфемізми, які виникли в межах феномену політкоректності, пов'язані із соціальною сферою і уособлюють професійну реалізацію жінок у сучасному суспільстві. Перспективою досліджень окреслено вивчення жіночих і чоловічих евфемізмів в порівняльному аспекті.

Ключові слова: евфемізми, вторинна номінація, гендерна ввічливість, політична коректність, тематичні групи.

Defining the problem and argumentation of the topicality of the consideration. At present, the gender parameter is one of the most important factors for

the life of the English-speaking society. The problem of male and female speech correlation from the viewpoint of politeness, their similarities and differences

remain in the focus of many linguists' researches (E. A. Zemskaya, A. P. Martynyuk, R. Lakoff, J. Coates, etc.). In this regard, the manifestation and fixation of the "female image" in euphemisms created on the principle of politeness, as well as the changes in the modern English language that "gender politeness" induced under the "mask" of political correctness, are of great interest for study. Euphemistic vocabulary as a result of speech representation of reality through secondary nomination of both language and speech nature is an integral part of the picture of the world of a native English speaker. Euphemisms as a type of linguistic and expressive tendencies of usage are used to avoid direct naming of mostly negative objects of reality and are designed to reflect the social agreement on replacing direct nominations with secondary ones. Euphemisms are a type of expressively colored vocabulary and have a more complex semantic structure than neutral vocabulary; they are characterized by connotative semantics, which is created by an "additional" macro component of the semantic structure (connotation), which is a link between nomination and denotation and absorbs all the information that represents the evaluative and emotional functions that together create a content that traditionally correlates with the concept of expressiveness: connotation is the additional content of a word or expression, its accompanying semantic or stylistic shades that overlap with its main meaning and serve to express various kinds of expressive – evaluative overtones [2, 101]. In modern society, the motivation for using euphemisms due to current taboos is mainly not fear, but a desire not to hurt the sensitivity of the interlocutor, not to humiliate his dignity, to show politeness, and so on.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The problem of euphemism, due to its great diversity and productivity, is widely covered in the works of such linguists as B. A. Larin, L. A. Bulakhovsky, A. M. Katsev, L. P. Krysin, V. P. Moskvina, C. Silver, J. Neaman, R. Holder, etc.

In linguistic literature, there are many definitions of the notion *euphemism*, the analysis of which allows us to assert that euphemisms are words or expressions that serve to replace such symbols, which are presented to a speaker as undesirable, not quite polite, inappropriate or tactless. Many researchers of euphemism note the ups and downs of "euphemism-making" in various historical epochs (A. M. Katsev, C. Silver, J. Neaman), moreover, at different stages of the development of society and language, various groups of euphemistic thesaurus become relevant or irrelevant. An important factor in the obsolescence of euphemism is the variation of moral and social foundations. In addition, the extinction of certain realities leads to the archaization of euphemisms and, on the contrary, the emergence of new realities, negative phenomena generates new euphemisms. Sometimes completely unexpected notions are euphemized for example, a group of euphemisms related to sexism in the language was not previously distinguished (by the way, this group is specific to the English language, which is associated with certain language traditions). We agree with I. Arnold's viewpoint that euphemisms should be considered in a synchronic aspect, because

euphemistic and direct names coexist in the language and form lexical opposition [3, 190].

It is customary to single out a number of pragmatic principles underlying the emergence of euphemism. Its definition emphasizes the fact that the main incentive that motivates a speaker to use euphemisms is *politeness*. And, indeed, most often in the case of euphemism, one of the basic principles of pragmatics is the principle of politeness. Euphemisms created on this principle tend to mitigate various types of physical and mental disabilities. But, in addition to the principle of politeness (and often in interaction with it), according to Yu.V. Gorshunov, euphemisms appear in the language for a number of the following pragmatic reasons: by virtue of the taboo principle (for example, when forming euphemistic substitutions for direct names of diseases and death); due to the regulatory principle of influencing the mass reader (for example, when creating euphemisms in the political field); from a pragmatic attitude to classify their activities (when creating euphemisms within the sociolects of various illegal groups); by virtue of the principle of language play and irony (when creating humorous and ironic euphemisms); due to the rational pragmatic principle of economy (when creating abbreviations in general, and abbreviations-euphemisms in particular) [1, 56].

Due to the fact that the principle of politeness is one of the main factors dictating the use of euphemisms, often some means of expressing the category of politeness (polite pronominal forms of address, words with diminutives, individual cases of meiosis, etc.) are mistakenly attributed to euphemisms. Comparing euphemisms and the category of politeness, their means of expression, linguists stipulate that if negative connotations arise, some of the linguistic means of the category of politeness can be euphemisms.

Methodology of the selection of such methods as method of component analysis (for the study of lexical meanings of euphemisms and related units); descriptive method (for the interpretation of semantic-stylistic and functional-pragmatic features of euphemisms); definitive analysis (when forming euphemistic chains based on the comparison of lexicographic definitions of euphemisms in dictionaries in different periods of language development) are used in the linguistic research.

Setting the goals and tasks of the article. The aim of the study is to reveal the semantics of English euphemisms characterizing women as means of implementing gender politeness. Achieving the goal involves solving the following **tasks**: 1) to identify the features of functioning, the range of euphemized topics and ways of replenishing the feminine sector of the euphemistic thesaurus; 2) to analyze selected traditional and politically correct gender-polite euphemisms.

The outline of the main research material. The focus of our research is on "gender politeness" euphemisms. In this regard, such a notion as "gender politeness" requires interpretation. We formulate the definition of the concept of "gender politeness" based on the fact that the principle of politeness is considered as a special strategy of speech behavior aimed at preventing possible conflict situations; "gender politeness" is implemented in the process of speech using various

rules and tactics. In our opinion, “gender politeness” is a speech behavior strategy aimed at a respectful, non-discriminatory attitude. It finds its expression in polite language forms not indicating male or female dominance. Besides that they also emphasize tolerance and respect for representatives of any gender, on the one hand, and soften, veil or neutralize any negative characteristics, on the other.

Currently, most of the gender studies are devoted specifically to the “women's issue”, and often the words *gender* and *female* become synonymous. It is impossible not to mention the fact that women predominantly use euphemisms in their speech.

The selected dictionary euphemisms characterizing occupation, appearance, and social peculiarities of women can be divided into two groups: traditional gender-polite euphemisms; politically correct gender-polite euphemisms.

Common euphemisms are widely used in the mass media, fiction, and advertising, allow us to judge, first of all, the stereotypes and norms of behaviour existing in English-speaking society, and more precisely, the negative aspects of the “female” image, which are traditionally condemned, discouraged, shamed, and consequently euphemized.

The analysis identifies the following thematic “female” groups.

1. Euphemisms expressing all kinds of evaluative characteristics.

In this group, we include lexical units expressing the attitude of society to the behaviour and marital status of female representatives, for example, some far-from-complimentary characteristics. Such well-known euphemisms as *no better than she should be* and *not all she should be* allow vaguely expressing a negative attitude towards “a woman of easy virtue”. Some evaluative euphemisms are associated with irony, for example, the expressions: *on the shelf* (“stale goods” – about an unmarried woman who has little chance of getting married), *fishing fleet* (that is, girls of marriageable age who go abroad in search of husbands), *wallflower* (about an unattractive young lady who is not invited to dance) [4].

2. Euphemisms hiding, “veiling” various physical disabilities.

Euphemisms of this group are very numerous. It is explained by the increased attention of women to their appearance, shape, and the desire to have good looks. It should be noted that such a problem as “overweight” encourages the appearance of a large number of euphemistic units. The following euphemisms substitute the word *full* in relation to women: *full-figured*, *ample*, *well-built*, *well-fleshed*, *filled out*, *pleasantly plump*, *big boned*, etc. The expressions *Renoir woman*, *of classic proportions*, *statuesque* remind us of the time when fullness was the symbol of female beauty, and, Pierre-Auguste Renoir is known (like many classical artists and sculptors) to have depicted far from thin models.

The creation of such euphemisms is often caused by commercial motives, the desire to attract a customer for buying a particular product and at the same time not to offend: one has to show the wonders of ingenuity, coming up with how to politely designate clothes of large

sizes. It often happens; clothing sizes for large ladies are tactfully labeled as *mature figure*, *Big Gal*, *woman's size*, *queen size*, *full size*, etc.

In advertising, also for commercial purposes, people encounter euphemisms for “skin imperfections” (due to aging or a severe rash): *imperfections* (imperfections of the skin), *mature skin challenged by natural hormonal changes* (mature skin exposed to natural hormonal changes), *beauty spot* (mole, wart, pimple).

3. Euphemisms associated with the “beauty industry” (including cosmetology, plastic surgery).

This group of euphemisms is closely related to the previous one, we can say that it “follows” from it, since it is the desire to have good looks that pushes for all kinds of cosmetic procedures improving the figure, complexion, hairstyle, etc. But not every woman will agree to recognize the fact that her beauty is the result of the hard work of cosmetologists and is not natural. For example, the euphemism *body image* is used to describe physical appearance. Someone does not want to openly admit that she is not a “natural blonde” and claims that she only “uses the services of the Revlon company” (*to partner with Revlon*); someone wants to get rid of “unwanted vegetation” (hair), in this regard, there are euphemisms: *bikini wax* (hair removal in the bikini area), *to wax* (remove hair).

4. Euphemisms for physiological processes and body parts.

The described group of euphemisms includes numerous substitute names for tabooed notions in any society. At the heart of their creation and use there are the strictest moral prescriptions, shame. Here are some examples. The euphemisms *wetness* (sweat), *bedewed* (sweaty) are preferred when it comes to a woman, since: “...a lady might get ‘bedewed’ but she didn't sweat” [4, 24]. When describing a pregnant woman, we can say that she is *big* (put on weight), *anticipating*, *expecting* (waiting), etc. In this group, we can include euphemisms used by women when they need to go to the water closet: *to powder one's nose*, *to fix one's face*. It should be added that we have encountered few examples of euphemisms for such notions as “old age” and “stupidity” in relation to women. Most of these euphemisms are not “purely feminine”, that is, they can also refer to male referents.

Considering gender-polite euphemisms, we cannot fail to mention politically correct linguistic innovations in modern English. The second half of the 20th century became a kind of “euphemistic” boom due to the spread of the ideology of “political correctness” in English-speaking countries. Political correctness is based on the desire to avoid various types of discrimination; language tact, humanity, and mutual politeness are gradually manifested and finally these factors have become to be regarded as the main motive for euphemization. That is why, in the works devoted to the study of the phenomenon of political correctness, euphemism is considered as an integral part of the linguistic aspect of political correctness. In relation to our research, of particular interest are politically correct euphemisms created on the principle of gender politeness and eliminating manifestations of sexism (as a form of discrimination) in the language. In the light of political correctness, to speak out, emphasizing gender

stereotypes is tantamount to insulting and initiating a conflict. It was political correctness that helped to overcome gender asymmetry in the language through numerous euphemisms created on the pragmatic principle of politeness and reducing sexual discrimination. It is noteworthy that the main object of criticism of adherents of gender political correctness was a group of female persons' designations on a professional basis. Thus, the traditional use of a neutral, generalized masculine gender for naming women's professions has been seriously criticized by the linguists focused on political correctness and, respectively all designations with *-man* component were classified as "sexist" names of female professions recommended for replacement.

It should be noted that often gender-neutral euphemisms denoting the names of persons by profession not only neutralize, eliminate gender and increase the status of a woman, but they also contribute to improving the professional status of an individual regardless of one's gender (due to its neutrality, the absence of a gender indicator). The motive for euphemizing the designations of some professions is not only an indication of gender contained in their names, but also their lack of prestige, from the point of view of this society, which implies low wages, a low level of social status. For example, the euphemism *first-line supervisor* replaced *foreman* (senior worker), simultaneously eliminated gender identity and formally "promoted" a person through the ranks.

Thus, the pragmatic principle of politeness stimulates the formation of various thematic groups of euphemisms. In the case of traditional gender-polite euphemisms, along with the principle of politeness, there is sometimes a concomitant principle of *language play* and *irony*, which allows the use of these euphemisms in situations of informal communication. Comparing traditional and politically correct gender-polite euphemistic units, current linguistic studies turn to the differentiation of euphemisms into "proper" and "negative" ones. Such a division is based on the concepts of "positive" and "negative" types of politeness introduced in the works of P. Brown and S. Levinson. In linguistics there exists such a hypothesis as politically correct euphemisms created on the principle of positive politeness. However, taking into consideration the fact that many politically correct euphemisms turn into a kind of etiquette patterns, ignoring which in modern English-speaking society is tantamount to rudeness, there is reason to believe that it is in the field of compliance with linguistic political correctness that positive and negative types of politeness intersect. Nowadays, there is a tendency of gradual transformation of political correctness from a voluntary contract into a mandatory, compulsory regime of political correctness.

We believe that initially political correctness was a manifestation of positive politeness, but now the regulated, standardized nature of politically correct speech samples transfers political correctness to the realm of negative politeness. Euphemisms arisen within the framework of the ideology of political correctness make it possible not to violate the cognitive territory of the interlocutor (one's "negative face"), but at the same time they are not necessarily sincere expressions

of sympathy and interest; they are rather formal, etiquette patterns, unlike traditional euphemisms. The use of the latter, on the contrary, is based on solidarity, the inclusion of the interlocutor in his or her group and, as a result, is a vivid demonstration of positive politeness. Analyzing traditional and politically correct groups of gender-polite euphemisms, we should note that in both cases different ways of forming euphemisms and different thematic groups are involved. For politically correct euphemisms, word-formation through metaphorization, metonymization and abbreviation is less specific. The most productive is the use of complex words, phrases and lexical units with a broad semantic structure. For traditional feminine euphemisms, the leading mechanisms of euphemization are metaphorization, periphrasis and replacement by a word of general meaning. Thanks to the figurative nature and expressiveness, the metaphor allows you to disguise the essence of the phenomenon and give it an ironic character. As for the euphemized topics, we note that traditional feminine euphemisms cover the area of personal and interpersonal relations, and euphemisms that have arisen within the framework of the phenomenon of political correctness are associated with the social sphere and imply the professional realization of women in modern society.

Conclusions and directions for further research in this area. The conducted research allows formulating conclusions. The manifestation and fixation of the "female image" in euphemisms created on the principle of politeness, as well as the changes in the modern English language that "gender politeness" induced under the "mask" of political correctness, are of great interest for study. The selected dictionary euphemisms characterizing occupation, appearance, and social peculiarities of women are divided into two groups: traditional gender-polite euphemisms; politically correct gender-polite euphemisms.

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