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## EUPHEMISMS AS REFLECTION OF ENGLISH MENTALITY

*The phenomenon of euphemisms has been considered in the article in the context of English mentality.*

*The definition of “mentality” has been drawn out. The language picture of the world as reflection of that language speakers’ mentality has been enlarged on. The unique concepts for Anglo-Saxon language picture of the world specific to the mentality of the British and Americans (being less reflected in the later) have been pointed out in the context of the question considered in the article.*

*The definition of “euphemism” has been drawn out. The English euphemisms as linguistic and cultural phenomenon have been commented on as the means for the concept “understatement” as words or phrases used to avoid saying something presumably unpleasant or offensive. Such subject groups of English euphemisms have been analysed as: euphemisms mitigating various types of discrimination (age, property, racial and ethnic discrimination, discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities), euphemisms that reduce the superstitious fear of any phenomena, euphemisms that raise the prestige of a separate profession, euphemisms distracting from the negative phenomena of reality (those serving as a cover for aggressive hostilities and those mitigating negative consequences in the social and economic sphere), crime, gender, religion and death related euphemisms, miscellaneous group.*

**Key words:** *mentality, euphemism, linguistic concept, “understatement”, linguistic phenomenon, cultural phenomenon, connotation.*

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## ЕВФЕМІЗМИ ЯК ВІДОБРАЖЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МЕНТАЛЬНОСТІ

*У статті розглянуто феномен евфемізмів в контексті англійської ментальності.*

*Визначено поняття “менталітет”. Мовну картину світу проаналізовано як відображення менталітету носія мови. Вказано унікальні концепти англосаксонської мовної картини світу в контексті піднятого у статті питання.*

*Виведено поняття “евфемізм”. Англійські евфемізми як лінгвістичний та культурний феномен розглянуто в якості засобу концепту “применення” у мовній картині світу англійців та (в меншій мірі) американців. Проаналізовано такі групи англійських евфемізмів, як: що стосуються різного типу дискримінації, евфемізми, які знижують забобонний страх перед певними явищами, евфемізми, які піднімають престиж певних професій, евфемізми, що відволікають від певних негативних явищ дійсності, евфемізми, які стосуються злочинності, статі, релігії та смерті, а також збірна група окремих випадків вживання евфемізмів.*

**Ключові слова:** *ментальність, евфемізм, лінгвістичний концепт, “применення”, лінгвістичний феномен, культурний феномен, конотація.*

**Topicality.** Mentality forms a way of vision of the world and concept of people as a totality of social-psychological features, automatism and habits of consciousness [6, 157 p.]. It is generally agreed that mentality of English people is characterized by such features as tactfulness, politeness, reticence and others of this kind. As any other social phenomenon mentality is historically changeable but alteration occurs slowly in it. Languages (those that we call “living”) are undergoing changes in a similar slow but constant manner, reflecting in themselves ways of thinking and world perception of their speakers, i.e. features of their mentality as well as other aspects. The amount of data on the English mentality is quite abundant and is still increasing. Nevertheless, in the context of euphemisms as its reflection it requires further research, especially considering modern euphemisms, which are of the biggest interest as they are just coming to life and can be best traced via mass media.

Thus, analysis of euphemisms as reflection of English mentality regarding different spheres of present day life is **the objective of the article.**

**Recent researchers and publications.** D. Crystal, R. Fowler, K. Fox, A. Jioeva, B. Johnstone, V. Liubchak can be mentioned among the researchers of the question of English mentality and euphemisms as linguistic and cultural phenomenon in its context [3-8].

**Results.** Mentality has many aspects reflected in modern science: it is viewed as interrelated psychological reactions by social psychologists, generalized way of perception of the world, the manner of thinking and feeling by historians, semantic matrix, predetermined meaningful reactions of cultural subject by sociolinguists. Generally speaking, apart from already mentioned tactfulness, politeness, reticence mentality of English people as a unity of behavioural and mental patterns embraces such features as being compliant and patient to other people, expressing respect during conversations.

The linguistics emphasizes the role of language in studying mentality, as its subject is shown in verbal language (verbal culture of a society) and a sign language, in behaviour, customs, traditions and beliefs [3, p. 211–214]. From the linguistic point of view mentality is reflected in the language picture of the world through its unique concepts. As A. Jioeva points it out, “understatement”, “privacy”, “stiff upper lip”, “commitment”, “challenge” and others are such concepts for Anglo-Saxon language picture of the world. She proves that concept “understatement” is notably specific to the mentality of the British and Americans yet being less reflected in the later [1, p. 117–125; 7, 151 p.]. It emphasizes not so much the fact of reticence, the concealment of information, but the insufficient expression of the evaluative component in the statement. R. Fawler points it out that understatement is used “not to deceive, but to enhance the impression of the hearer, i.e. to impress by moderation” [5, 145 p.].

The English euphemisms as linguistic and cultural phenomenon can be treated as the means for this concept. A. Hornby dictionary gives the definition of euphemism as “use of other (mild, vague and indirect) words or phrases in place of what is required by truth or accuracy” [10]. It is “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant” by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary [9]. B. Johnstone says that euphemism is “the use of a supposedly less objectionable variant for a word with negative connotations” [8, 336 p.]. Simply put, there are some words and topics which are not supposed to be mentioned directly in various cultures. To avoid the negative meanings and connotations of the words and subjects, euphemisms are employed. Mostly, euphemisms encompass such subjects as religion, politics, sex, different social negative phenomena, death, diseases etc.

As it has been mentioned above, euphemisms are culture-specific and to some extent a euphemism is a reflection of culture. Different history, social customs, values, religions, and moral standards cause the use of euphemisms that vary from culture to culture. Cultural differences will lead to dissimilar form and content of euphemistic expressions in various languages [2, 516 p.]. Depending on from which culture a text is translated to which culture, the amount of using euphemisms could change [4, 212 p.]. Thus, the whole idea of a euphemism as a word or phrase used to avoid saying some unpleasant or offensive word wholly corresponds to the English mentality concept of “understatement” as people tend to use this figure of speech in their interactions to show politeness and to soften definite realia considering which people may become emotionally vulnerable.

The general classification of euphemisms by subject groups that are considered in the article can be presented in the form of a table:

**Tab.1 Thematic classification of English euphemisms**

English euphemisms	Euphemisms mitigating various types of discrimination: – age discrimination – property discrimination – racial and ethnic discrimination – discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities
	Euphemisms that reduce the superstitious fear of any phenomena
	Euphemisms that raise the prestige of a separate profession
	Euphemisms distracting from the negative phenomena of reality: – that serve as a cover for aggressive hostilities – mitigating negative consequences in the social and economic sphere
	Crime related euphemisms
	Gender related euphemisms
	Religion related euphemisms
	Death related euphemisms
	Miscellaneous

The following examples of euphemisms related to any type of discrimination can be listed to illustrate this group: “middlescence”, “third age”, “senior”, “mature” instead of “old” – age discrimination (in Ukrainian it can be rendered as: “середнього віку” – “третього віку” – “старший” – “зрілий” – “старий”); “economically exploited”, “low-income”, “differently advantaged” in place of “poor” – property discrimination (“економічно експлуатований” – “з низьким прибутком” – “з іншими перевагами” – “бідний”); “person of colour” for “black” – racial and ethnic discrimination (“людина кольору” – “чорний”); “physically challenged”, “special” in place of “invalid” – discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities (“із фізичними викликами” – “особливий” – “інвалід”).

Considering subgroup “property discrimination” in more details we can see change in emotional gradation of the word chosen for the definite phenomenon throughout historical timeline: “poor” got substituted by “disadvantaged”, later by “economically disadvantaged” to be more politically correct (possible Ukrainian interpretation: “бідні” – “позбавлені можливостей/переваг” – “економічно обмежені в своїх можливостях”). Sometimes “underprivileged” or “socially deprived” can be heard in this case (“позбавлені привілей” – “соціально обмежені”).

Among other examples from this subgroup we can mention “unwaged” used instead of “unemployed” (“ті, що не отримують зарплату” – “безробітні”); “substandard housing” for “slums” (“житло, що не відповідає стандартам” – “нетрі”); “refuge collectors” in place of “bin man” (“той, хто збирає речі, від яких відмовились” – “людина, яка копірається в смітнику”).

The same emotional gradation of the words chosen for racial / ethnic phenomena that may sound offensive for definite groups of people in English culture can be traced in the corresponding subgroup – “euphemisms mitigating racial and ethnic discrimination”. “Negro / Nigger” that were originally used on both sides of the Atlantic before victory of antiracist movement got substituted by “coloured”, “black”, “African American / Afro-American”, “member of African diaspora”, “indigenous person” (“негр / нігер” – “кольоровий” – “чорний” – “африканський американець / афроамериканець” – “член африканської діаспори” – “корінний житель”); “Native Americans” is used for “Red Indians” (“корінні жителі” – “червоношкірі індіанці”); “Native Alaskan” is heard in place of “Eskimo” (“корінні жителі Аляски” – “ескімоси”); “indigenous population” is said instead of “natives” (“корінне населення” – “місцеве населення”); “newcomers” is preferred to “foreigners” (“новоприбулі” – “іноземці”).

In the subgroup “discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities” we can also see this change in emotional gradation of the word chosen for the definite phenomenon throughout historical timeline. Among the examples: originally widely used word “invalid” got substituted by “handicapped”, then “disabled”, “differently-abled”, “physically challenged”, “physically different” (“інвалід” – “з фізичними / розумовими недоліками” – “покалічений” – “з іншими можливостями” – “людина, яка долає труднощі через свій фізичний стан” – “фізично відмінний”); “aurally inconvenienced” is now sometimes preferred for “deaf” (“із слуховими незручностями” – “глухий”); “unseeing” may be heard for “blind” (“неспроможний бачити” – “сліпий”); “fat” is substituted by “big-boned”, “differently sized”, “horizontally challenged people” (“товстий” – “з широкою кісткою” – “з розміром, що відрізняється” – “люди, які долають труднощі через свої горизонтальні пропорції”); “hair-disadvantaged” can be used in place of “bald” (“лисий” – “із недоліками у волосяному покриві”); “vertically challenged people” can be said instead of “short people” (“люди, які долають труднощі через свої вертикальні пропорції” – “низькі/карлики”). “Retarded children” now can be called ousted and “children with learning difficulties”, “learning disabled”, “special”, “mentally challenged people” is used instead (“розумово відсталі” – “діти із труднощами в навчанні” – “із відсутніми можливостями до навчання” – “особливі” – “люди, які долають труднощі, пов’язані з їх розумовими здібностями”). In this relation “mental hospital” is generally accepted for “insane asylum” (“лікарня для душевнохворих” – “психіатрична лікарня”).

Euphemisms that reduce the superstitious fear of any phenomena can be exemplified by “moonchild” for a person lacking skin pigmentation – “albino” (“місячна дитина” – “альбінос”).

In the group “euphemisms that raise the prestige of a separate profession” we can find the following examples: “hairstylist” or “beautician” for “haircutter” (“стиліст (по волосся)” – “косметолог (по волосся)” – “перукар”), “funeral director” for “undertaker” (“директор похоронного бюро” – “гробівник”), “sanitation engineer” or even “environmental hygienist” for “garbage collector” or “janitor” (they can roughly be treated in Ukrainian as: “інженер із санітарії” – “гігієніст навколишнього середовища” – “збирач сміття” – “двірник”).

In the group “euphemisms, distracting from the negative phenomena of reality” we find the following: “collateral damage” for “civilians killed accidentally by military action” (“супутні втрати” – “цивільні, випадково вбиті під час військових дій”); “servicing the target” for “killing the enemy” (“потрапляння в ціль” – “знищення ворога”); “emerging nations” for “third world countries” (“країни, що підіймаються” – “країни третього світу”); “involvement”, “device”, “air support”, “pacification” can be heard to serve as a cover for aggressive hostilities (“втручання” – “проект/план” – “повітряна підтримка” – “примушення до миру”); “period of economic adjustment”, “downsizing”, “negative cash flow” mitigating negative consequences in the socio-economic sphere (“період економічної адаптації” – “зменшення” – “негативний грошовий потік”); “hospice” for “alms-house” or “poorhouse”, or “charity house” (“хоспіс” – “богадільня” – “дім для бідних” – “благодійний дім”); “terminal episode”, “therapeutic misadventure”, “negative patient care outcome” for “death of the patient” (“смертельний випадок” – “терапевтичне нещастя” – “негативний наслідок турботи про пацієнта” – “смерть пацієнта”). As the concept “capitalism” may have negative implication in itself, one can find “the system of free enterprising” or “open society”, or “economic humanism” in English mass media instead (“капіталізм” – “система вільного підприємництва” – “відкрите суспільство” – “економічний гуманізм”).

Among the crime related euphemisms we can find the following: “correctional facilities” for “prison”; “correctional officers” or “custodial officers” for “prison guards” (they can roughly be treated in Ukrainian as: “офіцери з виправної роботи” – “офіцери виправних закладів” – “тюремні наглядачі”); “clients of correctional system” or even “guests” or “people enjoying temporarily hospitality from the state” instead of “prisoners” (“клієнти виправної системи” – “гості” – “люди, які користуються тимчасовою гостинністю від держави” – “ув’язненні”).

Gender related euphemisms are used to smooth out phenomena that can arise any kind of accusations of sexism and bias towards any gender. Thus “spokesperson” is preferred to “spokesman” (“делегат/-ка”), “camera operator” to “cameraman” (both relate to Ukrainian “оператор”), “supervisor” to “foreman” (“наставник/-ця”), “fire fighter” to “fireman” (both relate to Ukrainian “пожежник”), “mail carrier” to “postman” (“поштар/-ка”), “flight attendant” to “stewardess” (“стюард/стюардеса”), “chairperson” to “chairman” (“головуючий/-а”) and head teacher to headmistress (“директор/директриса”).

Religion related euphemisms can be traced back to the earliest of written records. Protection of sacred names, rituals, and concepts from the uninitiated has always given rise to euphemisms, both for exclusion of outsiders and retention of power among select practitioners. The euphemisms are used for God and Jesus to avoid mentioning them in vain which would violate one of the Ten Commandments. Thus, instead of “Oh, my God!” you are very likely to hear “Oh, my Gosh!” or “Geel!” Euphemisms for hell, damnation, and the devil, on the other hand, are often used to avoid invoking the power of the adversary. The most famous in the latter category is the expression “What the dickens?” and its variants, which does not refer to the famed British writer but instead was a popular euphemism for the devil in its time. Among modern euphemisms of this kind we can mention Joanne Rowling’s “He who must not be named” for the evil wizard Lord Voldemort.

Death has always raised superstitious fear as a phenomenon that cannot be cognized. The practice of using euphemisms for death is likely to have originated with the magical belief that to speak the word “death” was to invite death. The euphemisms that can exemplify this group are as follows: “pass away” or “go to a better place” for “die” and “deceased” for “dead” (in Ukrainian we can find only “відійти в кращий світ” for “die” and no proper euphemism for “dead”).

Among the “miscellaneous” group of euphemisms we can find such quite surprising for other languages speakers examples as the use of “animal companions” for “pets” suggesting a person as a master or owner (“тварини – компаньйони” – “домашні тварини”). In the same way “botanical companions” can be heard instead of “house plants” (“рослини – компаньйони” – “домашні рослини”) or even “mineral companions” for objects of the inanimate world (“компаньйони – мінерали”).

**Conclusion.** As a conclusion, we may point it out, that the linguistic picture of the world reflects the mentality of the people – the bearer of this language. The concept “understatement” (Жієва А.) is one of key ones reflecting the mentality of the British and Americans (yet being less reflected in the later). A euphemism as a word or phrase used to avoid saying some unpleasant or offensive word wholly corresponds to this concept as people use this figure of speech in their interactions to show politeness and to soften definite realia considering which people may become emotionally vulnerable. A wide range of euphemisms can be found in English,

roughly divided into a number of subject groups discussed in the article, all of them reflecting different spheres of life or realia that are considered emotionally significant thus requiring a means to smooth out excessive negative emotional connotation.

As English is constantly undergoing changes (in the manner of most living languages) undoubtedly the question of euphemisms as reflection of English people mentality requires further researches there being many unclear and questionable aspects of the phenomenon.

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