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### ОБЩЕНИЕ В ЭПОХУ КОРОНАВИРУСА: ФУНКЦИОНИРОВАНИЕ ЭВФЕМИЗМОВ В МЕДИА- ДИСКУРСЕ

*В статье анализируются эвфемизмы, которые используются в англоязычном масс-медийном дискурсе для описания пандемии коронавируса и связанных с ней общественных явлений. Эвфемизмы, являющиеся одним из способов отражения социальной реальности, используемых акторами, в то же время отмечают области культурного, социального или коммуникативного напряжения. В этом смысле изучение эвфемизмов в СМИ дает возможность охарактеризовать социальные, культурные и речевые предпочтения носителей языка, их аксиологические приоритеты. Эвфемизмы можно рассматривать как когнитивно-дискурсивный феномен: с одной стороны, они отражают концептуальные и ценностные предпочтения говорящих, а с другой – претерпевают жанрово-стилистические и модусные преобразования, вытесняются новыми словами, более актуальными для конкретного исторического периода. Для достижения цели исследования в работе применяются следующие методы: дефиниционный анализ, метод лингвистического описания, классификационный метод, метод количественного подсчета, структурный метод, метод контекстуального анализа, сравнительный метод. Эвфемизмы, которые используются для описательной характеристики пандемии коронавируса и социальных нововведений, классифицируются в соответствии со следующими критериями: 1) термины, применяемые для описания анализируемых явлений; 2) эмоциональная сфера носителей языка, отражающая современное положение дел; 3) общественная жизнь, изменившаяся в эпоху коронавируса. Авторы приходят к выводу, что основная лингвопрагматическая цель образования эвфемизмов заключается в снятии напряжения,*

*спровоцированного пандемией, и создании иллюзии контроля над ситуацией.*

*Ключевые слова: эвфемизм, коронавирус, масс-медийный дискурс, неологизм, аксиологические предпочтения, когнитивно-дискурсивный феномен*

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### **COMMUNICATION DURING CORONAVIRUS: FUNCTIONING OF EUPHEMISMS IN MEDIA COVERAGE**

*The paper studies euphemisms which are employed in the English mass media to describe the coronavirus pandemic and the social events connected with it. Euphemisms being one of the modes of spotting the social reality chosen by the speaker at the same time mark areas of cultural, social, or communicative tension. In this sense the study of euphemisms in the media makes it possible to characterize the social, cultural and speech preferences of native speakers, their axiological priorities. To achieve the goal indicated in the study, the following methods were used: definitional method, the method of linguistic description, classification method, method of quantitative data processing, structural method, contextual method, the comparative method. The euphemisms which are used to disguise the coronavirus pandemic and the phenomena associated with it are categorized according to the following criteria: terms and terminology used to describe the facts under study, the emotional sphere of the native speakers which is connected with the social events, the reflection of the social life during the pandemic. It is considered that the main linguo-pragmatic aim of euphemisms' creating is to reduce the hardships and make the tension of the situation more manageable.*

*Keywords: euphemism, coronavirus, mass media discourse, coinage, axiological preferences, cognitive-discursive phenomenon*

#### **Introduction**

Modern times which can be characterized as emotional ones

demonstrate the development of feelings and emotions of an individual and / or a social community in two directions. On the one hand, people are interested in the experiences of others, they are ready to share their own emotional impulses and moods, they are constantly looking for sympathy and emotional support from those around them, they look for genuine feelings. On the other hand, modern society is characterized by a tendency to rationalize everything that happens which is a kind of psychological defense against the expression and manifestation of feelings. In the contemporary society and in the mass media which reflect the social life there is a steady tendency towards the emergence of new thematic groups of euphemisms due to the appearance of new spheres and phenomena that are subject to disguise (Malyuga & McCarthy, 2018). Euphemisms which are used to describe the coronavirus pandemic are one of the most effective ways of camouflaging reality, as well as manipulating the consciousness of a potential recipient in order to create a picture of events that is beneficial for the mass media. The mass media are currently one of the most important forms of the social reality's reflection; they are a powerful means of shaping public opinion, providing regulatory influence and exercising social control. Euphemisms being one of the modes of spotting the social reality chosen by the speaker at the same time mark areas of cultural, social, or communicative tension. In this sense the study of euphemisms in the media makes it possible to characterize the social, cultural and speech preferences of native speakers, their axiological priorities.

At the present moment there is no generally accepted definition of the term "euphemism", a large number of definitions indicate the diversity of the phenomenon under study, they can often be characterized as synonymous, but with the only difference that researchers focus on various aspects of euphemism. The scholars use the term "euphemism" while characterizing various speech units: words, phrases, abbreviations, graphic skipping, etc. In our defining the euphemism we stick to the its interpretation by E.E. Tyurina when it is understood as a lexical unit that is meliorative in its form: "Euphemism is a soft and permissible, mitigating-allegorical, and sometimes just a more acceptable word for one reason or another, or an expression used instead of words or expressions that seem to the speaker to be forbidden, indecent, rude, tactless, unacceptable from the point of view

of the norms accepted in society morality, a thematically stigmatic incorrect antecedent” (Tyurina, 1998, p. 37).

Enrichment of the language vocabulary is a lengthy process. It begins with the formation of a new word or meaning of the word which exists in the language. Gradually, new words, like old ones, become polysemantic, a constant semantic connection is established between their meanings or the internal form is forgotten and, new roots and words are formed. Replacing the concepts in speech that are considered to be rude or inappropriate with mitigated words is one of the means of enriching the vocabulary of the language and the appearance of euphemisms.

#### **Materials and methods**

The aim of the present study is to examine the usage of euphemisms which are employed in the English mass media to describe the coronavirus pandemic and the social events connected with it. This goal is achieved if the following tasks are solved: revealing the linguistic attributes of euphemisms, their fundamental features; describing the typological components of newspapers that are essential for a pragma-linguistic analysis of euphemisms; analyzing the pragmatics and semantics of euphemisms in the texts of modern English mass media; revealing the peculiarities of euphemisms’ functioning in the mass media discourse; establishing extralinguistic factors in the usage of euphemisms in modern mass media discourse; identifying the functions of euphemisms in modern speech; singling out frequent ways of euphemization in modern English mass media. The object of the research is euphemisms in the texts of the English mass media newspapers since March, 2020 up to the present moment. The subject of the research is pragmatics, semantics, features of the functioning of euphemisms in the mass media discourse and the specifics of euphemisation in modern English mass media. The list of the English mass media includes both qualitative media and tabloids which makes it possible to create a more holistic picture of the attitude of the western society to the coronavirus pandemic and the social events connected with it.

To achieve the goal indicated in the study, the following methods were used: definitional method (clarification of the definitions of “mass-media discourse” and “euphemism”); the method of linguistic description (selection and systematization of language units);

classification method (highlighting thematic groups and types of euphemisms); method of quantitative data processing (determination of the frequency of use of units analyzed in the work); structural method (highlighting the derivational and structural features of euphemisms); contextual method (revealing the latent communicative intentions of the speaker in a certain context); the comparative method (analysis of communicative and pragmatic features, taking into account the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the phenomena under study).

The problem of euphemisms has always attracted the interest of language researchers. The study of euphemistic units was carried out on the material of various languages: Russian (Andreeva, 1999; Kochetkova, 1998; Krasnova, 2004; Krysin, 2000; Larin, 1961; Mechkovskaya, 1998; Moskvina, 1999, 2001; Pryadilnikova, 2007; Shmelev, 1973; Varbot, 1998), English (Baskova, 2006; Bushueva, 2005; Galperin, 1981; Glios, 2007; Katsev, 1977; Kovaleva, 2008; Kudryavtsev et.al., 2003; Potapova, 2008; Temirbaeva, 1991; Tyurina, 1998; Shakhzhuri, 1956; Adams, 1999; Burrige, 1996; Epstein, 1985; Holder, 1995; Lawrence, 1973; Neaman et.al., 1995), German (Berdova, 1981; Prudyvus, 2006), French (Turganbaeva, 1989; Vidlak, 1965). The scholars study euphemisms on the material of different types of discourse: economic (Malyuga & Orlova, 2018); medical (Taylor, 2016); political (Casaca et.al., 2017); social (Mattson, 2015). The above-mentioned studies touch on the emergence of euphemisms, their purpose, thematic classification, means of creation.

### **Results**

The investigation of euphemisms is one of the topical issues in modern linguistics due to the following reasons: 1) the existence of a wide range of areas and topics in which euphemisms are used; 2) the opportunity to avoid a direct rough nomination of something with the help of euphemisms; 3) the desire of the mass media to produce a certain speech impact, to manipulate the consciousness of the addressee, to create the desired emotional effect; 4) the dynamic character of words instead of which the euphemisms are used (what is perceived as a euphemism today may not be it after a while, or vice versa).

L.P. Krysin compiled lexical and semantic classification of euphemisms (Krysin, 2000). He subdivided the spheres of functioning of euphemisms into personal ones, concerning the life and personality

of the speaker, the addressee and third parties, and social, concerning the relationship of a person with other people, society, and power. M. Ryabova singles out the following functions of euphemisms: 1)changing exact names with terrifying or frightening connotations or meanings, e.g. *to pass away* or *to join the majority* instead of *to die*; 2)replacing words with unpleasant repulsive referential meaning, e.g. *louse, flea, bug* instead of *parasite, insect*; 3)naming things or phenomena which at this very epoch are considered impolite, indecent, and unsocial, e.g. *intercourse* instead of *sexual intercourse*; 4)avoiding using the direct name lest the speaker can offend the listener or the third person, e.g. *he will not invent the gun powder* instead of *silly*; 5)milding or masking the real nature of things, i.e. camouflaging the truth, e.g. *to borrow* instead of *to steal*; 6)naming non-prestigious professions and jobs to heighten their status, to elevate menial or unskilled jobs, e.g. *waste-reduction manager* instead of *garbage man* (Ryabova, 2013, p. 38-39).

The enumerated functions of euphemisms are realized to the fullest potential in the mass media discourse the definition of which was suggested by T.G. Dobrosklonskaya: “the repertoire of processes and products of speech activity in the field of mass communication in all the richness and complexity of their interaction” (Dobrosklonskaya, 2014, p. 182). A.V. Polonskiy enlarges on the definition of the mass media discourse and points out that it “represents a mechanism of current social-cognitive and value-ideological regulation, carried out through targeted selection (picking) of information, its formatting, status interpretation, commenting and value-ideological accompaniment, a mechanism that provides a corrective effect on public consciousness, on the nature of knowledge, values, psychological and social attitudes dominating in society” (Polonskiy, 2016, p. 107). Thus, the mass media discourse as the most vulnerable type of interaction which reflects all the current social changes can be viewed as the valid tool of studying axiological and speech preferences of the speakers.

The lexical level to the greatest extent reflects the axiological preferences of native speakers who invent and (or) borrow words to denote newly emerging realities. The euphemisms which are used to disguise the coronavirus pandemic and the events associated with it can be divided into three groups: 1) the name of the disease and the social

processes connected with it; 2) the words which are used by native speakers to express their own emotions and feelings about events that are currently taking place and human behavior related to it; 3) the words which denote everything connected with the coronavirus infection. Let us examine each group of euphemisms in detail.

The coronavirus pandemic is compared to the enemy whose image becomes more and more diffuse but not less formidable and dangerous. The coronavirus is attributed with such characteristics as *invisible, unseen, unknown*: “We face some real challenges. We need to defeat this **invisible enemy** that is COVID-19. We need to get our economy going again. We need to soberly address the state's budget. We need to overcome the scourge of addiction and meth”, Gianforte said (NPR, November 14, 2020). <...> *The current pandemic poses a unique challenge on how to continue advocating for vaccine confidence amidst the fear of contracting the virus when seeking medical consultation or going for a scheduled vaccination. While the world awaits for an effective COVID-19 vaccine to protect against the **unseen enemy**, the disease also induces vaccine hesitancy or fear in a person who is afraid to catch the virus during doctor or healthcare center visits* (Business Mirror, October 26, 2020). <...> *Dr. Julius M. Drilon, chief of Hospital of CLMMRH is readying his medical warriors to be courageous and equipped in dealing with the **unknown enemy** – the Covid-19* (Sun Star, April 3, 2020).

There are also cases of metaphorical shift in the meaning when denoting the coronavirus infection. It can be called *natural disaster, perfect storm, health emergency, sanitary crisis*: *In this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic is of the “same general nature or class as those specifically enumerated,” and thus is included, rather than excluded, as a type of “**natural disaster**”* (HFW, June 2020) <...> *The headline of a recent editorial published in the journal **Science** described the possibility of a collision between the impending influenza season and the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic as a “**perfect storm**”* (Patient Care, September 20, 2020) <...> *FDA (Food and Drug Administration. – A.K.) is issuing this guidance to provide a policy to help accelerate the availability of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) tests developed by laboratories and commercial manufacturers for the duration of the **public health emergency*** (USA Food and Drug Administration, May 2020) <...> *For developing countries, we may*

address how the *sanitary crisis* unfolds in two ways (Sofrecom, April 29, 2020).

Boris Jonson described COVID-19 as a *physical assailant*, a *an unexpected and invisible mugger*: *If this virus were a physical assailant, an unexpected and invisible mugger – which I can tell you from personal experience, it is - then this is the moment when we have begun together to wrestle it to the floor... the moment when we can press home our advantage*. In this example we see that the virus is personified, it is attributed with the human characteristics, hence the usage of the martial metaphors while characterising the process of combating with it.

The very instance of coronavirus disease is called a *daily case*: *Cases of the coronavirus are spiking across the D.C. region, led by Maryland, which on Saturday logged its highest number of daily cases since the pandemic began* (The Washington Post, November 14, 2020). The sudden start of the coronavirus pandemic was called an *outbreak*, which is also an allusion to the 1995 American medical disaster film focusing on fictional viruses: *The State of Qatar has renewed the call to end the unjust and unlawful blockade imposed on it, stressing the disappointment of the accounts upon which the blockading countries relied on to undermine the State of Qatar and its sovereign decision, as well as the failure of the policies that relied on the separation of brotherly peoples. It stated that these policies have affected the solidarity and regional cooperation, which has become more necessary amid the outbreak of the corona pandemic (Covid-19)* (The Peninsula, May 24, 2020). The word *lockdown* has acquired additional meaning and instead of denoting restriction measures for a creating began to mean mass quarantines and stay-at-home orders: *The lockdown last spring led to the largest increase in redundancies on record, with about 150,000 jobs at risk of redundancy in June and July* (BBC News, February 21, 2021).

Doctors who sacrificed their lives during the coronavirus pandemic were called *corona warriors*: *A tribute to frontline corona warriors – Doctors who sacrificed their life while saving patients during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic* (Indian Journal of Ophthalmology, May, 2020).

If at the beginning of the pandemic the new virus was called Chinese then now the usage of such an attribute is considered to be

politically incorrect and the name of the disease was substituted by *novel coronavirus*: *A second wave of the **novel coronavirus** has seen daily cases accelerate in both Germany and Britain among other European countries* (Times Live, October 8, 2020).

The lexical units *coronavirus* and *covid* form a group of terms to which also belong the words *self-isolation*, *quarantine*, and *social distancing*. The latter term is formed by adding the words *social* and *distancing* but at the same time there is a false actualization of the meaning of the word because the social one implies “communication with people, closer contact with them,” and social distancing, on the contrary, prescribes the limitation of such communication. There has been a shift in the meaning of the word *shelter* which used to denote ‘seeking safety during a circumscribed event, like a tornado or an active shooter attack’ and now refers to a prolonged period of social isolation. The term *quarantine* has again come into active use reflecting the processes taking place in society. Sometimes the period of staying inside one’s home, insulated from the perceived danger is called *cocooning* in analogy with the form of the natural cocoon. The word combination *elbow bump* has appeared to denote a safe way to greet another person. To *flatten the curve* means to slow the spread of a virus, for instance by social containment measures, so that fewer people need to seek treatment at any given time. The term is epidemiologist jargon, but has been criticized as being a euphemism.

The linguists also observe the national differences in nominating the coronavirus disease: the words *rona* (*the rona*) as slang variants of the usual word have been used in Australia and the USA. Australian English has also produced *quaz* for quarantine and *sanny* for sanitiser. There has been quite a lot of discussion online about whether *Covid-19* should be spelled with an initial capital or with full capitals, *COVID-19*, and different official bodies and news organizations follow different practices. In UK English there is a clear preference for the form *Covid-19*, while in the US the preference is for *COVID-19*, although with a very slight shift towards *Covid-19* in recent months.

The second group of words, i.e. the ones which are used by native speakers to express their own emotions and feelings about events that are currently taking place and human behavior related to it, are of special interest from the linguistic point of view. For example, the word *covidiot* is used to describe somebody who ignores public safety

recommendations. *Doomscrolling* means the state when you skim anxiety-inducing pandemic-related stories on your smartphone. The word *furlough* has widened its meaning due to the coronavirus pandemic. If in the twentieth century it was used to denote military personnel home on leave then in new social and economic circumstances it began to denote programmes which were aimed at supporting employers and workers who lost their jobs. By contaminating the two stems the word *infodemic* was formed – verified and unverified messages the purpose of which is to instill fear and panic in society. “Um, I never in a million years wanted to hurt anyone and, um, we're not bad people,” Charnas said. # But the blogger's decision to uproot her family after the positive diagnosis had the Internet seething at the **covidiot** (Page Six, June 28, 2020). <...> Over the weekend, scores of people who were browsing (or doomscrolling) through Twitter stumbled upon an explicit reminder of how important quality hiking boots really are: a photo of Joyce Carol Oates's agonizingly painful-looking foot after a hike she said she did in sandals (Self, August 17, 2020). <...> In response, the Treasury said it had supported the industry throughout the pandemic through grants, loans and the **furlough scheme** (City A.M, November 14, 2020). <...> Today the Prime Minister said the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) - also known as the **Furlough scheme** - will remain open until December, with employees receiving 80% of their current salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500 (British Government, October 31, 2020). <...> The World Health Organization (WHO) has previously said that the “**infodemic**” surrounding Covid-19 spread just as quickly as the virus itself, with conspiracy theories, rumours and cultural stigma all contributing to deaths and injuries. *False information costs lives* (BBC, August 19, 2020).

The second group of words also contains the expressions which are used to describe the people's disappointment by the government actions while fighting the coronavirus. The word *unprecedented* was used on the meaning ‘unpredicted’, the expression *the right decisions at the right time* suggests that the government does possess the omnipotence necessary at the present moment: *Today we are confronted with an unprecedented crisis world has never experienced before* (Tablish SA, 2020) <...> *Ministers were hit with a growing row today as they insisted the Government “took the right decisions at the right time”*

*despite the Covid-19\_death roll passing 100,000 in the UK* (Evening Standard, January 27, 2021).

The third group contains the words which describe everything that is associated with coronavirus infection (some of them are formed according to the traditional word-formation model, to create others game methods are used). For example, the word *zoombombing* (an unwanted intrusion into a video conference call) was formed in analogy with the *photobombing*: *The issues with basic security practices culminated with “Zoombombing” in which trolls crashed people’s video meetings and bombarded them with inappropriate material like pornography* (The New York Times, April 8, 2020). *Covideo party* means online parties via Skype or Zoom: *Many of the newly popular terms relate to the socially distanced nature of human contact these days, such as ‘virtual happy hour’, “covideo party” and ‘quarantine and chill’* (BDNews24.com, June 15, 2020). The word *quaranteams* is used to describe online teams created to work during lockdown: *Finally, people need to actually follow the rules, comply with physical distancing outside of the **quaranteam** and be forthcoming if they think they may have been exposed* (The Conversation, June 17, 2020). This group of words show how digitally connected we are. Online connections to which we are restricted mostly at present makes it possible to create new means of expression new relations, new connections, new mode of life.

### **Conclusions**

The euphemisms used to describe the coronavirus infection and the phenomena associated with it may be divided into three groups: 1) the name of the disease and the social processes connected with it; 2) the words which are used by native speakers to express their own emotions and feelings about events that are currently taking place and human behavior related to it; 3) the words which denote everything connected with the coronavirus infection. These words may be also called *coronacoinages* which are sometimes coinages in the direct sense of the words, and sometimes they are adaptations of the lexical units existing in the language. The aim of creating these coronacoinages is to reduce the hardships which people experience in their everyday life, to ask people to be more patient while they are getting used to the new circumstances, to describe the behavioral changes which have been introduced into the usual order of things. Some of these euphemisms

will be on vogue for a short period of time, some others will endure for much more. The greater chance of sticking around have got those words which describe the long-lasting changes. The ones which are connected only with the pandemic and its after-effects will most certainly disappear in post-pandemic period.

As it is seen from the analysis different means of derivation are used when creating euphemisms to denote the realities connected with the coronavirus: the extension of the lexical meaning of the word when it enlarges its dictionary definition and starts to denote something which was not inherent to its semantic field before (*unseen enemy, invisible enemy*); the use of metaphors with the aim of making the description more powerful (*natural disaster, perfect storm*); occasional derivation (*covidiot, infodemic*); compounding of two stems or words (*self-isolation, social distancing*). On the one hand, these words reflect the social processes taking place in the world at the present time, on the other hand, these lexical units are often individual author's neoplasms, or occasionalisms, characterized by a single, non-usual usage. The analyzed euphemisms are also the reflection of a language game when traditional language means are used by native speakers in a non-traditional manner.

The main conclusion which can be made as a result of examining the usage of euphemisms which are employed in the English mass media to describe the coronavirus pandemic and the social events connected with it is that the main linguo-pragmatic aim of their creating is to reduce the hardships and make the tension of the situation more manageable. Some of these linguistic innovations make people laugh at the situation which is also a remedy against a serious disease. A. Hepburn once said: *I love people who make me laugh. I honestly think it's the thing I like most, to laugh. It cures a multitude of ills. It's probably the most important thing in a person.* Thus, the above-considered euphemisms can be viewed as a cognitive-discursive phenomenon: on the one hand, they reflect the conceptual and axiological preferences of the speakers, and on the other hand, undergo genre and modus changes, and are supplanted by new words that are more relevant for a particular historical period.

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**СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ, ТИПОЛОГИЧЕСКОЕ  
И СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНОЕ ЯЗЫКОЗНАНИЕ**

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**КОД КУЛЬТУРЫ КАК ОТРАЖЕНИЕ «НАИВНЫХ» ИДЕЙ  
О ЕДИНСТВЕ В ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРОЛОГИИ**

*В данной статье рассматриваются современные культурные коды в английском и русском языках. Лингвокультурологическое исследование предполагает выявление культурной информации, значимой для русского и английского социумов. Актуальность темы исследования обусловлена рядом факторов. Во-первых, фразеологические единицы, обозначающие эмоциональные состояния человека, представляют интерес не только в лингвистическом плане, но и в лингвокультурологическом, так как фразеологические единицы, обладающие высоким коннотативным потенциалом, являются хранителями культурной информации. Во-вторых, исследуемый в статье материал имеет непосредственное отношение к идее антропоцентризма в языке.*

*Для достижения поставленной цели необходимо решить следующие задачи:*