

# Euphemisms: Careful Language in Croatian Public Communication

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper analyzes euphemisms - embellished expressions - excerpted from the Croatian public communication discourse. The introductory chapters provide an overview of the definitions of euphemisms, from rhetorical to cognitive-linguistic ones. The central part of the paper analyses the functions of euphemisms in Croatian public communication, the ways and mechanisms of creating euphemisms in the Croatian language and the semantic areas in which euphemisms are more significantly represented. The research started from the hypothesis that euphemisms have deviated from their original purpose - to beautify the expression and save one's own or someone else's face - and that euphemisms are increasingly used in public communication to manipulate the interlocutor. To test the hypothesis, research was conducted using a bottom-up methodological approach that involved selecting materials from the corpus by "manually" browsing and following news and announcements in the electronic media, classifying euphemisms by types, functions, semantic areas and ways of formation, and concluding their use in Croatian public communication space.*

**Key words:** euphemisms, public communication, face theory, manipulation

## Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century, linguistic directions put the communicative function of language in the centre of attention. Many of these theories are based on the communication model as the transmission of a message or information from sender to receiver using a code accessible to both interlocutors<sup>1</sup>. Communication models that, developed during the 20th century added the source, channel and, goal or destination to the elements mentioned above, and Jakobson in the 1960s, as a kind of critique of the "technical" communication models, formed a model consisting of the following elements: sender, message, recipient, context, code, and medium or channel. Jakobson's communication concept's criticisms referred primarily to his reduction of the day-to-day functioning of language to message. One of his critics is Austin with his speech act theory. In this concept, unlike Jakobson's, the pragmatic dimension of language comes to the fore. While Jakobson believed that meaning is derived from the syntactic organization of language units, i.e. from within, Austin's theory sees communication as the result of language in practical spheres, i.e. it is framed by external factors. From the description of several best-known models of communication, it is easy to see that none of the models is fully dedicated to the social

character of communication, which arises from the definition of conscious and creative communication as a practice. Suppose one tries to discover the genesis of communication, i.e. communication practice. In that case, one must "look for its origins precisely at the moment when a man passed from the biological continuum into historical and social duration, that is, when he became a man, because he could not become a social being without communication ties, which are one of the things that constitute society"<sup>2</sup>. Any broader theoretical consideration of communication should by no means bypass the examination of social conditions and the social context in which that communication takes place. This is precisely one of the main shortcomings of structuralism in linguistics. While moving in the opposite direction from the structuralist currents, at least as far as the inclusion in research of social conditioning of language is concerned, cognitive linguistics, which advocates an interactive approach. Since communication practice, i.e. any form of language activity, is an intrinsic part of human social life, in which all complex relations of human existence are reflected, it is necessary to develop broader concepts that will accommodate the described issues as a whole.

In the light of the social determination of language use, this paper will also observe euphemisms, which have become an indispensable part of every form of communication. Indeed, all societies “have ways of indirectly expressing meaning, using, among other means, euphemisms”<sup>3</sup>. Euphemisation, which avoids the use of a socially unacceptable expression, and even obscures truth, has gained momentum and is no longer discussed only within the framework of literary theory.

This paper aims to investigate the functions of euphemisms in the Croatian public communication space, the ways of their formation, and the semantic areas that are most often euphemised. The introductory chapters provide an overview of the definitions of euphemisms, from rhetorical to cognitive-linguistic ones. The central part of the paper analyses the functions of euphemisms in Croatian public communication, the ways and mechanisms of creating euphemisms in the Croatian language and the semantic areas in which euphemisms are more significantly represented.

The research started from the hypothesis that euphemisms have deviated from their original purpose - to beautify the expression and save one's own or someone else's face - and that euphemisms are increasingly used in public communication to manipulate the interlocutor. To test the hypothesis, research was conducted using a bottom-up methodological approach that involved selecting materials from the corpus by “manually” browsing and following news and announcements in the electronic media, classifying euphemisms by types, functions, semantic areas and ways of formation, and concluding their use in Croatian public communication space.

### Euphemisms – Linguistic Fig Leaves or a Manipulative Strategy

Based on the arbitrariness of language, i.e. of a linguistic sign, euphemisation implies the creation of synonymous expressions that replace communicative and socially inappropriate expressions. The notion of euphemism and euphemisation is encountered first in the context of rhetorical figures. Euphemisms in rhetoric are defined as chosen softened expressions instead of primary ones that either denote unpleasant and crude contents or are taboo expressions<sup>4</sup>. Euphemism is, therefore, a language phenomenon known since antiquity and had been studied only in the context of rhetoric and, later, literary theory. In contrast today, with some of its new functions, which are discussed in more detail below, it has become the subject of linguistics as well. The turn from rhetoric to linguistics is exemplified by the style labels in the dictionary definitions of euphemisms, e.g. the label *retor. figura* (‘rhetorical figure’) in the newer edition of Anić's dictionary has been changed to *lingv. figura* (‘linguistic figure’)<sup>5</sup>. According to a linguistic definition, euphemism is “a speech act, being the discursive use by the speaker of some lexical substitutes – habitual, lexicalised, occasional or creative –

which, through a set of linguistic and paralinguistic resources, and in a certain pragmatically determined context or situation, allow the lexical neutralisation of a forbidden term.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, euphemisms are defined in relation to other units in the lexical system (from which it follows that they are context-dependent), while socially, or culturally, they are defined by the terms politeness, social norm, saving face. The definitions also include the pragmatic component that arises from the essential relativity of euphemisms and their social, i.e. contextual features<sup>7</sup>. Politeness is a pragmalinguistic category and an ethical one because it reflects the rootedness in a society's cultural tradition. It regulates the social side of communication by helping to understand the interlocutor and affects their (non) linguistic behavior<sup>8</sup>. Thus, politeness theory is based on two factors: the desire of the speakers that their actions and statements do not endanger others and the desire of the speaker to keep his good public image. The latter relies on face theory - the image that we have of ourselves, presented by well-known social attributes, it refers to our self-image which includes two aspects: the positive one - the need to be accepted and loved and seen as a member of the group; and the negative one - one's own desire for independence, for freedom that is not imposed by others<sup>9</sup>. In cognitive-linguistic terms, euphemisms can be defined as a cognitive process of conceptualizing a forbidden and/or unpleasant reality<sup>6</sup>. From the definitions and features of euphemisms mentioned so far, it is clear that the talk about euphemisms is a talk about the cultural history of the world because euphemisms as a universal linguistic phenomenon are directly related to customary and ethical norms, tradition, culture, and communication conventions. Layered by nature, euphemisms satisfy different communication needs, which is the source of their two basic functions: mitigation of conventionally unpleasant expressions, i.e. a sign that a person cares about the feelings of the interlocutor and thus shows respect and, on the other hand, obstruction of navigating reality, a sign of indecision, insecurity or intentionally avoiding to call things by their proper name<sup>10</sup>. According to their first function, euphemisms are sweet-sounding and less offensive expressions that speakers use instead of those they do not want to use in a particular speech situation. So, in this context, they are, figuratively speaking, linguistic fig leaves with which we cover up things that could make us or our interlocutor feel uncomfortable: *pro-choice* instead of *pro-abortion*, *pro-life* instead of *anti-abortion*, *erektilna disfunkcija* (‘erectile dysfunction’) instead of *impotencija* (‘impotence’), *obiteljsko nasilje* (‘domestic violence’) instead of *premlaćivanje supružnika* (‘beating one's spouse’), *osobe s invaliditetom* (‘persons with disabilities’) instead of *hendikepirani* (‘handicapped’), *razdvojen* (‘separated’) or *rastavljen* (‘split, broken up’) instead of *razveden* (‘divorced’), *ekonomski izazovan* (‘economically challenged’) instead of *siromašan* (‘poor’), *uspavati* (‘to put to sleep’) instead of *eutanazirati* (‘euthanise’), *izaći iz ormara* (‘come out of the closet’) instead of *javno priznati homoseksualnost* (‘publicly admit homosexuality’), *klub za gospodu* (‘gentlemen's club’) instead of *striptiz-klub* (‘striptease

club'), *sadržaj za odrasle* ('adult content') instead of *pornografija* ('pornography'). The other side of the coin is represented by expressions that are also used for embellishment, not to protect the interlocutor, but rather to manipulate him/her. *Kolateralna žrtva* ('collateral victim'), *vojna intervencija/operacija* ('military intervention / operation'), *korekcija cijena* ('price correction'), *reorganizacija/racionalizacija poslovanja* ('business reorganization / rationalization') are expressions that we encounter daily in public communication, and which are used to cover up socially negative and undesirable phenomena: war and its consequences, price increases, dismissals. Euphemisms in this sense represent a safe way to talk about unpleasant topics, which at the same time enables saving face<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, when negative connotations are related to a word spread among speakers, we try to find expressions free of those negative connotations. Euphemisation thus also reveals its dark side, and the expressions created for this purpose allow for manipulation and doublespeak.

## Types of Euphemisms

The typologies of euphemisms in the literature are based either on their function or on the semantic field to which they belong. One of the few typologies in Croatian studies was offered by Pasini,<sup>12</sup> who groups euphemisms into two basic types: positive and negative. Both have their subtypes. Positive euphemisms inflate and exaggerate the euphemised expression so that everything seems more significant and more important than it is. Positive euphemisms most often concern forms of address and titles and save the ego of workers by elevating their business status (*djelatnik Komunalca Komunalac* [a public utility company] 'employee' instead of *smetlar* 'garbage man', *spremačica* 'housekeeper' instead of *čistačica* 'cleaning woman'). The second subtype consists of euphemisms associated with personal honours and institutional euphemisms (*voditeljica ureda dekana* 'Dean's office coordinator' instead of *tajnica* 'secretary'). The third subtype of positive euphemisms are those that are motivated by the desire to improve someone's living environment, which is present in specific geographical names (*zemlje Trećega svijeta* 'Third World countries' instead of *siromašne/nerazvijene zemlje* 'poor/undeveloped countries').

Negative euphemisms diminish and humiliate. They are defensive in nature: they alleviate the power of "taboo" words and eradicate from language everything that people do not want to deal with directly - most often illness and death: *kopniti* ('thaw, melt away'), *venuti* ('wither'), *gasiti se* ('go out, fade'), *otići* ('leave, depart'), *zaspati* ('fall asleep') ...

Burridge<sup>13</sup> offered a classification of euphemisms according to their function, i.e. the effect achieved by their use, distinguishing between protective euphemisms, underhand euphemisms, uplifting euphemisms, and cohesive euphemisms and ludic euphemisms.

Protective euphemisms are softened expressions that we use when confronted with a "ticklish" communication situation in which, for whatever reason, we do not want to name what we are talking about directly. Interpreted in this way, euphemisms represent a kind of "verbal escape" that arises in response to social taboos<sup>13</sup>. In terms of meaning, the group of protective euphemisms includes euphemised expressions related to bodily functions and / or physiological processes in the body (*rast ženskog trbuha* 'growth of a woman's stomach', *neželjena posljedica* 'unintended consequence', *drugo stanje* 'a certain condition' instead of *trudnoća* 'pregnancy'; *krvarenje* 'bleeding', *izljev krvi iz tijela* 'bloody discharge' instead of *menstruacija* 'menstruation, period'; *reproduktivno izazovan* 'reproductively challenged' instead of *neplodan* 'infertile'), sex life (*leći s nekim* 'lie with someone', *integrirati se sa suprotnim spolom* 'integrate with the opposite sex', *stupiti u simbiozu s nekim* 'enter into symbiosis with someone', *erotska razonoda s većim brojem ljudi* 'erotic pastime with a number of people', *prvo potvrđivanje zrelosti* 'first confirmation of maturity', *tableta koja izaziva želju* 'desire-provoking pill', *oskvrnuti* 'to defile'), drunkenness (*etilne pare u glavi* 'ethyl vapour in one's head', *alkoholičarski konzument* 'an alcoholic consumer'), mental disorders (*sići s uma* 'be out of your mind' literally 'come off your mind', *imati potamneli um* 'have a darkened mind', *biti ne baš sasvim čist* 'be not exactly in one's right mind', literally 'be not completely sane'), illness (*opake kancerogene stanice* 'vicious cancer cells'), death (*otići* 'leave, depart, go away', *biti pozvan k Bogu* 'called to be with the Lord', *otići na onaj svijet* 'go to the other world', *pustiti dušu* 'give up the ghost', literally 'let go of your soul', *otići u čistilište* 'go to purgatory', *predstaviti se Bogu* 'meet your Maker', literally 'meet God', *otići u groblje* 'go into graveyard', *zakoračiti na rajске staze* 'step onto the paths of paradise', *biti uzet na nebo* 'be taken into heaven'), physical appearance (*neugledna vanjština* 'unsightly appearance', *nabijena figura* 'a compact figure', *teške/krupne kosti* 'heavy/large bones', *punašan* 'plump', *punačak* 'plump', *oblih svojstava* 'having round features', *folikularno izazovan* 'follicly challenged', *manjeg uzrasta* 'small in stature'). So, these are taboos connected with social conventions in the contemporary western world, which are based on tradition, and their use is determined by parameters such as age, sex, education, social status, and the like.

Underhand euphemisms have the function of misrepresenting, mystifying, and consequently manipulating the interlocutor. In this sense, euphemisms are dishonest, and it is precisely because of this type that the whole process of euphemisation has received negative connotations. The expressions of this type are typical examples of Orwellian doublespeak. They are semantically deflated expressions, whose use results in the semantic devaluation of public, i.e. political discourse. The goal of the euphemisms we include in this group is not to soften the expression but to save the speaker's face and mitigate his responsibility. Such euphemisms are common in military, political, and police discourse: *reforma* ('reform'), *reorganizacija* or *ra-*

*cionalizacija poslovanja* (reorganisation or rationalisation of business) instead of *otpuštanje radnika* (dismissal of workers), *korekcija cijena* (price correction) instead of *poskupljenje* (price increase), *restriktivne, korektivne, nepopularne, pojačane mjere* (restrictive, corrective, unpopular, enhanced measures) or *mjere predostrožnosti* (precautionary measures) instead of *kazne, restrikcije* (penalties, restrictions) and *represivne mjere* (repressive measures), *sukob* (conflict), *vojna intervencija or operacija* (military intervention or operation), *aktiviranje zemaljskih postrojbi* (activation of ground forces) instead of *rat* (war). The creation of all the above examples was initiated by the desire to choose the socially more acceptable words and expressions. To generate support for their politics and positions and to influence the public opinion, politicians have to be linguistically very skilful.

The third type is called uplifting euphemisms - an alternative to expressions that could, in the first place, offend the interlocutor. Most often, these are expressions that raise the reputation of socially less prominent professions, and with it the dignity of people who practice these professions: *spremačica* (‘housekeeper’) or *pomoćno osoblje* (‘auxiliary staff’) instead of *čistačica* (‘cleaning woman’), *djelatnik Komunalca* (‘Komunalac [a public utility company] employee’) instead of *smetlar* (‘garbage man’), *osobna asistentica* (‘personal assistant’) instead of *tajnica* (‘secretary’), *između dva posla* (‘between two jobs’) instead of *nezaposlen* (‘unemployed’), *estradni umjetnik* (‘pop artist’) instead of *pjevač* (‘singer’), *drogeristica* (‘druggist’) instead of *prodavačica u drogeriji* (‘drugstore saleswoman’), *barmen* (‘barman’) or *barist* (‘barista’) instead of *konobar* (‘waiter’), *hair artist* instead of *frizerka* (‘hairdresser’), *nail artist* instead of *manikerka* (‘manicurist’). The most numerous euphemisms of this type are those used to politely designate prostitution: *artistica* (‘artist’), *seksualna radnica* (‘sex worker’), *prijateljica noći* (‘lady [literally ‘friend’] of the night’), *barska dama* (‘bar lady’), *dama za noćne poslove* (‘night work lady’), *lascivni noćni program* (‘lascivious night program’).

Cohesive euphemisms connect members of a community, who use them to express belonging to a group, so euphemisms in this context are an identity label. Cohesive euphemisms are common among physicians and hospital staff. Namely, when there is a common experience, such as illness and death, which medical professionals face on a daily basis, euphemisms alleviate this difficult everyday life<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, we could also include those examples in the first group - protective euphemisms - because they indeed alleviate the unpleasant effect caused by the direct mention of disease and death. Examples having such cohesive function are: *terminalna faza* (‘terminal phase’), *negativan ishod liječenja* (‘negative treatment outcome’), *negativan učinak na ishod liječenja* (‘negative effect on treatment outcome’), *palijativna skrb* (‘palliative care’), *četvrti stadij bolesti* (‘stage four of a disease’).

The last type, ludic euphemisms, has the function of entertaining oneself or the interlocutor. Such examples

are frequent in literature: *ne poslovati s vodom* (‘don’t deal with water’)<sup>14</sup>, *gostovati među ženinim nogama* (‘be a guest between a woman’s legs’)<sup>14</sup>, *dobro razvožena limuzina* (‘a well-driven limousine’)<sup>14</sup>, *skup nepravilnosti na licu* (‘a set of irregularities on the face’)<sup>15</sup>. Among the ludic and occasional euphemisms, we can give the example of a newspaper headline: “*Bijeli Božić Rajka Dujmića*” (‘White Christmas for Rajko Dujmić’), which comically and euphemistically alluded to his cocaine affaire during Christmas holidays.

It can be concluded from the above examples that euphemisms are associated with the development of tradition, culture, aesthetic tastes and rules of behavior in society, and all these types of euphemisms have one more feature in common - dependence on context. To show this, we will use a headline from a web portal: “*Postariji Nijemac glavna senzacija Wimbledonu.*” (‘Older German main Wimbledon sensation’). The word *postariji* (‘older’) can be described as a formative euphemism in which the prefix (*po*) alleviates old age, also one of the common areas subject to euphemisation. The “older” German from the above example is a 32-year-old tennis player, i.e. a man of an age that we would not otherwise label as older, but in the context of top professional sport, these are indeed advanced years<sup>16</sup>. This example shows that euphemisms are not a universal category of meaning,<sup>13</sup> because they are subject to different interpretations depending on the extralinguistic context.

## Euphemisms and Jargon

For cohesive euphemisms in the previous chapter, we stated that they connect members of a community, who use them to express belonging to a group. In that context, we can consider them an identity label. With this feature, cohesive euphemisms approach jargon - a language that oscillates from the language of the profession to the language of the street and includes any informal and predominantly spoken variety of a language that is used as a means of identification and communication within a socially defined group - by profession, social status, age - whose members are connected with a common interest or way of life, and which may also be territorially limited<sup>17</sup>. In Osijek City jargon, in the area of the socially proscribed and undesirable behavior, we can find whole euphemistic strings with the meaning ‘to use drugs’: *bockati* (‘prick, pierce’), *napušiti se* (‘smoke weed’), *piti tablete* (‘take pills’), or ‘to consume alcohol’: *dudanje* (‘feeding from a bottle’), *nalijevanje* (‘pouring on/into/full’), *sauganje* (from Ger. saugen, meaning ‘sucking’), *lokativ* (‘locative’, a noun case in Croatian), *namazati se* (‘smear/coat/paint oneself’). The cyclical generation of new euphemisms arises not because of their weak form, but because over time, they lose their mitigating properties and because their referent is the one who is negatively marked. One of the ludicrous cohesive euphemisms is the example of *droga portorož* (Droga Portorož is a food industry company based in Portorož, and the expressive coincidence of the word *droga* ‘a

drug' from the name of the company was the basis for this ludic semantic extension), also in the sense of 'using drugs', in which the semantic extension is the result of a ludic phonetic coincidence rather than a metonymic transfer<sup>18</sup>. Euphemisation in all these examples has the function of "masking" modern social taboos. Euphemisms in jargon are characterized by a high fluctuation rate, which means that jargon euphemisms "wear out" quickly. Namely, their rapid obsolescence and the production of new terms is imposed by the need to maintain secrecy - as soon as the term has been "discovered" and has spread in the wider speech community, it must be replaced by a new one<sup>13</sup>.

## The Semantics of Euphemisms

The semantic fields that are euphemised in the Croatian public communication space are: occupations that are considered unworthy and humiliating (*artistica* 'artist', *seksualna radnica* 'sex worker', *prijateljica noći* 'friend of the night', *barska dama* 'bar lady', *dama za noćne poslove* 'night work lady', *djelatnik* 'employee', *spremačica* 'housekeeper', *osobna asistentica* 'personal assistant', *nail artistica* 'nail artist', *hair artistica* 'hair artist', *lascivni noćni program* 'lascivious night program'), dying and death (*zakoraknuti u prazno* 'take a step into nothing', *u nepostojanje* 'into non-existence', *otići* 'leave, depart, go away', *biti pozvan k Bogu* 'be called to be with the Lord', *otići na onaj svijet* 'go to the other world', *pustiti dušu* 'give up the ghost', literally 'let go of your soul', *otići u čistilište* 'go to purgatory', *predstaviti se Bogu* 'meet your Maker', literally 'meet God', *otići u groblje* 'go into graveyard', *zakoračiti na rajске staze* 'step onto the paths of paradise', *biti uzet na nebo* 'be taken into heaven', *preseliti se na onu stranu* 'to move to the other side', *usnuti* 'fall asleep', *skončati* 'to end/finish', *posljednje sklonište* 'last sanctuary', *otići u zemlju ili u nebo* 'go to the ground or to heaven', *prijeći u onostranost* 'cross over to the other side', *biti na odlasku* 'be departing', *vratiti se ilovači* 'go back to the soil'), appearance, faults and vice (*prikupiti suviše kilograme* 'to collect extra kilograms', *imati nabijenu figuru* 'have a compact figure', *biti punašan* 'be plump', *biti oblih svojstava* 'be of round features', *biti punačak* 'be plump', *biti tanan* 'be rather thin', *tanak profil* 'thin profile', *biti (bolešno) prozračan* 'be (sickly) airy', *imati skup nepravilnosti na licu* 'have a set of irregularities on one's face', *imati neuglednu vanjštinu* 'have an unsightly appearance', *ne posloovati s vodom* 'don't deal with water', *imati etilne pare u glavi* 'to have ethyl vapour in one's head', *alkoholičarski konzument* 'alcoholic consumer', *nepovratno otuđiti* 'irrevocably alienate [to steal]', *odašiljati lažne vijesti* 'to air false news', *imati ogoljelu glavu* 'have a bare head', *biti folikularno izazovan* 'be follicly challenged'), physiological processes in the body (*rast ženskog trbuha* 'growth of a woman's stomach', *neželjena posljedica* 'unintended consequence', *drugo stanje* 'a certain condition', *krvarenje* 'bleeding', *izljev krvi iz tijela* 'bloody discharge', *olakšati se* 'relieve oneself', *čišćenje* 'cleaning', *vjetrovi* 'winds'), sex life (*leći s nekim* 'lie with someone', *integrirati se sa su-*

*protnim spolom* 'integrate with the opposite sex', *stupiti u simbiozu s nekim* 'enter into symbiosis with someone', *erotska razonoda s većim brojem ljudi* 'erotic pastime with a number of people', *gostovati među ženinim nogama* 'be a guest between a woman's legs', *dobro razvožena limuzina* 'a well-driven limousine', *prvo potvrđivanje zrelosti* 'first confirmation of maturity', *tableta koja izaziva želju* 'desire-provoking pill', *oskvrnuti* 'to defile'), illnesses (*duga i teška bolest* 'a long and difficult illness', *zloćudna bolest* 'malignant disease', *kratka bolest* 'short illness', *opake kancerogene stanice* 'vicious cancer cells', *sići s uma* 'be out of your mind', literally 'come off your mind', *imati potamnili um* 'to have a darkened mind', *biti ne baš sasvim čist* 'be not exactly in one's right mind', literally 'be not completely sane') and age (*postariji* 'older', *suton života* 'the twilight of life', *zlatne godine* 'golden years', *najbolje godine* 'best years', *vremešan* 'aged', *večer života* 'the evening of life', *sijeda glava* 'grey head', *veteran* 'a veteran').

Sickness and death remain taboos today as they were thousands of years ago, and their euphemisation in language is fuelled by fear of one's transience and superstition. It is something over which man has no control, so we can label illness and death as eternal taboos<sup>19</sup>. By euphemising death, we approach it because we conceptualize it as something familiar - as a journey or as a dream<sup>20</sup>. Physiological processes in the body are also often taboo because we associate them with dirt, accompanied by disgust, secrecy, and shame<sup>21</sup>. All this encourages their euphemisation because we want to avoid embarrassment in society.

The area that has started to be euphemised only in recent times is people's age. A society in which youth and beauty are imperatives has imposed new directions and approaches to the interpretation of people's age, so in addition to chronological age, subjective age is also increasingly talked about. Novoselić and Tucak Junaković<sup>22</sup> explain that this is a complex construct that includes dimensions such as how old a person feels, looks, or behaves, what age group (s)he identifies with and how old (s)he would like to be, regardless of her/his actual age. Sociological research has shown that most adults, especially in Western individualistic cultures, perceive themselves as younger in relation to their chronological age and that the difference between subjective and chronological age during adulthood increases with age. During the transition to adulthood, in their twenties, people feel in line with their chronological age or slightly older, but already those older than 30 tend to feel younger than their chronological age. In such a social context, precise pronouncing of age has become undesirable and offensive, to which language has "responded" by euphemisms, which are used to avoid directly naming the taboos<sup>16</sup>. Due to the imposition of youth as the only role model and perfection, people find it increasingly difficult to tolerate aging and in modern society, aging has indeed become a taboo. As we Photoshop photographs, we have begun to Photoshop language, too.<sup>13</sup>

Analysing the semantic areas that are being euphemised in modern society leads to another interesting con-

clusion: most of the euphemised expressions are related to women, i.e. there are many more areas of euphemisation related to women than to men. In the society of typified gender roles, men are traditionally attributed as having a more sinful nature, which is manifested through the exercise of unbridled impulses. On the other hand, female nature is considered to be much purer. The traditional view of female viciousness and seductive nature, which had its origins in the character of the biblical Eve, was replaced in the 18th century by a new stereotype of a woman who would rule the family scene throughout the rise of the middle class until the 20th century. At the same time, the cult of the child develops, and because of its importance, the image of a woman is almost completely equated with the image of a mother, while humanity becomes her special mission. If a man embodies science, the market, or politics, a woman with her maternal compassion melts the cold he brings home from those areas. A strict father and a gentle mother become mutually complementary figures of the middle-class family. Although in the second half of the 20th century, talk about women and their share in society became almost a sign of social maturity, the euphemisms that we have found nevertheless reveal stereotypical images of women that have developed in Western societies for centuries. Euphemisms related to the thematic field of women can be divided into three thematic groups that rely on established social stereotypes: euphemisms related to a woman's appearance, euphemisms related to a woman's intimate life and her moral shortcomings, and euphemisms related to diseases and physiological processes in the body. A woman thus has to make sure that she: *ne prikupi suviše kilograme* 'does not collect extra kilograms', *da ne bude punačka i obla* 'not to be plump and round', *oblih svojstava* 'of round features', *nabijene figure* 'of compact figure', *krupna* 'large', *tanka profila* 'of thin profile', *tanana* 'rather thin' ili *bolesno prozračna* 'sickly airy'. In modern society a woman is not desirable if she is *starijeg godišta* 'of an older generation', or *s licem izrazito loše kvalitete* 'with a face of extremely bad quality', *neugledne vanjštine* 'of unsightly appearance' or *sa skupom nepravilnosti na licu* 'with a set of irregularities on her face'. Via the language of private communication, the euphemised expressions which we have found have become part of public communication discourse, balancing between the speaker's efforts to be polite, which can consciously or unconsciously grow into a false or rosy view of the world or even an attempt at manipulation and light-hearted ("carnival") discrimination<sup>23</sup>. The emergence of the 'nuclear family' created a stereotype of a new woman who now had to show her chastity in all areas - in conversation, eating, dressing. This sentimental portrayal of a woman eventually created the image of an "angel in the house," while insisting on a woman's maternal role increasingly contributed to the denial of her sexuality. While in the middle of the 19th century, Christmas began to be celebrated as a holiday of family warmth, at the same time in France the obsession with the image of a prostitute grew, leading to the polarization of the image of a woman that has persisted to this day. The large number of euphe-

misms related to a woman's intimate life and her moral shortcomings is evidence of the discrepancy between the well-known stereotype of a man who, robust and insensitive, protects a chaste, emotional and weak woman, and the opposite concept of that cliché – an independent woman, who can and wants to decide about her sexuality. The found euphemisms in this group refer to a woman's intimacy and her moral traits: *leći sa ženom* 'lie with a woman', *integrirati se sa ženom* 'integrate with a woman', *stupiti u simbiozu sa ženom* 'enter into symbiosis with a woman', *gostovati među ženinim nogama* 'be a guest between a woman's legs', *erotska razonoda s većim brojem muškaraca* 'erotic pastime with a number of men', *dobro razvožena limuzina* 'a well-driven limousine'. Among the found euphemisms related to women, the most numerous are those outlining the stereotypical image of a prostitute - stupid, in a tight dress, eager for male attention, with low self-esteem and lost morals: *haljina koja neznatno prikrija* 'a dress that slightly conceals', *egzotična plesačica* 'exotic dancer', *erotična zabavljačica* 'erotic entertainer', "comfort woman", *emancipirana mačka* 'emancipated cat', *seksualna radnica* 'sex worker', *prijateljica noći* 'friend of the night', *barska dama* 'bar lady', *dama za noćne poslove* 'night work lady', *djevojka koja pruža posebne usluge* 'a girl who provides special services', *lascivni noćni program* 'lascivious night program', *artistica* 'artist'. The euphemisms we have singled out imply that the entrenchedness of backward patriarchal attitudes is still too strong, so that even now, at the beginning of the 21st century, a woman is often viewed only through the prism of her sexuality and appearance<sup>24</sup>.

## The Formation of Euphemisms

New words in a language are created in three ways: word formation, semantic formation, and borrowing<sup>25</sup>. Euphemised words and expressions are created in the same way. Word-formation, specifically suffixation, gave rise to the euphemised words *postariji* 'older', *tabletica* 'a little pill', *bockanjelbockati se* 'pricking/to prick oneself', borrowing is responsible for the expressions *nail artist*, *hair artist*, and the most common way of forming euphemisms is semantic formation, specifically metaphor and metonymy. This is confirmed by our research of euphemised expressions in Croatian, but also research in other languages<sup>21,26,27</sup>. Metaphorical and metonymic transfers of meaning are exemplified below.

Metaphor and metonymy are considered parts of ordinary, everyday speech, whose centre is not in language, but in how speakers conceptualize one mental domain using another one<sup>28</sup>. Metaphorical change of meaning implies understanding one domain of extralinguistic experience using another (different) domain. This mapping is conventional and is part of the human conceptual system. The metaphor thus gave rise to examples referring to age such as *zlatne godine* 'golden years', *suton/sumrak/večer života* 'twilight/dusk/evening of life' or *pupoljak* 'a bud'. In these examples, the course, i.e. stages of life are under-

stood as parts of a day, so the expressions such as *suton života*, *sumrak/večer života* ‘twilight/dusk/evening of life’ refer to the last stage of life (or day), while the word *pupoljak* ‘a bud’ implies youth, conceptualizing life in terms of different phases of plant growth. Furthermore, in the expression *uzet na nebo* ‘(be taken into heaven)’ we recognize the orientational conceptual metaphor (conceptual metaphor is one of the cognitive processes of constructing meaning on the basis of which we connect two conceptual domains): GOOD IS UP, i.e., HAPPINESS IS UP. The expression *uzet na nebo* ‘(be taken into heaven)’ in addition to alleviating the fear of death, also takes advantage of man’s conceptual system, to which it is immanent that what is up is good (in this case, it is heaven). The example *potamnijeli um* ‘(a darkened mind)’ is a conventional metaphor, and its basis is the conceptual metaphor LIGHT IS GOOD, i.e. DARKNESS IS BAD. Regardless of its function of softening a negative expression by metaphor, this euphemism suggests mental illness as an unknown that healthy people shy away from and fear. The darkness suggests something bad and unknown to man.

On the other hand, metonymy causes a change in meaning whereby the expression used metonymically deviates from the usual meaning based on contiguity<sup>29</sup>. Metonymic shifts can explain age-related terms such as *sijede vlasi* ‘grey hair’) or *sijedjeti* ‘(turn grey)’ meaning ‘to grow old’. These are PART FOR WHOLE metonymies in which one part - the grey hair - is taken as a designation for an older person, i.e. the whole. The expression *veteran* can be understood by these two metonymic shifts: EXPERIENCE FOR OLD AGE and OLD AGE FOR AN OLDER PERSON. In the expression *pustiti dušu* ‘(give up the ghost’, literally ‘let go of your soul’) we can also recognize the PART FOR THE WHOLE metonymy. Namely, the soul is only one part, while the expression suggests both mental and physical death.

### Euphemisms and/or Phraseological Units

Based on a study of euphemisms in Polish, Dąbrowska<sup>30</sup> concludes, among other things, that euphemisms belong to a rapidly changing linguistic material and that their petrification into phraseological units is rare. Prompted by the examples collected, we show in this chapter that this conclusion is only partly correct. A phraseological unit is usually defined as the smallest linguistic unit that is not created in the speech process but is reproduced in a ready-made form. Its meaning is not derived from the meaning of its parts because all or some of the parts have undergone a semantic change<sup>31</sup>. It is also important for a phraseological unit to be easily recognized because it has become established as a conjunction of words through a long communication practice. Therefore, a phraseological unit is permanent conjunction of words that have been “petrified” by frequent repetition and always appears in the same form. The following euphemisms from our corpus meet the above-described criteria: *silazi ti s uma* ‘be out of your mind’ literally ‘come off your mind’, *otići (u groblje)* ‘go (into graveyard)’, *teški slučajeви* ‘diffi-

cult cases’, *prijateljice noći* ‘friends of the night’, *barska dama* ‘bar lady’. All of these expressions have been found in two Croatian phraseological dictionaries<sup>32,33</sup>, they are reproduced as such in a ready-made form (if another word replaced one part of these expressions, it would lose the entrenched meaning of the expression as a whole, and with it the status of a phraseological unit) and there has been a semantic change of parts of these phraseological units so that they do not have their primary meaning anymore. Kružić and Tanacković Faletar<sup>34</sup> conclude the same for some euphemisms for death and dying in the Croatian language. They say that most of these examples are phraseologised units that have arisen due to the sensitivity of certain situations in which there is a communication need to activate less traumatic experiential domains, whose mention will not hurt the interlocutor, because phraseological units, as established communication formulas, can hardly be misunderstood, and as such, they allow for more accessible communication in delicate situations.

### Conclusion

The close connection of language with other human cognitive processes determines its nature; namely, language is never neutral, but governed by the norms of social behavior, realizing human view of the world<sup>35</sup>. Human efforts to be polite and to save their own or someone else’s face, as well as their lack of determination to call things by their proper names, the creation of a rosy view of the world, and manipulation have found refuge in euphemisms that have spread to all pores of human private and public communication. The research of euphemisms presented in this paper leads us to several conclusions. Areas where euphemisms are very common are getting more numerous, and the old ones do not fade so quickly, which is undoubtedly also due to the adaptability of euphemisms to different communication situations. Among the newer areas that have intensively been euphemised is age, which is a consequence of the cult of youth nurtured by modern Western society.

Furthermore, social stereotypes have found their “linguistic ally” in euphemisms. Petrified clichés, albeit mitigated by euphemisms, in certain contexts again become means of discrimination reflecting a desire for domination in a patriarchal society. The very frequency of euphemisms related to women implies prejudices. At the same time, their analysis has shown that they are often a reflection of male stereotypes about women and their position and status in society. When it comes to the types and functions of euphemisms, they have not changed significantly since the emergence of euphemisms to replace taboo terms. Still, in public communication, as shown by our examples, they are increasingly used for manipulation, confirming our initial hypothesis. In relation to Grice’s<sup>36</sup> cooperative principle of communication, which implies respect for the maxims of quality (telling the truth), quantity (speaking as much as necessary), relation (relevance,

adherence to the topic), and manner (how something is said - avoiding vague and ambiguous expressions), it is clear that by using manipulative, i.e. underhand euphemisms, we do not respect all the stated principles, and the maxim of the manner in communication is called into question, and with it the unambiguous transmission of the message. More intense than the desire and need to be unambiguous in communication is the desire to save face, first of all, our own. This is important in human society, sociologically, culturally, and anthropologically: a public

image of oneself that both the speaker and the listener considers in communication. Thus, euphemisms are the result of life in society, i.e. the subjective point of view of a speaker who wants to achieve a positive effect in communication. By using euphemisms, we name extralinguistic objects, but we also talk about ourselves. That is, we express our views. This is why euphemisms are an indispensable part of any sophisticated, refined, and polite style.

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## EUFEMIZMI: OBZRIVI JEZIK U HRVATSKOJ JAVNOJ KOMUNIKACIJI

### SAŽETAK

U ovome radu analiziraju se eufemizmi – uljepšani izrazi – ekscerpirani iz hrvatskog javnokomunikacijskog diskursa. U uvodnim poglavljima donosi se pregled definicija eufemizama, od retoričkih do kognitivnolingvističkih. U središnjem dijelu rada analiziraju se funkcije eufemizama u hrvatskoj javnoj komunikaciji, načini i mehanizmi nastanka eufemizama u hrvatskom jeziku i semantička polja na kojima su eufemizmi značajnije zastupljeni. U istraživanje se krenulo od pretpostavke da se upotreba eufemizama udaljila od svoje prvotne namjene – uljepšavanja izraza i čuvanja vlastita ili tuđeg obraza – te da se u javnoj komunikaciji eufemizmi sve češće koriste da bi se manipuliralo sugovornikom. Kako bi se provjerilo postavljenu hipotezu provedeno je istraživanje primjenom *bottom-up* metodološkog pristupa koji podrazumijeva odabir materijala iz korpusa uz „ručno“ pretraživanje i praćenje vijesti i objava u elektroničkim medijima, klasifikaciju eufemizama prema vrstama, funkcijama, semantičkim poljima i načinima tvorbe te izvođenje zaključaka o njihovoj upotrebi u hrvatskom javnokomunikacijskom prostoru.