A morphopragmatic study of [X-word] constructions through their morphological replicability and pragmatic functions

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Introduction

1   The evaluative semantics of words is built on the basis of the sociocultural and cognitive context where speech is produced (see, for example, Chen [1999], Storch [2017], Pizarro Pedraza [2018]). This implies that the expression of pejorative meaning should also be approached from the conceptualization of a pejorative unit as a lexical representation of linguistic taboo, which is in turn "avoided in public discourse because of the restrictions imposed by taboos" (Crespo Fernández [2008: 96, fn. 2]). Hence, speakers are equipped with the capacity for coining (and decoding) 'new' words that are intended to neutralize or intensify conceptual interdiction. This creates an association between taboo and lexical innovation, whereby the former constitutes a powerful source of the latter, which leads to a proportional relationship in which "the more potent the taboo, the richer the growth" (Burridge [2004: 212]). In fact, this proportionality depends largely on the physical closeness (or intimacy) of the object/ action to the speaker, which is also related to "the social constraints on the individual's behaviour where it can cause discomfort, harm or injury" (Allan & Burridge [2006: 1]).

2   An intelligible way of examining how neologisms or nonce words convey gradable degrees of taboo and linguistic interdiction is through the analysis of their pragmatic function as neutralizers (euphemisms) or enhancers (dysphemisms) of negative meaning in discourse. These X-phemisms, as a result of a process of morphosemantic change, comply with a set of word-formation mechanisms, which are known to the speakers/hearers and which guarantee that a word retains its intended communicative

force on the discursive and pragmatic planes. One of these mechanisms, for instance, is the formation of compound hybrids (henceforth CHs),[1] where the leftmost base is an initial letter of a pejorative word and the rightmost base is a semantically-neutral full word (Sánchez Fajardo [2022]), as in *a-hole* (< *asshole*) and *f-bomb* (< *fuck-bomb*).[2] This morphosemantic representation of a linguistic (taboo) unit is perhaps felt to be more transparent in [X-word] constructions, which are a type of CH in which the rightmost base is always the form *-word*, as in *n-word* in (1).[3]

> (1) Jenny S. Martinez, dean of the law school, told the school community Friday evening that she strongly disagreed with McConnell's decision to quote the N-WORD but understood that he believed it was done for a legitimate teaching purpose. (*washingtonpost.com*, 03/06/2020)

3   These [X-word] constructions[4] have been traditionally acknowledged as euphemistic forms, or "slur-once-removed" constructions (Bax [2018]), since the slur itself (as in *nigger*) is avoided or neutralized. The initialisms (as with *n-*) are, then, used in place of words or phrases that are pragmatically considered harsh or offensive (Annan-Prah [2015: n.p.]). There is even recent lexicographical evidence suggesting that [X-word] constructions can show a reversed process: a depreciation of non-pejorative bases in the form of dysphemisms, as in *f-word* (< *feminist*) in (2). In this vein, OED3 includes two subentries for the form *-word*: (i) "[a]ppended to a (frequently capitalized) letter of the alphabet, to denote euphemistically a word beginning with that letter which is coarse slang or otherwise likely to give offence", where the euphemistic function of the construction is underscored, as in (1); and (ii) where this construction is used "to denote a word which is not itself offensive but is regarded (frequently humorously) as unmentionable or taboo in a particular context". The latter implies a dysphemistic, contextualized use of the construction, in which the model [X-word] conveying a euphemistic function plays an active role in the formation of new units.

> (2) And Combs especially took issue with the fact that the new iteration of the beloved show was being described as a "fierce, funny, feminist reboot of the original series," mostly that final F-WORD: feminist. (*eonline.com*, 18/10/2012)

4   Therefore, on the morphosemantic level, there are two types of [X-word] constructions, one in which [X]- conveys a negative/taboo meaning (henceforth $[X_{neg}]$-) and another in which [X]- expresses a positive or neutral meaning (henceforth $[X_{pos/neut}]$-). This distinction is conveniently made at this point in order to understand how the semantics of [X]- has an impact on the pragmatic force of the resulting [X-word]. However, these two types might pertain to the same [X-word] construction, in which $[X_{neg}]$- and $[X_{pos/neut}]$- are understood euphemistically and dysphemistically, respectively. In fact, the latter could be argued to follow logically from its being used in a position where a taboo word is expected. This study also addresses this gap and aims to explore the coercive effects of using $[X_{pos/neut}]$- in the expression of dysphemism.

5   The above generalizations are not sufficient in themselves to map out the aspect of semantic development, since what is generalized as 'negative' in fact has varying degrees of evaluative traits. It is worth noting that what is being referred to as 'negative' in this study, as in $[X_{neg}]$-, is based on the fact that the referent denoted by [X]- is extra-linguistically perceived as being taboo or showing unfavorable judgement. For instance, while *n-word* in (1) clearly stems from sensitive or taboo motives, *h-word*

(< *holocaust*), as in (3) below, originates from a word that, although not avoided in public discourse as a result of taboo constraints, has a denotation that raises feelings of disapproval towards the act itself. In using *h-word* in this case in particular, the author alludes to its controversial nature and its perilous use by those who claim that the nonexistence of the holocaust, within a hate speech context, is being used as a political weapon by, say, Hitler supporters. In sum, examples (1) and (3) demonstrate that the initialed [X]- not only conveys a euphemistic use of $[X_{neg}]$-, as in (1), but also a dysphemistic one that originates from a political/ideological stance taken by the writer/speaker towards a controversial concept represented in [X]-, as in (3).[5]

> (3) Holocaust relativists don't deny that the Holocaust took place; instead they unwittingly water down its historical uniqueness, its status as the greatest crime in history, by describing all sorts of modern-day, comparatively small-scale acts of war or barbarism as "Holocausts" too. Such inappropriate use of the H-WORD, usually as a form of moral blackmail to get people to support military action against some tinpot tyrant said to be "the new Hitler" has the effect of making the Holocaust mundane [...] (*telegraph.co.uk*, 13/09/2011)

6   A key definition that is used in this study is that of morphological replicability (henceforth MR), which is a concept that evaluates the effects of an existing morphological structure on the creation of new words. MR is essentially based on the constructivist premise that "analogical word formation may develop [...] into a pattern that abstracts away from specific model words" (Booij [2010: 90]). To this end, the process of MR helps explain how $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] might develop from $[[X_{neg}]$-word] through coercion.[6] This study therefore sets out to primarily examine the correlation between the process of MR of [X-word] constructions and the evaluative meaning of their bases (i.e. [X]-*). Following a usage-based approach, the paper attempts to assess how the MR rate of an [X-word] category (e.g. *a-word*, *b-word*, *c-word*) is dependent on (i) the frequency of occurrence of the construction and the number of [X-word] types (e.g. *a < amazing*, *< Apartheid*, *< austerity*), as well as (ii) the evaluative meaning of [X]-, particularly $[X_{neg}]$-. I argue that the stronger the taboo or interdictive semantics of $[X_{neg}]$-, the lower the rate of MR, which has an effect on the analogical extension of a given construction. This implies, for instance, that *n-word*, whose base is extremely offensive, should have lower chances of being replicated than other [X-word] constructions. So, units like *n-word (< *night*) or *n-word (< *nasty*) are somewhat avoided. The second objective of the study is to attempt at illustrating the variety of intentions (or motivations)[7] behind the use of [X-word] constructions as types of X-phemism, in which euphemism and dysphemism constitute conceptual ends of a continuum (see, e.g., Crespo Fernández [2011], Allan [2016], Casas Gómez [2016]).

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Abbreviated forms as euphemistic devices

7   A large and growing body of literature has investigated the connection between abbreviated forms and their pragmatic function as neutralizers of taboo or unacceptable lexicon (cf. Allan & Burridge [1991], Burridge [2012], Widawski [2015], Allan [2016]). Abbreviated forms, such as initialisms or clippings, are essentially formed

on the basis of language economy (e.g. *Aids*, *NYPD*). However, on various occasions, they might also be interpreted as euphemistic forms, functionally conceived to morphologically disguise referents that are perceived as taboo. This process of disguising is what Burridge [2012] refers to as 'distortion', through which the form of a taboo unit is altered to neutralize or minimize, say, its expression of contempt. Although abbreviated forms are used, to a greater extent, to minimize the effort in speech production, the expressive (or evaluative) motivations underlying the making of distorted forms are oftentimes a driving factor. For instance, forms such as *Paki* (< *Pakistani*) or *Yid* (< *Yiddish*) also corroborate the fact that abbreviated forms, particularly clipped words, might also be used to enhance the expression of contempt.

8   Initialisms or acronyms are made up of initial letters, as in *OAPs* (< *Old Age Persons or Pensioners*) and *RTFM* (< *read the fucking manual*).[8] The use of a single letter standing for an interdictive or taboo concept is oftentimes accompanied by avoidance characters such as dingbats and asterisks, as in *f*** off*. These non-lexical expressions seem to be "reserved for the more severely tabooed expressions" (Burridge [2012: 75]), which might be an indication of contempt being a scalar property. Therefore, the use of initials, rather than their dispreferred expression, is intended, according to Brown & Levinson's politeness theory, "to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offense, that of the audience, or of some third party" (Allan & Burridge [1991: 11]). This suggests that the expression of contempt involves sets of form-changing strategies, which has an effect on the perception of contemptuous meaning. Let us compare the following expressions:[9]

> (i) She told me to *fuck off.*
> (ii) She told me to *fly off.*
> (iii) She told me to *f off.*
> (iv) She told me to **fcuk off.*
> (v) She told me to *fo.*
> (vi) **She told me to *f-word off.*

9   These utterances (i-vi), which are all used in reported speech, convey a contemptuous and insulting way of telling someone to go away. On the level of pragmatics, with the exception of (i), each and every single one of them constitutes a different alternative to disguise the offensive meaning of *fuck* in the phrase *fuck off*. In complex forms, only constituents that are accountable for the expression of taboo (e.g. *fuck*) are distorted, while the other constituents are generally left intact for the sake of recognizability, e.g. *f off* in (iii), *fly off* in (ii). However, in other cases there is a complete makeover where all the constituents are initialed, e.g. *fo* in (v), similar to other frequent forms in colloquial English, as in *as* (< *as fuck*) and *wtf* (< *what the fuck*). Unlike *fo*, which is not used so extensively, the cases of *af* and *wtf* have reached a lexicalization status, that is the meaning of their constituents is not as salient as the meaning of the abbreviated construction. In regard to the typology of genre, whereas (iv) and (v) are only found in written sources, the examples in (i), (ii) and (iii) are found in both written and spoken ones. Although the expression of *-word* in (vi) makes sense to the full structural remodeling, it is a grammatical oddity since *-word* is used in the formation of nominal units, not verbal ones.

10   The examples above also corroborate the variety of formulas there are in English to disguise taboo or unacceptable words and concepts. Following Burridge's [2012] principle of distortion, omission of letters in the form of initialisms is an effective

mechanism (e.g. *f-off*, *fo*, *f-word*). Also, the taboo word can be misspelled to facilitate recognition and minimize offensiveness, as in *fcuk off*.[10] Lexical substitution represents another strategy of guise in which taboo words are replaced by those with offensive meaning but not to the extent of interdiction, e.g. *fly off.* The imitative form *fly off* is semantically related to *fuck off* in the sense that the denotation of 'leaving at once' is maintained, and that the connotation and pragmatic force of (covert) offensiveness surrounding this command is inherited through the initial *f* and the monosyllabic form of *fly*. This semantic transition undergone by *fly* has been traditionally referred to as euphemistic dysphemism, which is used to "avoid giving offense [by substituting] a euphemistic locution for such dysphemisms" (Allan [2018: v]).

11   Euphemistic devices are in fact context-driven, that is, their communicative strategy depends on the intentionality of a speaker towards their message and the face of hearers. Inevitably, a universal principle in the use of euphemisms is the individual's desire "to be positively regarded in social context" (Crespo-Fernández [2015: 45]),[11] which is a reminder of the role played by euphemistic expressions in the formation and maintenance of group identity: "[s]hared taboos and the rites and rituals that accompany our euphemistic behavior increase group identity through feelings of distinctiveness; they strengthen the social fabric" (Burridge [2012: 70]).

1.2. Morphological replicability through an axiological-evaluative perspective

12   From an axiological-evaluative perspective, the meaning of [X]- in an [X-word] construction is linked to the concept of pejoration, and to how it is "associated with a cognitive attitude [and] expressed through language and realized through linguistic means" (Finkbeiner *et al.* [2016: 2]). This section addresses the intricacy of pejorative meaning and its lexical representation through an [X-word] construction, as well as its impact on morphological analogy and semantic development.

13   Being an essential part of MR, morphological analogy occurs, from the speaker's perspective, "when a similarity is perceived between the constituents of a model and those of a potential target" (Mattiello [2016: 105]). This implies that the new word must contribute stable pragmatic effects (Merlini Barbaresi & Dressler [2020: 408]) while being structurally recognized by interlocutors. In the analysis of how a model structure is repurposed by a speaker to creatively convey an axiologically different meaning (e.g. *f-word* [< *fuck*] > *f-word* [< *feminism*]), analyzing the effects of MR through an axiological-evaluative continuum helps to better understand the link between evaluation and lexical representation. This axiological-evaluative continuum is built on the input semantics of the base [X]- and the speaker's attitude or stance towards [X]-. According to this lexical choice, it is claimed that "*stance* would be a more abstract concept and *evaluation* would be the actual realization or manifestation of the stance."[12] (Alba-Juez & Thompson [2014: 10]). The issue here lies in finding out what type of meaning and value judgment, as expressed by [X]-, is reflected in word axiology. As suggested by Krzeszowski, in his conceptualization of the principle of axiology: "[w]ords have a tendency to be axiologically loaded with 'good' or 'bad' connotations in proportion to the degree of the human factor associated with them" [1990: 150]. Part of the human factor is precisely social taboo, and the research questions of this study delve into how taboo impacts stance-taking, and more importantly, its lexical representation.

14   The position that a lexical item takes on an axiological scale is therefore connected to extralinguistic factors (cf. Felices Lago [1991], Escalier-Fournier [1997], Faber & Mairal [1999]), and the representation of these axiological values, particularly those that involve [human] and [emotions, judgements, morality, self-awareness], moves along the axiological continuum, whose end-points are 'positiveness' and 'negativity'. For instance, taboo, being a socially unacceptable concept, determines the axiological value gained by the lexical unit. Therefore, words pertaining to a type of social taboo (e.g. body parts, sex, politics, religion) are more liable to undergo semantic shifting from its prototypical value (referential component) into its axiological value (evaluative component). As shown in Figure 1, the connotation of a word may vary across individuals, which implies that stance-takers A and B might have different perceptions towards the same prototypical concept Z (e.g. [feminism]). The prototypical concept is based on denotational, factual elements that are repurposed by A and B to connote Z. The connotation traits assigned to Z are not necessarily untrue, but they are biased to reach values of positiveness or negativity. This implies that the axiological evaluation of Z might be expressed by A and B through linguistic forms that can be easily interpreted by any member of the speech community.

Figure 1. An epistemological representation of A's and B's stance-taking towards Z
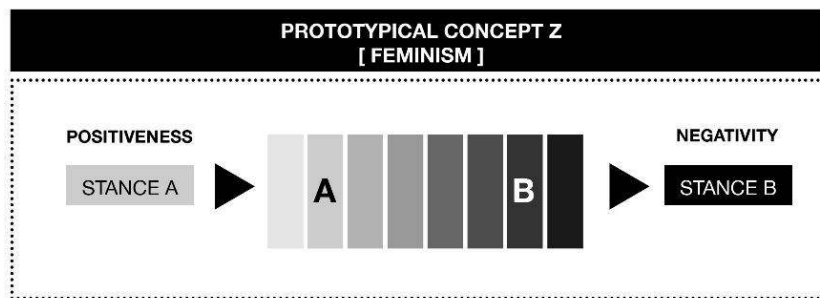
15   Such axiological scales are based on two endpoints (positiveness and negativity) and two opposed stances (A and B) towards the same prototypical concept (Z). Although this oversimple representation of axiology and evaluation is not sufficient to cover all the nuances that might be represented between the two endpoints, it ultimately attempts to show how the implementation of an X-phemistic unit, for instance, might be interpreted on the evaluation scale. Figure 2, which is also based on the same prototypical concept [feminism] and epistemological stance-taking in relation to it, integrates a lexical unit (*femo*)[13] expressed by stance-taker B. This lexical unit pejoratively refers to an advocate of feminism. On the axiological scale in Figure 2, *femo* is placed closer to the endpoint of negativity because it represents a clear negative stance towards feminism through an explicit lexical form. This position indicates that *femo*,[14] as a dysphemistic unit, is used to explicitly reinforce stance-taking B through moral judgments or higher emotions.

Figure 2. Lexical explicitness in B's stance-taking towards Z
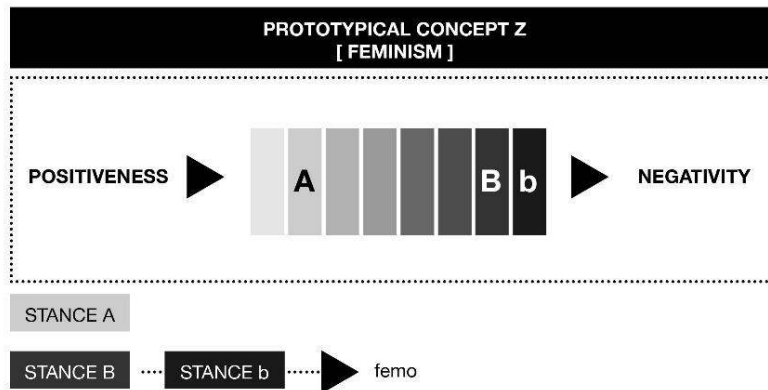
16   The case of [feminism] corroborates the notion that the use of pejoratives or dysphemistic units (e.g. 'b' in 'Stance b'), as the most visible manifestations of a negative stance towards Z, also reflects the closeness of 'b' to 'negativity' not only being a result of the inherent taboo-*ness* of a concept but largely a result of the individual's own perspective of the concept itself. This generalization helps understand the semantic dynamics underlying the unit -*word* as a vehicle for evaluation and semantic specificity. Figure 3 shows two different instances of prototypical conceptualization: Z [*feminism*] and W [*antisemitism*]. The former represents advocacy of social equality of the sexes while the latter refers to religious discrimination against Jews.

Figure 3. Lexical explicitness in A's and B's stance-taking towards W and Z respectively
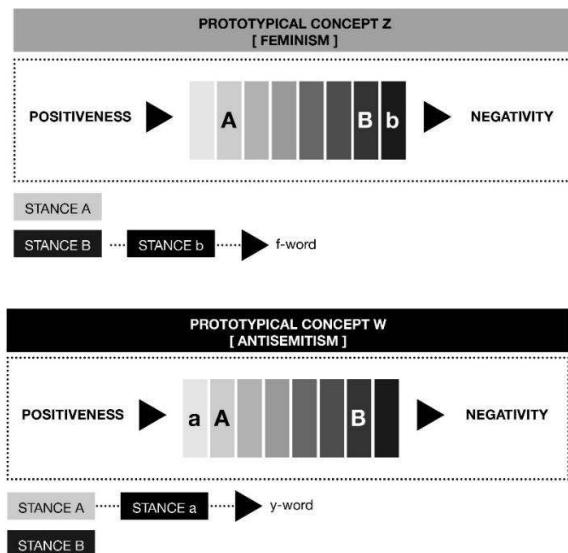
17   In Figure 3, there are two scales, on both of which -*word* is used to form a complex unit that expresses a stance towards a prototypical concept. In regard to W in the figure, 'Stance a' repurposes the form -*word* to neutralize the taboo and offensive meaning of

Yid (< *Yiddish* 'Jew'), which is an indication of the stance taken by A towards W. On the other hand, the form *-word* in *f-word* (*f* standing for *feminism*) follows the pragmatic path of *femo*, by casting aspersions on advocates of Z. The latter function conveyed by [X-word] replicates the use of *-word* as a euphemizing device where sensitive or taboo bases are involved. The prototype approach suggests that these two scales pertain to the same network, where the expression of dysphemism (*f-word* < *feminism*), or peripheral sense, is analogically spawned from that of euphemism (*f-word* < *fuck*), or prototypical sense (Hamawand [2007: 46]). These peripheral constructions, however, are also dependent on their 'extent of polysemy' – that is, "whether a particular morphological form might have a propensity towards one or another reading" (Lieber & Plag [2022: 308]).

2. Methodology

18   The dataset is primarily made up of 24 [X-word] categories (e.g. *a-word*, *b-word*, *c-word*, *d-word*, etc.) and 747 [X-word] types (e.g. *o-word* < *Obamacare*, < *obesity*, < *objectivity*),[15] all of which are extracted from the NOW Corpus.[16] These [X-word] categories are all checked in descriptive dictionaries (e.g. CED23; DCS; MWD11; ODS; OED3) to confirm, in the first place, whether these constructions are lexicalized and listed as dictionary entries. Each [X-word] category is also used as a search string (NOW Corpus) to generate concordance lines (N=3,487), where only the first 200 lines are extracted. This study follows a quantitative and qualitative corpus analysis (Hasko [2012]) in that the constructions extracted are first disambiguated to (i) find out the meaning of [X]- and (ii) examine the communicative situation where the [X-word] construction is used. This means that the annotation process is made up of two stages. The first attempts to answer the research question of how the meaning of [X]- has an effect on the morphological replicability of a given construction. The MR rate is measured through the ratio (R), which is computed by dividing the total number of [X]- bases (types), or (f), by the total number of [X-word] constructions (tokens), or (F): (R) = (f) / (F).

19   The value (R), which is the ratio of [X-word] types (f) to the number of [X-word] tokens (F), is directly proportional to the MR rate. Thus, when a construction has a low (R), this means that the construction is also expected to show a low MR rate. In other words, there is a lower chance of finding constructions of the same type. The disambiguation of the instances allows for annotating what type of evaluative semantics is expressed by [X]- (negative, positive or neutral), as well as the morphological constraints that characterize a negative base and a positive/neutral one. This part of the qualitative analysis might also shed light onto how each of these bases is linked to the functions of euphemism and dysphemism, and how the latter extends out from the former through coercive effects.

20   On the second level of analysis, the data obtained from the corpus also offers qualitative information on the X-phemistic function and the pragmatic functions underlying the process of morphological analogy. Through an exploratory and descriptive examination of the instances extracted from the corpus, this part of the study is aimed at providing an illustrative set of examples that are used to confirm the variety of intentions behind the use of [X-word] constructions. This examination is generally based on a series of syntactic and discursive indexicals that are intended to establish the more precise identification of X-phemistic models: i) the collocational use

of the full word that is represented through [X]-; ii) the speaker's intentionality (e.g. mockery, criticism, argumentation); iii) text typology (dialogic or non-dialogic); and iv) the verbal frame where the [X-word] construction is used (e.g. *to use/to deploy/to drop* [X-word]). As a result, a series of functions originating from the $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] models would suggest that the metapragmatic aspect of usage can be responsible for the dysphemistic effects. Rather than attempting a systematic classification, the process of categorization and naming of these functions is based on a personal interpretation of the metapragmatic use of each [X-word] construction in the utterance.

21   Through the examination of the metapragmatic aspect of usage, which also reflects hearer-related and reader-related properties (Mattiello [2008]), these examples are of help in itemizing the pragmatic categories that are connected to the X-phemistic function of language. These categories fall within a larger category of metapragmatic function with varying purposes depending on the expected audience/readership reaction. It is hypothesized that dysphemistic constructions show a wider range of functions, and the full words, which are positive or neutral, are used in collocation with their corresponding [X-word] construction to help readers identify the meaning of [X]- more easily.

22   Being limited to a generally non-dialogic corpus, this study proposes a correlation between the evaluative semantics of [X]- and the morphological replicability of the model construction. However, further research could usefully explore how the above syntactic parameters and speech modalities in the concordances might be used to determine morphosemantic constraints. But perhaps the most important limitation of this work lies in the fact that pragmatic functions are not generalized in the form of constructions, which could also be used to further explore if these functions are correlated with, say, specific collocations and syntactic structures.

3. Discussion of results

### 3.1. [X-word] constructions: A morphosemantic overview

23   The NOW Corpus shows that there are 24 [X-word] categories, which are characterized by different frequency indexes. Closer inspection of Table 1, in which overall frequencies (Fs) are represented, shows that *n-word*, *f-word*, *k-word* and *c-word* manifest the highest frequency index. Of these four constructions, the index (F) of *n-word* is higher than those of the other [X-word] categories combined. The prototypical concept in *n-word* is an offensive slur (*n-* < *nigger*), which implies that the [X-word] units of this type are formed to express a euphemistic meaning. As indicated in Section 1.1., initialed forms, representing a taboo or interdictive base form, are an authenticated strategy for neutralizing the socially unacceptable status of offensive words. So, when *f-* is used instead of *fuck-*, a word which is unacceptable in standard contexts, what is neutralized is not the concept of *fuck*, or its referential values, but rather its connotational load, through its abbreviated representation. In general, this euphemistic strategy of softening pejorative words through the use of its first letter is interpreted as less offensive. Abbreviation, or letter omission, is hence recognized as a device to euphemize offensive communicative stretches (see Section 1.1. for further information on the use of abbreviated forms in the expression of euphemism).

Table 1. Frequency index (F) of the 24 [X-word] constructions, extracted from the NOW Corpus [last accessed: November 2022]

[X-word]	(F)	[X-word]	(F)
n-word	14652	i-word	198
f-word	3369	t-word	165
c-word	1627	y-word	161
k-word	1465	g-word	151
r-word	774	h-word	110
b-word	714	e-word	84
p-word	442	v-word	82
s-word	431	o-word	48
l-word	289	q-word	39
d-word	275	z-word	30
a-word	214	x-word	19
m-word	208	u-word	15

24   However, [X-word] constructions undergo a change of pragmatic force. Rather than merely neutralizing pejorative meaning, [X-word] has also gained the capacity to extend out to positive or neutral bases, which are thus imbued with negative appraisal. This transition can be diachronically summarized as: [X-word] (euphemistic) > [X-word] (dysphemistic), since the earliest coinages of [X-word] constructions (e.g. *f-word* [1956], *c-word* [1979], *n-word* [1985])[17] conform to euphemistic functions, as also confirmed by Bax [2018]. Therefore, morphologically speaking, the first [X-word] constructions (where [X]- stands for an interdictive/taboo base) are in fact accountable for the morphological analogy of [X-word] and its semantic change on an axiological continuum. So, owing to the prototypical construction [[[X$_{neg}$]-word] = euphemistic function] and to coercive effects, the negative meaning of [X]- in [[X$_{neg}$]-word] is extrapolated to [[X$_{pos/neut}$]-word], where the unit -*word* constitutes the morphosemantic facilitator of this axiological transposition. This analogical process results, as shown in Figure 4, in the reconfiguration of -*word* as a pejorative-forming unit. The morphological tendency of -*word* to combine with all types of evaluative bases is perhaps based on the notable frequency of the construction [[X$_{neg}$]-word] in the making of euphemisms. This suggests that [[X$_{neg}$]-word] construction is coerced in that the dysphemistic 'reading' of examples such as *f-word* (< *feminism*) shows that the construction is incompatible with the evaluative meaning of [X$_{pos/neut}$]- (Michaelis [2004], Audring & Booij [2016]).

Figure 4. The semantic extension of [X-word] constructions through coercion
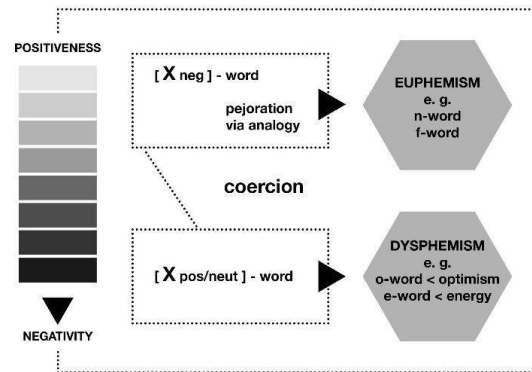
25   There are 747 *word-* types in our data, which are labeled in our research study as (f).[18] An interesting result to emerge from the data, particularly that in the Appendices, is that most [X-word] constructions are denominal nouns (87.1%), that is, their [X]-constituent (initial) originates from a nominal unit. Only three instances of phrases were found: *g-word* (< *God damn it*), *h-word* < *how's-it-going*, and *s-word* < *son of a bitch.* Personal names, in particular, illustrate how names with an apparently neutral meaning gain a significant degree of negativity or taboo, as in (4), where the writer uses *t-word* (< *Thatcher*) as a reference to current sociocultural tendencies to overplay sensitivities.

> (4) Good Pop Bad Pop concludes, long before the Br*tpop era, in the early Eighties. That second starred-out word, the T-WORD, rhymes with 'catcher' and is the surname of the first female prime minister of the United Kingdom. (*standard.co.uk*, 23/05/2022)

26   Being acknowledged as a type of N-N compounding, [X-word] constructions include a nominal head (-*word*), so they generally function as nouns. On the level of morphology, an [X-word] construction usually accepts nominal bases, which is why the example used in Section 1.1., **She told me to f-word off*, is an oddity, particularly in spoken discourse. To a lesser degree, adjectives and adverbs are also found, e.g. adj. *overwhelmed* in (5), and adv. *very* in (6). Also, although scarce in the dataset, some examples of loanwords were found, e.g. *Umweltfreundlichkeit*, *Español.*

> (5) "The Metro system is completely overwhelmed. The cellphone system is overwhelmed. The satellite trucks are overwhelmed," reported MSNBC correspondent Cal Perry from the Mall in Washington, adding that, "We're looking at a city that's overwhelmed." A few minutes later on CNN, reporter Jessica Schneider also invoked the O-WORD. (*nzherald.co.nz*, 17/01/2022)

(6) The algorithm sometimes confused words with similar phonetic sounds, identifying "going" as "bring," "do" as "you," and words beginning with "F"—"faith," "family," "feel"—as a V-WORD, "very." (*yahoo.com*, 21/07/2017)

27 In the taxonomy and quantification of denominal [X-word] constructions, noun phrases were also included as bases. Contrary to what might be expected, the initial is not necessarily taken from the headword or nucleus of the nominal phrase or compound, but from the dependents, e.g. *g-word < gifted child, e-word < equal treatment, z-word < zone element.* Also, the base [X]- is generally modeled on the initial letter of the etymon, except for one single case, where [X]- is modeled on the first syllable, e.g. *x-word* (*< extirpation*), rather than **e-word.* This exception is due to the fact that the syllable *ex-* shares the exact same pronunciation as the letter chosen (*x-*).

28 There is a certain regularity in the abbreviation of prefixed words whereby the initial of the prefix, not of the full word, is taken as the leftmost base in the [X-word] construction. For instance, in the examples of *antisemitism* and *overdue*, the forms *a-word* and *o-word* are used respectively. However, there are some exceptions to this regularity: for the case of *antiestablishment*, the [X-word] construction is *e-word*, not **a-word.* The example of *antiestablishment* shows that complex words might also be abbreviated on the grounds of their semantic compositionality, thus *establishment*, unlike the affix attached, represents the semantic nucleus. Generally, therefore, [X-word] constructions are constrained in that [X]- is a nominal base and that the evaluative meaning of [X]- determines whether the [X-word] construction is used to neutralize the negative meaning.

29 The nominal base is extended, as commented earlier, to proper nouns and personal names. An [X-word] construction constitutes an effective strategy to demonstrate an explicit stance towards either a political figure, as in *Trump* in (7), or a sports coach, as in *McVay* in (8), through which the writer/speaker intends to underscore their reputation in the public media. Although these personal names, as in *Trump* in (7) and *Thatcher* in (4), are semantically neutral (as opposed to *treason* or *murder*, which are inherently negative), their depreciation, and hence, their becoming dysphemistic units, are dependent on the speaker's stance-taking and evaluation.

(7) Prosecutors Advise Witnesses In Manafort Trial: Avoid The T-WORD (Trump). (*ksro.com,* 31/07/2018)
(8) Any time you hear the M-WORD—"McVay," that is—thrown around in a conversation about coaches, your ears perk up. (*yahoo.com*, 30/09/2022)

30 Although this study does not investigate the syntactic frame surrounding [X-word] constructions and their impact on the X-phemistic functions in great depth, there seems to be a connection between the use of the type of verbs and the pragmatic force intended in each context. For example, the use of *to deploy* and *to drop*, as in (9), is generally associated with dysphemistic usage of [X-word] constructions, which is possibly modeled, particularly in the case of the former, on the CH *f-bomb.*

(9) As Eagleton noted in *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, the terms "tragic" and "very sad" are now almost entirely interchangeable – indeed we are quick to drop the 'T-WORD' into casual conversation. (*isismagazine.org.uk*, 2017)

## 3.2. Morphological replicability according to the index (R)

31   Of the total of 24 [X-word] categories, only a few are found in dictionaries. For instance, OED3 records only five of them: *c-word*, *f-word*, *l-word*, *n-word*, *y-word.* An interesting finding is the irregularity of (R) with regard to the 24 categories. Table 2 shows a series of parameters and their values: [X-word],[19] (F), (f), and (R). The index (R), as defined in Section 2., indicates the degree of morphological replicability (MR) undergone by [X-word] constructions. MR is associated, in other words, with the likelihood of a word-formation pattern and its 'profitability' in speech production (cf. Bauer [2003]).

Table 2. Compilation of [X-word] categories and their corresponding variables: (F), (f), (R). All the data is taken from the NOW Corpus [last accessed: November 2022]

[X-word]	(F=200)[20]	(f)	(R)	[X-word]	(F)	(f)	(R)
n-word	14652	2	0.01	i-word	198	35	0.18
f-word	3369	16	0.08	t-word	165	62	0.38
c-word	1627	25	0.13	y-word	161	3	0.02
k-word	1465	8	0.04	g-word	151	51	0.34
r-word	774	24	0.12	h-word	110	33	0.3
b-word	714	22	0.11	e-word	84	50	0.6
p-word	442	37	0.19	v-word	82	27	0.33
s-word	431	65	0.33	o-word	48	23	0.48
l-word	289	16	0.08	q-word	39	9	0.23
d-word	275	76	0.38	z-word	30	7	0.23
a-word	214	55	0.28	x-word	19	5	0.26
m-word	208	86	0.43	u-word	15	10	0.67

32   It can be seen from the data in Table 2 that (R) varies in most of the [X-word] categories but at different rates. The forms showing the lowest (R) and MR are *y-word*, *c-word* and *n-word.* One of the reasons behind the extent of variation of [X-word] forms in general lies in the evaluative meaning of [X]-, particularly in the case of [[X$_{neg}$]-word] types, in which [X$_{neg}$]- represents a taboo or offensive base. This variation is to some degree connected to the definition of MR in that the chances of creating words that morphologically resemble *y-word*, *c-word* or *n-word* are lower because the pejorative semantics of [X]- discontinues the formation of new words conforming to the model structure. Figure 5 provides summary statistics of the data in Table 2, and the tendency of MR is arranged on the basis of each item's (R) index.

Figure 5. Fluctuation of (R) indexes in the 24 [X-word] categories
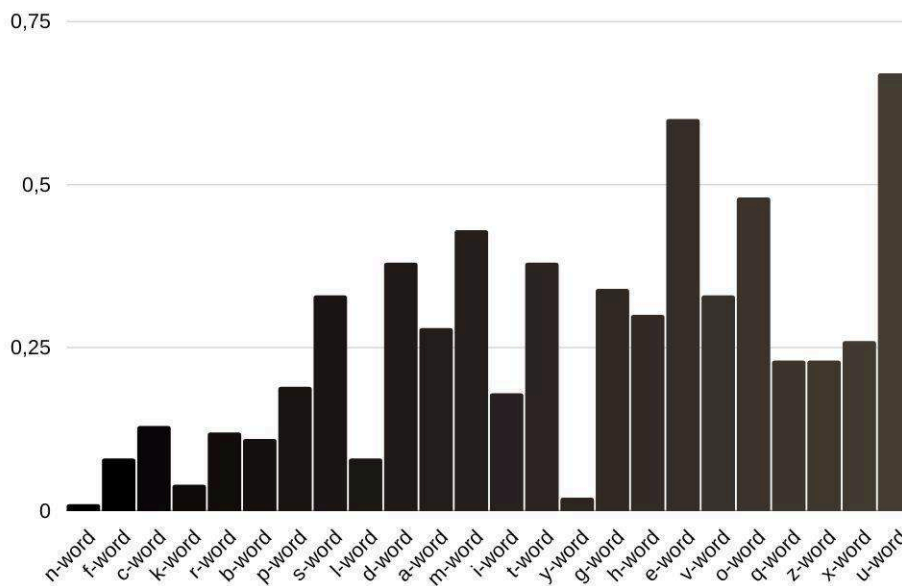
33 Following the proposition of MR, [X-word] constructions, particularly those that originate from offensive bases, are also likely to undergo a 'semantic lexicalization' process, in which certain forms show a loss of their compositionality of meaning (Bauer [1983: 55-59]). This is in turn interpreted as a gain in specific negative connotations, which implies that ensuing analogical forms become unlikely. Consequently, the use of a low-(R) construction, as in *n-word* in (9), in a context where a morphological structure is analogically used but is unexpected (e.g. *nuclear weapons*), can be resorted to by speakers to arouse strong reactions in their listeners.

> (9) Surrounded by his "adoring flock," Trump said, "You know Putin mentioned the 'N-WORD.' Do you know what that is?" people shouted the answer they thought Trump was looking for-because there is only one answer. Hardly surprised by the response to his "purposefully provocative question," Trump said, "No, no, no, it is the "nuclear word," he said he was talking about Russian President Vladimir Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons in in his war on Ukraine. (*scotsman.com*, 01/11/2022)

34 In some cases, the process of MR is also affected, albeit to a far lesser degree, by the popularity of a topic within a specific time frame, and hence the increased use of its corresponding [X-word]. For instance, *i-word* shows a relatively low (R), which is caused by the increased use of the bases *impeach/impeachment*, as in (10), in the years 2019 and 2020.[21]

> (10) President Donald Trump on Wednesday expressed disgust that Democrats discussed impeachment, which he referred to as the "I-WORD," during a caucus meeting earlier in the day. (*businessinsider.com*, 22/05/2019)

35 The correlation between the axiological taxonomy of [X]- and the type of X-phemism involved is interesting because all the [[X$_{pos/neut}$]-word] constructions undergo a

dysphemizing process, which is used by stance-takers to imbue $[X_{pos/neut}]$- with a certain degree of contempt or depreciation. Therefore, $[[X_{pos/neut}]$ word] is a dysphemistic construction while $[[X_{neg}]$-word] is euphemistic. For instance, *m-word* (< *Memphis*) in (11) suggests that the name of the city is forbidden on the networking site. Although this specific case was a mistake on Twitter, the use of an [X-word] construction to represent the suspension of the word from the social networking site provides evidence of the pragmatic force of the *m-word* itself in this particular context. Conversely, *m-word* (< *midget*), as in (12), originates from an offensive word, and its $[[X_{neg}]$-word] construction points to a strictly euphemistic structure.

> (11) [I]f you were suspended from Twitter over the weekend, it might be because you used the word, uh, "Memphis" in your tweet. Anyone using the M-WORD was automatically suspended for 12 hours and forced to delete the offending tweet. (*bingboing.net*, 15/03/2021)
>
> (12) Most people with dwarfism dislike the term 'midget' (M-WORD) immensely and recognise it as a hate word. It has a history of [sic], and continues to be used as, a term to demean, dehumanise and ridicule people with dwarfism. (*kirunastamell.net*, n.d.)

3.3. Pragmatic functions behind the process of MR

36   Exploring what motivates the formation of [X-word] constructions in English is complex in nature because the use of [X-word] is inherently loaded, and interpretable in multiple ways. This section is divided into two subsections: whilst the first one (3.3.1.) is devoted to the euphemistic function, the second (3.3.2.) addresses the dysphemistic function, placing particular emphasis on a series of descriptive terms that account for its variability: disparagement, humor, criticism, seriousness, controversy and foregrounding.

3.3.1. The euphemistic function of [X-word]

37   As specified by the OED3, this function characterizes the earliest recorded coinages, e.g. *f-word*, *c-word* and *n-word*. The use of the first letter of the taboo word is induced by the effect of letter omission or word respelling turning negative or taboo words into socially acceptable forms. The [X-word] constructions that fall into this category, however, do not soften the concept of $[X_{neg}]$-; rather they deceive the eyes and ears of interlocutors by altering the form while still keeping a relatively strict association with the meaning. Unlike other alterations such as *f****, *fcuk*, or *f*, the use of *f-word* is even more acceptable because $[X_{neg}]$- is removed from its original syntactic frame. For example, in (13), *f-word*, as opposed to the form *f****, is stripped of its natural construction. The 'unnatural' syntactic structure of *f-word* is an explicit reminder of the writer's/speaker's awareness of the taboo nature of the etymon, which was in fact never printed in full until the 1950s/early1960s (Sheidlower [2009: xxii]).

> (13) I remember very vividly, I said the F-WORD for the very first time when I read it off the wall at the void deck [...] And of course, I had to choose the most "appropriate" time to ask the question in the lift filled with people, "Mummy, what does F*** mean? How do you pronounce it?" (*citynews.sg*, 25/05/2017)

38   Although the vast majority of the [X-word] constructions in Table 1 are used with this function, the truth is that there are only 43 (out of a total of 747) [X-word] types identified in the dataset used here, e.g. *f-word* (< *fuck*), *c-word* (< *cunt*), *n-word* (< *nigger*), *y-word* (< *Yid*), *h-word* (< *hotnot*). This represents only 5.8% of the total of [X-word] types, or (f), in Table 2. This suggests that dysphemistic constructions are far more productive than euphemistic ones, the latter largely falling into three conceptual categories: sex, body parts and race/origin slur. Alongside the overall purpose of turning these negative bases into socially acceptable linguistic units, the writer/speaker might also resort to these [X-word] constructions to indicate that they hold a critical view of the social implications of slurring. In the case of (14), for instance, the slur *tranny* is first introduced to highlight the case of the jocular use of *tranny* and its hurtful connotations. The use of *t-word* on the next line conforms to the writer's intentionality of raising the issue of repurposing *tranny* as an offensive slur, which should, in turn, be regarded as an interdictive or taboo unit.

> (14) When one of the writers on ABG made a joke that involved the word "tranny," the LGBT community took vocal offense to it. Rae and her writers didn't know that the T-WORD was fraught, but they addressed the issue and moved on. (*fastcompany.com*, 9/12/2012)

3.3.2. The dysphemistic function of [X-word]

39   The annotated corpus shows that in approximately 97% of the instances where an $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] construction is used, the full word that is initialed as [X]- is also found as a collocation in the same context. This indexical was key to determining the X-phemistic function unequivocally. Also, in contrast to the euphemistic function, the dysphemistic function repurposes the [X-word] pattern as an argument focus. That is, [X]- is a concept that contributes to the argumentation, which the speaker/writer assesses through the [X-word] construction. This can have two readings: i) [X-word] constitutes an evaluative strategy by opening up new ways of taking a stance towards [X]-; or ii) while [X-word] undergoes an axiological 'bleaching' (i.e. [X-word] is not perceived as a lexical representation of taboo), [X]- follows a multi-functional path with pejorative tinges. The dysphemistic function shows a higher number of [X-word] types. This variability is due to the number of $[X_{pos/neut}]$- forms to which *-word* is attached. These forms have, in turn, been epitomized by the OED3 as units that are "regarded in a particular context as contentious or taboo." As illustrated in Figure 4, *-word* is analogically imbued with the semantic trend of categorizing $[X_{pos/neut}]$- as negative or taboo within a specific context. The dysphemistic function, as mentioned in Section 3.1., originates from the coercion of $[X_{pos/neut}]$- into a 'taboo' position. The next subsections attempt to illustrate how the MR of $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] constructions might result in different pragmatic functions: disparagement, humor, criticism, seriousness, controversy and foregrounding.[22]

3.3.2.1. Function of disparagement

40   The base *-word* is the result of the process of semantic pejoration, which is best reflected in bases of the type $[X_{pos/neut}]$-. These bases undergo a process of semantic disparagement. That is, writers/speakers use $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] constructions to inform

their reader/listener that the concept expressed by [$X_{pos/neut}$]- has gained negative connotations within a specific discursive context. Disparagement is particularly unexpected in cases where the leftmost base originally conveys a positive meaning, such as *optimism*, *gratitude*, *great* (*status*), etc. In particular cases, as with *m-word* (< *Malay*) and *c-word* (< *Chinese*) in (15), the full forms (as opposed to their abbreviated constructions) are a reminder of ethnic confrontations, which leads the writer to allude to [X-word] constructions in order to inform readers that *Malays* and *Chinese* are contextually disparaging, and hence they should be removed from current approaches.

> (15) The first step in disarming is simple: stop talking about Malays and Chinese—ban that M-WORD and that C-WORD from political discussions and campaigns. (*m.aliran.com*, 27/08/2019)

41   On some occasions, the concept of disparagement is reserved for the semantic process through which a referent is degraded in terms of rank or quality. The use of an [X-word] construction explicitly alludes to the fact that an [$X_{pos/neut}$]- form is debased. In example (16), for instance, Mariah Carey refers to the film *Glitter* as the *g-word*, which is a reminder of the film being a failure and being characterized by poor quality. By debasing *Glitter*, through an [X-word] construction, the singer is acknowledging the aftermath of making this film, and the negative implications of remembering this artistic setback.

> (16) Mariah has even made public peace with *Glitter*, telling Andy Cohen on *Watch What Happens Live* in 2013: "You don't understand, for years it was the G-WORD, nobody could talk about it; now I understand it as a kitsch moment in my life." (*usmagazine.com*, 21/09/2021)

3.3.2.2. Function of humor

42   Humor or hilarity underlies many instances where an [[$X_{pos/neut}$]-word] construction is used. In (17) and (18), for instance, *h-word* (< *Hyundai*) and *t-word* (< *transitory*) are used by the respective authors to, respectively, humorously ridicule and mock an attitude towards brand naming (as in *Hyundai*) or a political denomination (as in *transitory*). It is interesting to note that these extracts of hilarity contain markers of tone in a dialogical context, which are also indicative of how this type of context accepts humor-related instances more naturally than other types do. The overall humorous tone in these contexts is accomplished by the use of satirical wit and playfulness, where the writer is depreciating two semantically neutral referents to the level of taboo or unspeakable-*ness*.

> (17) And of course, there is the famous Hyundai warranty… oh, did I say the H-WORD? Oooops. (*driving.ca*, 30/08/2021)
> (18) But if you read the Fed's statement carefully, not so much: The Fed is still of the view that a lot of recent inflation is tr-tr-transit-… OK, we can't use the T-WORD anymore, so maybe say that it's fugacious? (*sltrib.com*, 20/12/2021)

3.3.2.3. Function of criticism

43   This function demonstrates that dysphemistic constructions are not just about the evaluative meaning of [X]-, but rather how the speaker 'quotes' the word, through its

initialed form, to distance themselves from it. As also shown in *t-word* (< *transitory*) in (18), [[$_{Xpos/neut}$]-word] constructions are used to convey a critical stance towards [$_{Xpos/neut}$]-. What the construction implies is that the writer does not approve of the concept expressed by the base [X]-, partly because, as with (18), the word is avoided by some speakers in the hope of manipulating what is really happening. So, the critical view of the [X-word] coiner is reflected in depreciating the meaning of [X]- through the social (or political) connotations aroused by communicative instances where the full base of [X]- is used. Rather than expressing disagreement towards the (mis)use of a word, *e-word*, as in (19), is used to turn the spotlight on the concept of evolution and on the educational necessity of addressing it. In this example in particular, what is criticized is not the concept of evolution itself, but the lack of teaching strategies to explain it as a scientific universal. The fact that the writer is stylistically using socially unacceptable constructions such as *n-word* and *a-word* in the same line as *e-word* is to make a point on the social constraints that still surround evolution in some situations. Similarly, *i-word* in (20) is used to condemn the nature of the protests, by underscoring the (mis-)judgment of them (by the media) as a form of insurrection.

> (19) I realize that in discussing issues, the N-word is disallowed for racism, the A-word for Middle East problems, but the E-WORD? Come on, you all could be using this pandemic as a teaching moment to educate people about evolution. Apparently, it's not well taught (*sfchronicle.com*, 19/06/2021)
>
> (20) While the 6th was awful, it obviously paled in comparison to a typical night of George Floyd protests. By the way, have you noticed how the "I-WORD" has disappeared? Where did the "insurrection" go? Well, it never was. (*foxnews.com*, 19/10/2021)

3.3.2.4. Function of seriousness

44 The function of seriousness is also accountable for by arousing sensitive or taboo feelings towards specific matters, such as those that are medical or social. In the cases of *c-word*, as in (20), and *a-word*, as in (21), the etymons/concepts of *cancer* and *Apartheid* are used within this type of construction because their naming is a reminder, respectively, of a life-threatening ailment and discrimination against race-based minorities.

> (20) People whispered the "C-WORD" and turned away from you as if it were some kind of contagious disease. (*The Irish Sun*, 12/08/2022)
>
> (21) When U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry got caught using the A-WORD behind closed doors to warn against failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he wasn't saying anything new. (*america.aljazeera.com*, 02/05/2022)

45 As such, these types of construction are primarily motivated by the seriousness or gravity of the concepts being initialed, which are ultimately perceived as taboo. The use of *c-word*, for instance, is built on the long-standing stigmatization of the disease, of which the feelings of death and hopelessness have formed part. Not surprisingly, there are other medical terms that follow the same pattern: *l-word* (< *Leukemia*), *m-word* (< *melanoma*), *a-word* (< *Aids*). Although these constructions might share similarities with those stemming from a euphemistic function of [X-word] (e.g. *n-word*, *f-word*) through their unspeakable and sensitive nature, the latter are overtly forbidden for reasons unrelated to seriousness.

3.3.2.5. Function of controversy

46   The [X-word] construction is also used to signal instances in which certain concepts provoke dispute or controversy. Rather than taking a particular stance towards the concept being abbreviated, the speaker/writer imports the construction in question to inform listeners/readers that [X]- is unspeakable (or relatively taboo) because it is susceptible to opposing stances. In (23), for instance, the writer does not take a particular stance towards *age*, but is aware of its potential to cause distress, or even contempt.

> (23) As you'd expect from a collection of models who have settled comfortably into middle age, they have a few things to say about this new movement. Christensen, for one, thinks it's downright insulting that now she's over 40 she's asked about the A-WORD [< *age*] at every opportunity. (*independent.ie*, 10/08/2016)

3.3.2.6. Function of foregrounding

47   The pragmatic function of foregrounding refers to the use of [X-word] constructions in underscoring a concept without any apparent point of criticism. For instance, in excerpts (23) and (24), *h-word* and *o-word* are introduced to stylistically signal that *Halloween* and *optimism* are not only the kernel of the argument while also contributing to the pointed remarks through playfulness and jocularity, but also to indicate the fact that these concepts might be socially imbued with criticism or negative appraisal.

> (23) There are many "H" words in parenting that is for sure. Happy, hug, heartfelt, healthy, and humorous are ones that are common in everyday parent living. But the big H-WORD Halloween consumes us parents sometimes starting as early as August of every year. (*coronadopreppreschool.com*, 14/10/2021)
> (24) So what's a person to do in these overwhelming, uncertain times? Okay, I can't help myself. I feel my Pollyanna Anne surfacing as I choose a different O-WORD for our times—Optimism! It seems to me that the time has come for us to remember and practice the old adage of looking on the bright side. (*ulife.vpul.upenn.edu*, 27/09/2011)

48   The case of *l-word* (25), for instance, demonstrates that the expression of foregrounding might also result in low (R) and limited MR, which is also an indication of semantic lexicalization. However, in spite of there being a clear association between foregrounding and lexicalization, this type of [X-word] construction does not escape the negative connotations inherited from the dysphemistic models. Thus, as shown in (26), *l-word* refers to the constraints of expressing *love* emotions by male individuals.

> (25) I'm a man of facts and science, but I know this – what dogs feel is not just attachment, it's love. Yes, I used the L-WORD. How else to put it, as evidence stacks up for the inherently social nature of our closest companions? (*theguardian.com*, 11/04/2022)
> (26) At the time, I thought, wow, this is unusual. I get that Brady had literally just won the Super Bowl, but a lot of people—a lot of men, in particular— aren't so quick to use the L-WORD. (*inc.com*, 06/02/2021)

49   The function of foregrounding also confirms the coercive effects of $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] constructions on the MR rate. The rather unpredictable nature of [X-word] constructions is dependent on their changing evaluative-axiological expression which regularly moves along an X-phemistic continuum. The function of foregrounding, however, does not entirely detach from this continuum, and generally connects with X-phemistic functions, particularly dysphemistic ones, which shows that the 'extent of polysemy' (Lieber & Plag [2022]) and the morphological replicability of [X-word] constructions are, in general, higher than expected. Considerably more work, however, will need to be done to determine the connection between the aspect of semantic extension and (originally) X-phemistic paradigms at the levels of pragmatics and evaluative morphology.

Conclusions

50   This study has shown that, although the earliest [X-word] constructions are euphemistic, the number of [X-word] types, or (f), is much higher in the case of dysphemistic constructions. An inductive analysis of the data shows that $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] constructions are associated with a dysphemistic function, which results from the coercive effects induced by prototypical euphemistic $[[X_{neg}]$-word] constructions. (R) emerged as a reliable predictor of the fact that morphological replicability of [X-word] categories is dependent on the evaluative meaning of [X]-. In other words, initialed bases that are originally found in offensive and contemptuous constructions such as *n-word* and *y-word* are less likely to generate $[[X_{pos/neut}]$-word] constructions. While taboo and linguistic interdiction are acknowledged as being leading factors in determining the MR rate in these constructions, the notoriety (or popularity) of a certain topic, within a specific time frame, might lower the indexes of (R), suggesting that its MR is also proportional to the overall frequency of a concept, which is not necessarily taboo, e.g. *i-word < impeach/impeachment* and *o-word < Obamacare*. The process of MR explains how the chances of coining constructions that morphologically resemble low-(R) words such as *y-word*, *f-word* or *n-word* are lower because the taboo or forbidden semantics of [X]- impedes the formation of new words with similar morphological structure to the model construction.

51   The second aim of this study was to qualitatively investigate the pragmatic functions of [X-word] that underlie the formation of X-phemistic units. There are two general functions identified in the dataset, the dysphemistic one showing a higher variety of pragmatic functions (e.g. hilarity, disparagement, criticism, seriousness, controversy and foregrounding). The function of foregrounding, which seems to fall outside the X-phemistic scope, confirms that some negative traits might be inherited by the construction, as with dysphemistic models. Although this study focuses on [X-word] constructions and their axiological-evaluative variability, the findings may well have a bearing on the implications of taboo and linguistic interdiction in word-formation and semantic shift.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDICES: Dataset of [X-word] categories, their etymons and their frequencies[23]

a-word	*abortion* (x22), *access*, *accidental* (*abuse*) (x5), *accountability*, *accounting*, *administration*, *advertising/ads* (x2), *Africa*, *age/aged* (x7), *agility*, ... *amalgamation* (x5), *amazing* (x3), *Amazon* (x2), *ambivalence*, *American*, *amnesty* (x3), *Antidisestalishmentarianism* (x4), *antioxidant*, *antisemi...* *artist*, (*sexual*) *assault*, *ass* (x8), *asshole* (x52), *atheist* (x2), *audience*, *austerity* (x4), *auteurism*, *authenticity* (x2), *autism* (x11), *automation*, *Aza...*
b-word	*bankruptcy* (x4), *baseball* (x2), *beautiful*, *Bee movie*, *bench*, *bestseller*, *bigotry*, *billionaire*, *bisexual*, *bitch* (x141), *blackout*, *bloodline*, *bored/borin...*
c-word	*caffeine*, *canceled*, *cancer* (x10), *can't* (x2), *change* (x2), *chocolate*, *choice*, *Christmas*, *chubby*, *client*, *clown*, *co-governance*, *confidence*, *conscienc...* (*Security*)
d-word	*dagga*, *dago* (x2), *damn* (x8), *dark*, *Dastard*, *dawless*, *Dawood*, *deal* (x2), *debt* (x5), *deceit*, *decentralized*, *defense*, *dehydration*, *delay* (x4), *deme...* *democracy* (x11), *demon*, *demonetisation*, *denial*, *density* (x3), *denuclearisation*, *depreciation*, *depression* (x9), *desperation* (x2), *development...* *disability*, *disaffection*, *disappointment*, *discounts/discounting* (x2), *disgrace*, *disruption* (x4), *distinction*, *distraction* (x2), *diversity* (x7), *divisio...* *draw*, *driverless* (*train*), *drone* (x2), *drought*, *dumb*, *Dutch* (*treat*), *Duterte*, *dynasty* (x4)
e-word	*eats*, *Easter*, *easy*, *eccentricity*, *economy* (x3), *editorial*, *education/educational* (x2), *efficiency* (x7), *effort*, *eject*, *elderly* (x4), *electable* (x2), *electi...* (x2), *ensure*, *entitled/entitlement* (x3), *ephemeral*, *epidemic* (x9), *equality*, *equal* (*treatment*), *eradicate*, *ergonomics*, (*Edmonton*) *Eskimos* (x3... *experimentalist*, *expert* (x3), *extra effort* (x2), *extramusical*
f-word	*faggot* (x11), *fallowing*, *famine* (x2), *farmer* (*spending*), *fascism* (x3), *fat*, *fear*, *federalism* (x3), *feminist/feminism* (x6), *Fenian*, *fifty*, *forgiveness*, ...
g-word	*5G*, *galaxy*, *gallery*, *gambling*, *gangster* (x3), *gardening*, *gay* (x4), *geek* (x2), *genealogy*, *genius* (x2), *genocide* (x43), *gentleman*, *gentrification* (x... *glamping*, *Glitter* (*film*), *gluten*, *God* (x10), *God damn it*, *godfather* (*of politics*) (x3), *gold* (*medal*), *Google*, *gook*, *gorilla*, *Gotcha* (*Day*), *government...* *grunge*, *Guantanamo* (x2), *guilt* (x5), *gun*, *Guptas*, *gut*

h-word	Halloween, happiness (x11), Harper (Government), Haskell, hate (x3), health, heart, heaven, hegemony (x10), Heisman (x3), heritage, hero (x3), (x8), hotnot (x4), how's-it-going, hubris, (John) Hutton, Hybe, hydrogen (x3), hypocrite (x2), Hyundai (x2)
i-word	I, icon, ideas, identification, idiot (x4), illegal (x6), immigrant/immigration (x8), impeach/impeachment (x94), imperialism, impossible, imp inspiration (x2), insurrection, integration (x3), (no) intention, interruptible (x4), intolerance (x2), invasion (x11), investigation, investment (x5),
k-word	Kaffir (x162), Karen (x3), keling (x12), kike (x18), kill, kindness, kleptomaniac (x2), Korean
l-word	lay off, legacy (x4), leftovers, legend, leprosy, lesbian (x14), leverage, liberal (x13), lie/liar (x12), like, lockdown (x12), loser, loss (x2), love (x121)
m-word	magic, magician, Magneto, maestro, makwerekwere, Malays (x3), Malabar, Malibu, (shopping) malls, mama, Mama (June), manager, manda masterwork, masturbate, maternity, maverick, McCarthyism, McVay, media, Mega, melon, memoirs, Memphis, menopause (x3), menstruation Mexican, Michael Milken, Mick, Microsoft, middle-aged, midget (x34), migration, Milan (Design Week), MILF, militia, (soy) milk, millennial (x5), (x3), Moriarty, Mormon, moron, mother (x3), motherfucker, movement, movie (x3), moving, Mukhtar (Ansari), multiculturalism (x2), Mum, mur
n-word	nigger (x195), nuclear (weapon) (x3)
o-word	Obamacare (x3), obesity (x5), objectivity, obsession, occupy (x4), Ofsted, oil, Olympics, Omicron, opportunity, opposition (x3), optimism (x6), ordi
p-word	pact, pageant, Paki (x51), Pakistan, Palestine/Palestinian (x3), pandemic (x17), patriotism, (the) Patriots, pecking (order), pedophilia/pedophile privatisation (x2), privilege (x2), Prosecco, progressive (x2), productivity, public (health), punk, purchase, purpose (x2), push n., push v., pussy '
q-word	quarantine (x8), quarter-final, queer (x12), queue (jumping), queynte, quiet, quit, quirky, quota (x13)
r-word	racist/racism (x8), ranching, rape (x3), rebuild, recession (x94), Reddit, redskin (x5), refill, rehearsal, relegation, remake, reparations, Republic,
s-word	sanctions, scale, Schizophrenia, schmuck, Scientology, scrutiny, scum, scumbag, secularism (x5), segregation (x2), self-esteem, selfish, sell (x8), se (x5), social, Socialism/socialist (x25), socialite, so good, soft-spoken, solipsist, son of a bitch, sorry (x6), soybean, sovereign, spastic (x3), special sublime, submission (x2), succession, suicide (x7), superhero, surgery (x2), surge, surprised, Surrender (Act), surveillance, sustainable/sustainab
t-word	tablecloth, tainted, Tampon, tanking (a season) (x4), tapas, taper, taxes/taxation (x15), (carbon) tax, teetotaller, Tem (Michael Barnes), tequil Tita, Titanic, tits, Toronto, torture, Tottenham (x2), tourist/tourism (x6), toxic (x2), Tracer (bullet), trade (balance), tranny (x4) transfer (x2), tr treaty (x2), tribal (battles), trillion, Trinitarian, trivialize, trolley, trophy, Trump (x24), trust n., trust v., truth, Trypanophobia, (The) Tudors, tur
u-word	uber (x3), ugly (3), Umweltfreundlichkeit, uncertainty, understeer, unionist (x2), universality, unlawful, unprecedented, uranium
v-word	vaccination (x12), vaccines (x16), vagina (x8), value, vampire (x9), vape, VAR, vasectomy, vegan (x4), veggie (x8), vendetta, Venezuela, verifia vulnerability
x-word	extirpation (x2), xenophobic/xenophobia (x14), (Nick) Xenophon (x2), xeriscape
y-word	Yid (x152), yips (x4), yoga (x2)

| z-word | *zeitgeist*, *Zionist* (x12), *zombie* (x7), *zombification* (x4), *zone* (*element*) (x3), *zoning*, *Zuma* |

NOTES

1. A CH is a type of hybrid initialism which involves a full base and a letter (or initialed base) that represents a taboo notion. There are two types of hybrid initialisms: (i) a phrase initialism (e.g. *a off* [< *ass off*], *as f* [< *as fuck*]), in which the initialism already forms part of the phrase; and (ii) a compound hybrid (e.g. *a-hole*, *f-word*), in which the initialism is a compound base, whose distorted (or initialed) form is interpreted as taboo.

2. CHs are compounds "made up of a noun and a letter of the alphabet and [they] are sometimes referred to as letter compounds; the letter often stands for a word which is deliberately left out" (Widawski [2015: 23]).

3. Following convention, the initialed base is lowercase in the examples of [X-word] forms used throughout this article.

4. The term 'construction' that is used in this study to describe a lexical unit of the type [X-word] is based on Booij's [2010] notion of 'construction', which is understood as a generalization of form and meaning that is abstracted at the level of word structure.

5. For more information on the pragmatic function of controversy, see Section 3.3.2.5.

6. The definition of coercion that is used in this study is based on Audring & Booij's [2016] and Booij & Audring's [2018] research works in that the meaning of a morphological construction, such as [X-word] in *n-word*, can override the semantics of the base [X]- in analogical constructions, such as *l-word* (< *love*), in which the base *l-* is coerced into negative axiology.

7. The term 'pragmatic motivation' is based on Berkenfield's [2006] findings on how pragmatic inferences are largely dependent on various aspects such as "discourse function" and "frequency effects related to semantic properties of the construction in discourse" (Berkenfield [2006: 39]).

8. Examples extracted from Burridge [2012] and Allan [2016].

9. All these lexical units are extracted from the NOW Corpus.

10. For more information on the use of the misspelled acronym *fcuk* (*off*), see Waters [2012].

11. This universal principle is based on Brown & Levinson's [1987] politeness theory, whereby a euphemism is strategically used as a mitigator of a face-threatening act.

12. Italics in the original.

13. The word *femo* (< *feminist*) is mainly used in Australian English.

14. 'Stance b' is one of the lexical representations used by B to convey his/her stance towards the prototypical concept.

15. A full table with all the [X-word] types/tokens extracted for each [X-word] category can be found in the Appendix section.

16. Although the NOW Corpus is limited to written instances, such as newsfeeds and blogs, it is used here because it generates the highest number of [X-word] categories. The NOW Corpus contains 17.4 billion words of data, particularly extracted from magazines and newspapers. The corpus is available at https://www.english-corpora.org/now/.

17. These dates are extracted from OED3.

18. For a detailed account of (f) in each [X-word] construction, see Table 2.

19. A complete list of [X-word] tokens can be found in the Appendices, where they are ordered alphabetically, and the number of times the construction is found in the corpus is indicated in parenthesis.

20. All the values of (F) in this first column correspond to the first 200 hits.

21. These instances of *impeach/impeachment* refer to the Trump impeachment trials in the Senate in 2019.

22. These terms, as specified in the objectives, are merely aimed at illustrating the variability of intentions or motivations behind the use of [X-word].

23. The cases of [X-word] constructions being used as titles of books, names of companies or of podcasts, are excluded from the dataset.

ABSTRACTS

The objective of this study is twofold. Firstly, it aims to examine the process of morphological replicability (MR) of [X-word] constructions (e.g. *n-word*, *f-word*, *l-word*) through the effects of the evaluative meaning of [X]- on the overall frequency of these constructions in the data. Employing a combination of the usage-based and the prototype approaches, this research study seeks to assess how dysphemistic constructions analogically extend out from prototypical euphemistic ones through MR. The second objective is to attempt at illustrating, from a pragmatic perspective, the variety of intentions behind the use of [X-word] constructions. The dataset, which is extracted from the NOW Corpus, includes a total of 24 [X-word] categories (e.g. *a-word*, *b-word*), the first 200 hits in each of which are examined to determine the meaning of [X]- and the pragmatic function associated with the construction, as well as to calculate the index (R), which is directly proportional to the MR rate. The index (R) is measured by dividing the total number of [X]- bases, or (f), by the total number of [X-word] constructions, or (F). The findings show that [X-word] constructions with a dysphemistic function (e.g. *f-word < feminism*) have a higher (f), suggesting that the euphemistic [X-word] is coerced into the dysphemistic form, which has an impact on the aspects of MR and pragmatic multifunctionality. (R), which is numerically lower in the constructions where [X]- stems from an interdictive or taboo etymon (e.g. *n-word*), corroborates the proposition that [X-word] constructions such as *n-word* and *y-word* are less likely to be morphologically replicated. Another important finding is that the metapragmatic aspect of usage is responsible for the variability of dysphemistic effects, which are expressed through various pragmatic functions such as humor, criticism, seriousness, etc.

L'objectif de cette étude est double. Premièrement, elle vise à examiner le processus de réplicabilité morphologique (RM) des constructions anglaises du type [X-mot] (par exemple *n-mot*, *f-mot*, *l-mot*) à travers les effets de sens évaluatif de [X]- sur la fréquence globale de ces constructions dans les données étudiées. En combinant approches basées sur l'usage et prototype, cette étude cherche à évaluer comment les constructions dysphémiques s'étendent analogiquement à partir des constructions euphémiques prototypiques par le biais de la RM. Le deuxième objectif est de tenter d'illustrer, d'un point de vue pragmatique, la variété des intentions qui sous-tendent l'utilisation des constructions [X-mot]. L'ensemble de données, extrait du corpus NOW, comprend un total de 24 catégories de [X-mot] (par exemple, *a-mot*, *b-mot*), dont les 200 premières occurrences sont examinées pour déterminer le sens de [X]- et la fonction pragmatique associée à la construction, et pour calculer l'indice (R), qui est directement proportionnel au taux de RM. L'indice (R) est mesuré en divisant le nombre total de bases [X]-, ou (f), par le nombre total de constructions [X-mot], ou (F). Les résultats montrent que les constructions [X-mot] ayant une fonction dysphémique (par exemple, le *f-mot < feminism*) ont un indice (f) plus élevé, ce qui suggère que le [X-mot] euphémique est contraint de revêtir une forme

dysphémique, ce qui a un impact sur les aspects de la RM et de la multifonctionnalité pragmatique. (R), qui est numériquement plus bas dans les constructions où [X]- provient d'un étymon interdictif ou tabou (par exemple *n-mot*), corrobore la proposition selon laquelle les constructions [X-mot] telles que *n-mot* et *y-mot* sont moins susceptibles d'être répliquées morphologiquement. Un autre résultat important est que l'aspect métapragmatique de l'usage est responsable de la variabilité des effets dysphémiques, qui s'expriment à travers diverses fonctions pragmatiques telles que l'humour, la critique, le sérieux, etc.

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