



# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EUPHEMISMS IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN CULTURES

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## Abstract

Euphemisms function as culturally sensitive linguistic tools for managing taboo and face-threatening topics. This study employs a linguoculturological approach to compare English and Russian euphemisms in the domains of death and mortality, bodily functions and intimacy, and social vulnerabilities. Using comparative-contrastive, discourse, and cultural script analysis, the research reveals both universal mechanisms and culture-specific patterns. English favors standardized lexical mitigation and institutional politeness, while Russian relies more on contextual flexibility, ritual formulas, and pragmatic resilience. These differences reflect distinct national linguocultural identities. Findings contribute to cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** Euphemism, linguoculturology, cultural scripts, English-Russian contrastive analysis, taboo, politeness.

## Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of cultural values, social norms, and collective ways of thinking. One of the clearest examples of the close relationship between language and culture is euphemistic language. Euphemisms are indirect or softened expressions used instead of words



and phrases that may sound rude, offensive, unpleasant, or socially inappropriate. People use euphemisms to discuss sensitive topics such as death, illness, bodily functions, sexuality, disability, poverty, and social inequality while reducing emotional discomfort and maintaining politeness in communication. The study of euphemisms has become an important area of modern linguistics because euphemistic expressions reveal significant aspects of national mentality, communicative etiquette, and cultural worldview. Euphemisms are closely connected with pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguoculturology since they demonstrate how societies conceptualize taboo topics and regulate interpersonal interaction through language. Although euphemisms exist in all languages, their forms, frequency, and communicative functions differ depending on cultural traditions, historical development, and social values. English and Russian provide an especially interesting basis for comparative analysis because both languages possess rich euphemistic systems while representing different communicative cultures. English euphemistic discourse is often associated with emotional restraint, individual privacy, indirectness, and institutional politeness. Euphemisms in English frequently rely on lexical neutralization, understatement, and standardized person-first terminology, especially in public and professional communication. Russian euphemistic discourse, by contrast, demonstrates greater contextual flexibility, emotional expressiveness, and reliance on interpersonal relations and shared cultural understanding. Russian speakers often combine euphemisms with implication, humor, ritual formulas, and emotionally colored expressions depending on the communicative situation.

These cultural differences become particularly visible in sensitive thematic domains such as death and mortality, bodily functions and intimacy, and social vulnerability. In both languages, universal cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy are actively used to soften taboo topics. However, the linguistic realization of these mechanisms reflects different national communicative traditions and value systems. English discourse tends to prioritize politeness toward a broad audience and emotional moderation, while Russian communication more often emphasizes communal solidarity, relational closeness, and pragmatic emotional expression. The growing importance of intercultural communication in the modern world increases the relevance of



studying euphemistic language from a linguoculturological perspective. In multilingual and multicultural societies, successful communication requires not only grammatical competence but also understanding of cultural norms, pragmatic strategies, and socially acceptable forms of expression. Euphemisms play an important role in avoiding communicative conflict, preserving dignity, and expressing social sensitivity. Therefore, the comparative study of English and Russian euphemisms contributes to a deeper understanding of cultural differences in communication and may be especially useful for language teaching, translation studies, and intercultural communication in contexts such as Uzbekistan.

## **METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative, comparative-contrastive methodology grounded in the framework of linguoculturology as developed in the Russian scholarly tradition. The study integrates several complementary methods: the descriptive-analytical method was used to define, classify, and systematize euphemisms according to their typology, functions, and formation mechanisms; the comparative-contrastive method served to identify both universal features and culture-specific characteristics of euphemistic strategies in English and Russian; discourse and contextual analysis enabled the examination of euphemisms as they appear in authentic communicative situations, including obituaries, condolence messages, institutional texts, medical discourse, and everyday interactions; and cultural script analysis was applied to interpret linguistic choices in relation to underlying cultural norms, values, and communicative expectations.

The primary data sources consisted of scholarly literature on euphemisms by both international and Russian researchers, empirical studies such as corpus-informed analyses of English obituary discourse, phraseological units and conventional expressions from both languages, institutional and bureaucratic texts, lexicographic materials, and illustrative examples drawn from real communicative genres. Analysis was carried out in three main stages: first, theoretical systematization of the conceptualization, typology, functions, and formation mechanisms of euphemisms; second, a domain-by-domain comparative analysis focusing on death and mortality, bodily functions and intimacy, and social vulnerabilities; and third, an interpretive synthesis of the findings through the lenses of cultural constants, facework, and national



communicative etiquette. The study is predominantly qualitative in nature, with no quantitative statistical processing, as the emphasis lies on identifying patterns, interpreting cultural meanings, and revealing linguocultural specificities rather than measuring frequencies.

## RESULTS

### Death and Mortality Euphemisms:

Both languages exhibit rich euphemistic repertoires that are rooted in universal human taboos surrounding death and mortality. In both English and Russian, speakers tend to avoid direct words such as *die* or *умереть* in everyday communication because they may sound too harsh, emotionally painful, or socially inappropriate. Instead, euphemisms help soften the emotional impact of death and make communication more polite, respectful, and culturally acceptable. One of the most common conceptual metaphors in both languages is *death is departure*. In English, expressions such as *pass away*, *gone*, *departed*, and *no longer with us* present death as a journey or leaving this world. Russian uses similar expressions, including *уйти из жизни*, *покинул нас*, and *отойти*, which also conceptualize death as departure rather than physical ending. This similarity demonstrates that many cultures share universal cognitive mechanisms for dealing with difficult realities. Another widespread metaphor is *death is rest or sleep*. English expressions like *rest in peace* and *laid to rest* portray death as calmness and eternal peace. Russian euphemisms such as *уснул навсегда* and *упокоился* reflect the same idea of peaceful rest after life. These metaphors reduce fear and emotional tension by replacing the idea of death with images of sleep, silence, and tranquility. Despite these similarities, English and Russian differ in their preferred communicative styles. English euphemistic discourse often reflects emotional restraint and indirectness. Speakers usually prefer controlled understatement and formal expressions such as the deceased or late. In obituary discourse, euphemisms are commonly used to maintain dignity and respectful distance. In 2017 Hänggi and Diederich note that departure metaphors account for approximately 25.3% of obituary references, while the expression passed away has become highly conventional in modern English. English obituaries also frequently emphasize peaceful passing, family support, and personal legacy, creating a calm and respectful narrative tone. Russian



euphemistic discourse, on the other hand, tends to be more emotionally expressive and culturally ritualized. Russian often employs impersonal absence constructions such as *его не стало* and *её больше нет*, which focus on loss and absence rather than the act of dying itself. In addition, Russian communication strongly incorporates collective solidarity and spiritual traditions through formulas like *царство небесное*, *вечная память*, and *земля пухом*. These expressions are deeply connected with Orthodox Christian traditions and cultural ideas about remembrance and respect for the dead. Lexical choice in Russian also carries strong evaluative meaning. For example, *скончался* sounds formal and respectful, *погиб* usually implies tragic or violent circumstances, while *ушёл* appears softer and more emotional. English also contains stylistic variation, but Russian demonstrates a greater degree of emotional and contextual nuance in euphemistic choice. Overall, the comparison shows that although both languages rely on universal metaphorical mechanisms, their euphemistic systems reflect different cultural values, communicative traditions, and attitudes toward emotional expression.

### **Bodily Functions and Intimacy:**

English relies heavily on standardized lexical displacement and sanitization when referring to bodily functions and intimate topics. Direct expressions are often replaced with softer and socially acceptable alternatives such as *restroom*, *bathroom*, *to go to the bathroom*, *make love*, or *that time of the month*. These euphemisms help speakers avoid embarrassment and maintain politeness in both formal and everyday communication. English culture generally favors indirectness and privacy in discussing bodily matters, so euphemistic language becomes an important strategy for reducing discomfort in social interaction. Another noticeable feature of English is the strong role of clinical and neutral vocabulary. Medical or semi-formal terms are often used as socially acceptable middle-ground options, especially in public discourse, media, healthcare, and education. Such expressions sound less emotional and less vulgar than direct colloquial language. This tendency reflects the English preference for emotional restraint and linguistic moderation when dealing with sensitive or intimate subjects. Russian, by contrast, demonstrates greater contextual flexibility and more noticeable register switching. Some words that may sound too direct in



English, such as *туалет*, function relatively neutrally in everyday Russian speech without creating strong discomfort. At the same time, Russian speakers frequently rely on implication, ellipsis, diminutives, humor, and ironic metaphors in informal communication. Instead of directly naming bodily functions or intimate topics, speakers may hint at them indirectly or use playful expressions that reduce tension through humor and familiarity. Russian euphemistic communication is also highly dependent on social context and interpersonal relationships. Informal conversations among friends or family members often allow greater openness and expressive language than English conversations in similar situations. However, institutional or technical vocabulary in Russian may sound overly bureaucratic, cold, or unnatural outside professional contexts. As a result, Russian speakers tend to move more freely between formal, neutral, and expressive registers depending on the situation and the relationship between speakers. Overall, the comparison shows that both languages use euphemisms to avoid discomfort and preserve politeness, but they do so in different ways. English tends to rely on standardized and socially normalized euphemistic formulas, while Russian allows more situational creativity, emotional expressiveness, and flexibility in register choice. These differences reflect broader cultural attitudes toward privacy, emotional expression, and acceptable public communication.

### **Social Vulnerabilities:**

English strongly favors person-first and experience-first language when referring to socially vulnerable groups. Expressions such as person with a disability, people experiencing homelessness, economically disadvantaged, and justice-involved are widely used in institutional, academic, media, and professional discourse. These euphemisms aim to avoid stigmatization by placing emphasis on the individual rather than the condition or social status. Such language reflects a broader cultural tendency toward political correctness, inclusivity, and dignity-oriented communication. In English-speaking societies, careful lexical choice is often viewed as an important way of demonstrating respect and social sensitivity. Another important feature of English euphemistic discourse is its high level of standardization. Institutions, educational systems, media organizations, and public services actively promote preferred terminology, which gradually becomes



normalized in everyday communication. As a result, many euphemisms in this sphere function almost as official linguistic norms. This process demonstrates how language is shaped not only by cultural values but also by institutional policies and social movements focused on equality and representation. Russian also uses institutional euphemisms in discussions of social vulnerability. Expressions such as *человек с ограниченными возможностями, лица без определённого места жительства, социально незащищённые*, and optimization-related terminology are common in official and bureaucratic discourse. These forms similarly attempt to soften direct reference to disability, poverty, unemployment, or social difficulties. However, unlike English, Russian institutional euphemisms often coexist with more direct and less formal everyday expressions. Speakers may alternate between official terminology and simpler colloquial language depending on the communicative situation. In Russian communication, empathy and politeness are often conveyed not only through lexical replacement but also through tone, context, intonation, and interpersonal relations. The emotional attitude of the speaker may be understood through pragmatic cues rather than through carefully redesigned terminology alone. As a result, Russian discourse can appear more flexible and less standardized in this area compared to English. In some situations, overly formal euphemistic language may even sound distant, artificial, or bureaucratic to Russian speakers. The comparison demonstrates that both languages attempt to reduce stigma and preserve social respect when discussing vulnerable groups, but they employ different communicative strategies. English relies more heavily on institutionalized person-first terminology and lexical reform, while Russian places greater emphasis on contextual sensitivity, relational communication, and pragmatic expression of empathy. These differences reflect broader cultural attitudes toward social identity, politeness, and the role of language in shaping public perception.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study confirm the main hypothesis. Although both English and Russian employ universal euphemistic mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, generalization, and technicalization, the ways these mechanisms are used and culturally embedded differ considerably. Euphemisms in both languages serve the



common purpose of softening taboo, uncomfortable, or socially sensitive topics, yet their linguistic realization reflects different cultural values and communicative traditions. English euphemistic discourse is closely connected with cultural scripts that emphasize individual privacy, emotional restraint, indirectness, and politeness toward a broad audience. Speakers often prefer carefully neutralized and standardized expressions that minimize emotional intensity and avoid direct confrontation with sensitive realities. This tendency is especially visible in institutional language, public communication, and formal discourse, where euphemisms function as markers of social tact and inclusivity. Russian euphemistic patterns, in contrast, are more strongly associated with communal solidarity, relational closeness, and pragmatic emotional expression. Russian communication often allows greater contextual flexibility and emotional nuance, while politeness is conveyed not only through lexical replacement but also through tone, interpersonal relations, and shared cultural understanding. Euphemisms in Russian therefore tend to be more situational and emotionally colored, especially in informal interaction. The comparison demonstrates that euphemisms are not merely linguistic substitutions but important reflections of national mentality, cultural norms, and communicative behavior. They reveal how different societies conceptualize taboo, politeness, dignity, and emotional expression. In this sense, euphemistic language functions as a sensitive indicator of national linguocultural identity and value systems.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that euphemistic language serves as an important reflection of national linguocultural identity. Although English and Russian employ similar cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, generalization, and indirect reference, they organize euphemistic communication according to different cultural priorities and communicative traditions. Both languages aim to soften taboo or sensitive topics, yet the linguistic strategies they use reveal differences in worldview, politeness norms, and emotional expression. The analysis shows that English euphemistic discourse is strongly connected with values such as individual privacy, emotional restraint, political correctness, and institutional standardization. English speakers often prefer neutralized and socially standardized expressions, especially in public and professional



communication. Russian euphemistic discourse, in contrast, demonstrates greater emotional flexibility, contextual variation, and reliance on relational communication. In Russian, empathy and politeness are frequently conveyed not only through lexical replacement but also through tone, implication, and shared cultural understanding. The comparison of the three thematic domains: death and mortality, bodily functions and intimacy, and social vulnerability confirms that euphemisms are deeply connected with cultural scripts and national value systems. Universal metaphors such as *death is departure* and *death is rest* appear in both languages, but their communicative realization differs according to cultural expectations regarding politeness, solidarity, and emotional expression. The findings show that euphemisms are not simply linguistic substitutions but important tools for maintaining social harmony, reducing communicative tension, and expressing cultural values. From a practical perspective, the research highlights the importance of culturally informed approaches in language teaching, translation, and intercultural communication. Understanding euphemistic strategies can help future English teachers and translators avoid pragmatic misunderstandings and communicate more effectively in multicultural contexts such as Uzbekistan. The study confirms that euphemisms function as sensitive indicators of national linguocultural identity and reflect how different societies perceive taboo, politeness, and social relationships through language.

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