

## The motivation behind the creation of euphemisms

Denis Jamet

*University of Lyon (Jean Moulin Lyon 3)*

*Euphemisms are embedded so deeply in our language that few of us, even those who pride themselves on being plain speakers, never get through a day without using them. [Rawson 1981: 1]*

According to Allan & Burridge [1991: 11], “[a] **euphemism** is used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one’s own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or some third party.” The word “alternative” seems to imply that there is always a choice for speakers, according to the situation of utterance, the interlocutor(s), the register, etc. Yet, in some cases, there does not seem to be much choice, and some euphemisms are completely lexicalized as they have imposed themselves as the only acceptable ways to refer to a given referent or a given notion. This may be the case for politically-correct terms for instance, or for euphemisms referring to notions that are deemed too shocking or painful to be directly mentioned.

The motivations underlying the lexical creation of euphemisms are varied, and depend on various criteria that need to be taken into account. Allan & Burridge [2006: 96] made this clear when they write that “[e]uphemism is driven by many different things: euphemistic expressions can of course be motivated by a desire not to offend, but they are also motivated by the wish to display in-group identity markers, the wish to upgrade whatever they denote, and even the display of wit.” This presentation therefore aims to discuss the aspects of word-formation process in the euphemistic lexicon, and to bring out the various reasons underlying the creation – and potential success – of euphemisms, depending on the domains they refer to, the society resorting to them, the reasons why they are used and the types of euphemisms (protective euphemisms, underhand euphemisms, uplifting euphemisms, provocative euphemisms, cohesive euphemisms, ludic euphemisms, etc.).

### References

- Allan, Keith & Burridge, Kate (1991). *Euphemism and Dysphemism. Language Used As Shield and Weapon*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Allan, Keith & Burridge, Kate (2007). *Forbidden Words. Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Allan, Keith, Burridge, Kate, Crespo-Fernandez, Eliecer & Jamet, Denis. Euphemism as a Word-Formation Process. In *Lexis – Journal in English Lexicology* 7. <http://lexis.revues.org/334>.
- Jamet, Denis & Jobert, Manuel (2013). *Aspects of Linguistic Impoliteness*. Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Jamet, Denis & Jobert, Manuel (2010). *Empreintes de l’euphémisme. Tours et détours*. Paris, L’Harmattan.