Truths and Euphemisms:
How Euphemisms Are Used in the Political Arena

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ABSTRACT

Politicians are notorious for their employment of words in a disguised fashion through the usage of euphemisms. Consequently, their message becomes a recurrent theme of conspicuous deception. Elected government representatives deliberately engage in grandiloquent expression conscious of its subversive capacity. The deviancy of euphemisms is guided by social norms that politicians are permitted to exercise in order to safeguard their images. When politicians envelop seemingly good intentions with conscious deception, people are harmed in the process. Those in power transgress justice and commit crimes with their overwhelming command of euphemisms. In fact, euphemisms are utilized as masks, hiding truths under the protective tones of a speaker with a genuine, worthwhile goal. Selective vocabulary is employed to arouse, rationalize and justify. To achieve this end, politicians misrepresent the facts of various political situations by using terms that completely transform or falsify them. Euphemisms are used simplistically in daily conversations. However, where they are used and misused more frequently is in the political arena, in such cases as "soft targets" or "peace keepers" or "collateral damage." These expressions are heard frequently, while past ones are forgotten and new ones primed in their place as transgressions continue. In this paper, I will make use of Jurgen Habermas' public sphere theory, a critical theory that demonstrates how the audience's outlook affects political action. This article will demonstrate the deliberate use of euphemisms in political language both as a cultural element and as one that is constantly changing to suit the ever-changing political arena.

Keywords: politics; euphemism; dysphemisms; political correctness

POLITICAL USE OF EUPHEMISMS AND ONE'S COGNITION

LEARNED THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Public cognition is the basic, primary element of our reasoning. We rely on our knowledge to assist us through the fabric of life that incessantly unfolds ahead of us. We trust our instincts and logic for guidance rather than our emotions. We are verbally conditioned to the extent that we seldom second-guess how to decipher a message cognitively. It is observable that despite a detailed classification of euphemisms, their origin may be accounted for by cognitive terms of categorization and conceptualization. When the importance of cognitive linguistics and the mechanisms of human perception are emphasized, we realize how vital euphemisms have become. Allan and Burridge (2006) in *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language* reiterate, "What determines them is a set of social attitudes or conventions that vary considerably between groups and individuals" (p. 98). These social attitudes accustom us to believe in our politicians and have faith in their words.

SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND THOUGHT

Collectively then, if we are cognitively familiar with words and conscious of the importance of their correct usage, language develops because of the interaction between human

characteristics and the environment. Habermas's concept of the public sphere described "a space of practices between the private interests in civil society and state power"; he was concerned with "political consciousness" and "reducing citizen participation in the welfare state because dominating power rested in the hands of the state" (Keller, n.d., paras. 5-6). Therefore, because of social attitudes and observations, we not only articulate what is "best practice" but also what is "uniform practice" (Allan & Burridge, 2006, p.112). The euphemisms politicians use confuse people, hindering individual thought and conscious decision-making. McGlone and Batchelor (2003) add in *Looking Out for Number One: Euphemism and Face,* "To accurately identify [politicians'] motives for using euphemisms in a given situation, one must employ a methodology less susceptible to reactive responding" (p. 254). It is widely believed and accepted that there is invariably a veiled motive and much left undisclosed behind a politician's message.

Robinson (1991) writes in *Henry James and Euphemism* that, "The 'normal' meaning or use of a word or phrase is always better, more accurate, more truthful, more rational, than a 'deviant' meaning or usage" (p. 409). Many of us do not know any better when hearing a deviant message - the simplicity of our lives dictates the simplicity of our capacity. As the ambitions of politicians increase, so does their deviance as they tie the "conception of euphemism to ideology" (Robinson, 1991, p. 413) - the assortment of objectives and notions directing one's goals, expectations, and procedures. It is striking, therefore, to note how euphemisms affect our behaviour and attitude and the extent to which we believe our politicians. In her article, *An Endless Coded Stream*, Assunta Martin (2007), explains:

> Sociolinguistics encompasses the vast realm of human language behaviour in all social dynamics as expressed in social class, gender distinctions, and varieties of the spoken language, language diversity, language acquisition, semiotics, and language as a tool or weapon, to name but a sampling of the specific areas within the field. (p.56)

At times, politicians may lie, but that does not appear to be their primary intention; they have speculative looks, uncertainty on their brows and composed anticipation. They may stretch the truth, but do not intend to harm. In the end, they do not want to admit fault for any circumstances. They adroitly manage to avoid any serious trouble for themselves. It is interesting to observe how the human psyche reacts to shield itself against malign fate and the disapproval of others. Mary Douglas (1921) is a symbolic anthropologist who examines how people provide significance to their reality and believes that "humans actively create meanings in their social lives in order to maintain their society" (p.1). In an excerpt from her book, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Douglas (1921) identifies the concern for purity as a key theme at the heart of every society: "By defining what is polluted, people classify their social life into two opposite categories: what is acceptable and what is unacceptable" (p. 2). The notion of pollution does not apply in this case to contamination of the environment but corruption of society and government. Allen & Burridge (2006) answer, "As Douglas sees it, the distinction between cleanliness and filth stems from the basic need for categorization…" (p. 123). Within this ideology, it is a natural desire or priority for politicians to maintain their social status in order to safeguard their position.

PROTECTING SELF-IMAGE AND FACE

McGlone and Batchelor (2003) inform us that, "Communicators have two possible motives for referring to a distasteful topic euphemistically: to minimize threat to the addressee's face and to minimize threat to their own" (p. 251), but they are inclined to use them more for self-presentational purposes than out of concern for their addressee's sensibilities. If they wish to

attain a personal achievement, they employ a vocabulary that they calculate provides the necessary reaction – deflecting any blame from them. Situations that threaten their status are either avoided or mitigated. However, "Face threatening situations nevertheless do occur, and when they do, interlocutors collaboratively employ politeness strategies to mitigate the threat" (McGlone & Batchelor, 2003, p. 252). To downplay the situation, euphemisms are used to create a favorable environment for the politician to continue to maintain his position. Allan and Burridge (2006) add, "Those who are skilled at this are said to have social *savoir faire*; they are said to be perceptive and diplomatic" (p. 33). Therefore, the two reasons for using euphemisms are inseparable, but primarily are "to preserve their own face" (McGlone & Batchelor, 2003, p. 253). While a politician protects his own face, he is also expected to be considerate concerning the face of others. Although this is a given in his social environment, it unfortunately rarely happens.

The magnitude of "number one" is the prime element of self-image and self-existence and, therefore, politicians operate in any manner that sustains personal public image. It is, hence, more self-serving to use euphemisms. Subsequently, if euphemisms are a defensive maneuver, a mechanism for self-preservation when raising an awkward topic by suppressing and distorting the truth, politicians are directly protecting their sensibilities and preserving their self-esteem. After all, language, among other functions, is a device that men use to their advantage. Although a politician is at times mindful that he is suspected of deviousness, watching out for "number one" is what ultimately counts.

Robinson (1991) adds, "More broadly, too, the traditional criticism of euphemism, that it is deviant in being neither precise nor concise, rests upon social norms governing rational discourse that are of relatively recent historical origin" (p. 411). In addition, as Valentine (1998) explains in *Naming the Other Power, Politeness and the Inflation of Euphemisms*, "for the sake of good taste in polite [political] society, …directly abusive terms may be exchanged for euphemisms that are in fact softer terms of ridicule" (p. 5). Yuxiang Li (2005), a lecturer in Chinese language*,* stated in his article titled *Culture and Language,* "Others treated culture in a more abstract way as the shared knowledge of members of social communities like world views, value orientations, norms, manners, customs, preferred styles of thinking and arguing …" (p. 23). Allan and Burridge (2006) continue by saying that politeness is sensitive to social standing, and it "is the ritual of society, as prayers are …" (p. 30). Therefore, culturally, we share politeness and tolerance during arguments. With this outlook towards a cognitive and social dimension in politics, a definition of euphemism could be found that is fuller and truer to its essence, but "the demand for euphemisms, in the absence of any controls on the supply … in itself leads to inflation of euphemisms: they grow and grow" (Valentine, 1998, p. 8).

GROUPS HIT HARD BY POWERFUL PEOPLE USING EUPHEMISMS

NAMING AS A FORM OF POLITICAL CONTROL

Naming is a means of identification, a form of power that helps establish definitions of self. People are marginalized through domination and conceptions of racial and sexual identity from beginning to end by euphemisms and naming. Valentine (1998) explains in that "Definitional power is socially distributed: … often in the form of euphemisms. It is argued that the demand for euphemisms is generated by etiquette, modernist ideology and the power of protest" (p. 1). Support from Jurgen Habermas' public sphere theory maintains that "big economic and governmental organizations took over the public sphere, while citizens became content to become primarily consumers of goods, services and political administration" (Keller,

n.d., para. 11). It was the aspirations of politicians that made them assume the prerogative to defining power and controlling groups.

Ascribed names "can be forced on recipients against their will … unpleasant nicknames, focusing on deviations from the normal and 'right' " (Valentine, 1998, p. 2). Interestingly, "naming often says less of the named and more of the namer," (p. 14) which is frequently seen in politics, not just in the politicians' view of the world and themselves, but also their presumptions of knowing what to say. What form of abuse is this to those who are named? Valentine (1998) explains by saying, "The named is already bounded, confined within limits…" (p. 3) and there is no choice but to accept. We allow this disrespect and in many cases it is inherited by our children. We thus permit categorizing using terminology that has no discretion, no morals and no grace. Politics has a way of denying an identity to communities and their traditions. Native American Indians were deprived of their cognition and euphemistic phrases and made to suffer the illusion of being an exhausted, misplaced people. The reality, however, is that the white man pressured them into this state of being through political means. These negative stereotypes have also been witnessed in the Australian Aborigines where the political response has been disturbing to say the least. In *Euphemism, Banality, Propaganda: Anthropology, Public Debate and Indigenous Communities*, Cowlishaw (2003) wraps it up by saying, "Thus it is not surprising to find widespread disillusionment with self-determination, both as a practice and ideology, and a resurgence of assimilations, now conveniently renamed 'modernization' " (p. 5).

CATEGORIZING WITH INTENT

Allan and Burridge (2006) add that such activities "have left people resentful, hurting and looking for someone to blame" (p. 106). Dubow (1994), in *Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes*, supports this by saying, "The question of who defines whom, and the power relations involved in this process, is of crucial significance in the process of ethnic ascription … the derogatory word 'kaffir' with 'heathen' or 'infidel' … it therefore seems safe to say that the word ethnic was employed as a means of establishing difference or defining the other" (p. 369). Valentine (1998) sums it up saying, "Yet euphemisms do not merely package and contain: they may also neglect and deny… [that] euphemisms play a part in exacerbating the invisibility of marginal groups" (p. 15). Allen and Burridge (2006) suggest, "Globalization, rationalization, privatization, and reorganization go on around us, typically for the benefit of a handful of the rich and powerful" (p. 106), and in politics, categorizing through euphemisms has become a way of life specifically advantageous to the powerful. According to Habermas' theory, during the bourgeois era in the 1700's, general meetings occurred that were a direct example of "individuals shaping public opinion while influencing political practice" (Keller, n.d., para. 14). This theory survived, but in the 19th century powerful corporations assumed control of state policies as the public sphere declined and "citizens became consumers, dedicating themselves more to passive consumption and private concerns than to issues of democratic participation" (para. 18). Respectively, the bourgeois were part of that select group that held powerful positions supporting Allen and Burridge's earlier statement.

Those in powerful positions tend to categorize anyone deemed different in our social system, receiving both public and political abuse. A "confirmed bachelor is a homosexual", "moon people are lunatics" and "underprivileged are the poor or illiterate" (Holder, 2003, pp. 80, 258, 421). There are even ultraconservative traditions in the system preventing women from participating in the realm of politics, but Habermas reminds us that even in bourgeois circumstances women's groups existed "to represent voices and interests excluded in this forum" (qtd. in Keller, n.d., para. 26). The expressions are neither balanced nor positive. However, they do euphemistically present a double-edged resemblance to what is

increasingly becoming social identification and separation. Martin (2007) adds, "The unemployed are described as economically abused, … housewives are domestic engineers, … unwanted male attention becomes sexual harassment, … school psychologists give us educationally challenged, … and when the stock market falls it is referred to as equity retreat" (p. 59). Valentine (1998) continues with the following:

> Euphemisms can wrap up and away: good taste and delicacy can be lethal … as to exclude others from sharing in the privileges of a status group. Thus at the extreme you are beneath contempt because you are beneath mention: you can only be despised if you are recognized. Maximum indirectness is lack of reference at all: silence becomes the ultimate euphemism, and identity is denied. (p. 15)

The unmentionable for practical purposes ceases to exist. It is, therefore, necessary to delineate how language could ideally be used in the political field to cause the least damage and present the most constructive criticism.

LANGUAGE CHANGES – EUPHEMISMS GROW

EUPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE IN LITERATURE

In *Drama and the Dramatic*, S.W. Dawson (1970) suggests that, "The rhetorician is rightly said to clothe thoughts in suitable words, and that is to imply that the thoughts already exist fully [and] if they existed, they existed in words – presumably other words, and less suitable ones" (p. 23). He continues by explaining "word-finding … is not necessarily new vocabulary, but new language, new phrasing, new combinations of vocabulary …" (p. 23). It is at this point that euphemisms are imperative. Allen and Burridge (2006) direct our attention to the fact that, "Language is not a perfect, logical, consistent and transparent linguistic system, one that matches thinking and dittoes reality. It is replete with instances of vagueness, variability and ambiguity, and this fuzziness will always make prescriptive speech codes difficult to enforce" (p. 99). According to his theory, Habermas considered that "communicative action could generate norms to criticize distortions of communication in processes of societal domination and manipulation" (qtd. in Keller, n.d., para. 38). Thus, it reroutes the intention of communication with that of influential deception. Vagueness is too often exhibited in the way politicians express themselves, and this results in influencing our interests and decision-making. Deception is misleading and is therefore reductive. Communication is either complex or simple, but its presentation through euphemisms becomes contrary to conceptual language.

We are unable to prevent the growth or usage of euphemisms because it is necessary, as our world changes, to unearth words and phrases that coincide with those alterations. "The English language," wrote George Orwell, who is well known for condemning political euphemisms, "becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of the language makes it easier to have foolish thoughts" (qtd. in LaRocque, n.d., para. 36). The problem is that the creation of euphemisms is designed for unconstructive rationale, as in politics, but we do not know how to reject the use: "The growth of freshly fashioned terms, which may be so cumbersome as to encourage silence, is part of an inflationary process … by developing ever more guarded [deviant] euphemisms" (Valentine, 1998, p. 8). It is assumed that the function of language is to express thoughts and communicate information. Thus, what the listener anticipates, perhaps naively, is truthful communication.

Language is a part of culture and human behaviour; it is not essential to study human behaviour deeply to comprehend that politicians select their terminology according to

requirements and expectations made upon them. Martin (2007) writes that linguist Noam Chomsky "maintains that language can be studied as objectively as any other science and that the observations on the use of language is an altogether different area of study" (p. 56). What is pertinent here is that language codes are meant to be broken, dismissed and altered so that the intention can be fulfilled. Whether or not language behaviour counts as good manners will depend on a number of factors. Allen and Burridge (2006) clarify, "These include: the relationship between speakers, their audience … the subject matter; [and] the situation [setting]" (p. 30). Euphemism use in politics is essential because amid all of the factors stated above, language behaviour would not be of a good quality without euphemism: "it is a language that avoids, shifts or denies responsibility, language that conceals or prevents thought" (Gladney, 2005, p. 1) which is, in fact, deception.

<div align="center">HOW WEASEL WORDS WORK</div>

Within the realm of deception, a sound way of describing euphemisms is by employing the term "wease"; it is known that a weasel is said to have a reputation for cleverness and craftiness. Weasel words are seemingly indispensable in the political arena. Stockman (1999) clarifies in *Issues Related to Subspecialty Education: Weasel Words in Action*: "As Roosevelt perceived it, words were to some politicians what eggs were to weasels, tempting qualifiers that sucked meaning out of them" (p.669). He goes on to say, "Would not Roosevelt recognize George W. Bush's phrase 'compassionate conservatism' or perhaps Al Gore's term 'practical idealism' as empty shells? In each of these instances, one word in a phrase sucks out the importance of the other, so that in the end there is little real meaning left" (p.669).

Habermas insists that "the people must be informed and capable of argumentation and participation" (qtd. in Keller, n.d., para. 56). This signifies that the educated communication between people and their government is expected to be overt and unambiguous. These are key elements in language use. It is unfortunate to have to invent terminology, but it is even worse to be vague to the extent that no one fully apprehends the implication of your words, something that frequently typically occurs with political speeches. An example of concealing the meaning is using "profit-motive" and "greed". Grant (1977) writes, "Both mean the desire for wealth at the expense of everybody else, but because the words themselves fail to suggest the correspondence, most people fail to notice it" (p. 249). In politics this is vital because there is no value-neutral term behind a euphemism. As politicians stack euphemism on euphemism, they build a wall around the truth, abandoning existing vocabulary to disguise the muddle that ensues. Political language is defined by proscription and condemnation of certain words, and the existence of grey areas is therefore acceptable. Robert Fisk, a Middle Eastern correspondent for *The Independent* of London, discusses the issue of political language in journalism. He understands the importance of who is in charge, and how the existing grey areas in a piece of work submitted by a journalist are rectified prior to presentation to the public. A summary in the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Fisk (2005) as saying, "I realized the enormous pressures on (para 1) journalists when they [leave a foreign assignment] and no longer have to alter the truth to suit the paper's more vociferous readers" (p. 2).

The importance of gaining political approval through a selective usage of words is widespread as politicians strive to envelop the "real" so as not to exacerbate the situation while the populous involuntarily surrenders to that. Euphemisms are a form of lying in this case and are executed with the calculated objective to sway and deceive. Bowers and Pleydell-Pearce (n.d.) support this by adding, "… an offensive word and its euphemism have different emotional impact simply because they mean different things [which] allows

euphemisms to support lies …" (p. 5). For the most part, neutral words and their euphemisms invoke a milder response; they are more practical and helpful for the speaker.

MUCH – NEEDED EUPHEMISMS IN POLITICS

AROUSING, RATIONALIZING AND JUSTIFYING

Political language is mostly pessimistic language by nature; consequently, euphemisms are crucial in concealing the rightful intention to negate importance, preventing people from understanding their true purpose, gain their unending support and maintain their undying respect. No apology is required. Euphemisms are therefore effective because they "replace the trigger (the offending word form) by another word form that expresses the same (or similar) idea but that is not itself associated with a conditioned response" (Bowers & Pleydell-Pearce, n.d., pp. 4-5). This allows the message to be communicated without eliciting an emotional response; if the population accepts a statement with passion, they are undoubtedly able to reject it with an equivalent fervor. Orwell (1946) insists, "In our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics'. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer" (para. 19). Whatever the source, people search desperately through the clutter of politicians' speeches for items of sincerity as they listen to false impressions and repetition.

Politicians usually talk in circles – everything is an inference or illusion and never a statement of fact. It is similar to solving a riddle. When the politician fails to be convincing, he is often met with criticism, and he has to conceive of new ways, or words, to cover up the cover-up. It is analogous to shouting fire where one never existed and then attempting to convince the population of its actuality. Eckhart Tolle (2006) reminds us:

> Most of the people who are in positions of power in this world, such as politicians, are completely
> identified with their role, but they are no more than unconscious players in the egoic game, a game
> that looks so important yet is ultimately devoid of true purpose. It is, in the words of Shakespeare, a
> tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. (p.107)

Misinterpretation is indeed intentional and ramifications plentiful. The communicator, i.e. politician, denies responsibility and claims that people are misinformed, but it is his contention to be the victor aided by euphemisms. Therefore, language is indeed "a tool or weapon" in the hand of communicator (Martin, 2007, p. 57), and "most of the euphemism-hunters are politically motivated" (Grant, 1977, p. 249). Quentin Crisp (1984) maintains that:

> Euphemisms are not, as many people think, useless verbiage for that which can and should be said
> bluntly; they are like secret agents on a delicate mission, they must airily pass by a stinking mess
> with barely so much as a nod of the head. Euphemisms are unpleasant truths wearing diplomatic
> cologne. (para. 11)

Aldous Huxley (2005) states in *Essays: Words and Behaviour* that, "If we use the same reality words, the reasoning seems to be, we will see the same reality" (para. 1). Grant (1977) adds, "The imposition of our reality on someone else – the insistence that he call a spade a spade whether he sees a diamond or not – is of course, politics" (p. 249). Huxley (2005) reiterates:

> Even the most violently patriotic and militaristic are reluctant to call a spade by its own name… We
> find them, for example, clamoring for war planes numerous and powerful enough to go and "destroy
> the hornets in their nests" — in other words, to go and throw thermite, high explosives and vesicants
> upon the inhabitants of neighboring countries... In time of war, euphemisms are said to "desensitize" the
> public to keep the people from thinking too much and hiding the human pain, [and] as a society we have
> become inured to the soft lexicon of war. (para. 1)

USING EUPHEMISMS AS A MASK IN POLITICS

Counterculture comedian George Carlin (2010) once said:

> Smug, greedy, well-fed white people have invented a language to conceal their sins. It's as simple as that. The CIA doesn't kill anybody anymore, they neutralize people … or they depopulate the area. The government doesn't lie, it engages in disinformation. The pentagon actually measures nuclear radiation in something they call sunshine units. Israeli murders are called commandos. Arab commandos are called terrorists. Contra killers are called freedom fighters. Well, if crime fighters fight crime and fire fighters fight fire, what do freedom fighters fight? They never mention that part of it to us, do they? (para. 36)

In the military, euphemisms such as "soft targets (people), hard targets (buildings), destabilize (overthrow governments)" (Martin, 2007, p. 60) are terms used daily, and the previous original terms are forgotten. Because of this, political propaganda and banality direct public debate and interest. Noam Chomsky (1988) wrote:

> Many political matters are not fit topics for reporting, commentary and debate. Rather, the agenda must conform to elite requirements, generally set by state propaganda, though debate is permissible insofar as dominant elites disagree on tactical and procedural matters. Contemporary events must be reported and discussed in these terms, and historical memory must be shaped so that these doctrines are not called into question, or even considered controversial. (pp. 113-114V)

Further is a description from Orwell as he wrote in *Politics and the English Language*, "Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification" (qtd. in Freedman, 1983, p. 412). Moreover, Orwell (2002), determined to write as free from "sheer cloudy vagueness" as he could (p. 4), expresses in his book, *Animal Farm* [where he uses animals to represent people] that all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others which demonstrates that we "use language to manipulate and brainwash people" (p. 9). The problem then is that euphemisms are supposedly innocent and used to obscure the truth; they are freely employed by governments to downplay a war's horrors. George Carlin (2010) describes how a familiar combat term can vary:

> It's when a fighting person's nervous system has been stressed to its absolute peak and maximum… In the First World War, that condition was called *shell shock*. Simple, honest, direct language… That was seventy years ago… then the Second World War came along and very same combat condition was called *battle fatigue*… Then we had the war in Korea, 1950… and the very same combat condition was called *operational exhaustion*… Then of course, came the war in Viet Nam, … the very same condition was called *post-traumatic stress disorder*. (para. 34)

USING EUPHEMISMS AND DYSPHEMISMS

Euphemisms and dysphemisms function in tandem whether regarding governments sanctioning a country or discussing social issues at home. They work as a yin/yang in vocabulary. Euphemisms reflect our intellectual side, identified with control, tolerance and reason. Dysphemisms reflect our emotional side, lack of control and intolerance. Allan and Burridge (2006) explain, "Dysphemisms are therefore characteristic of political groups … [who tend to use] derogatory comments to insult or wound..." (p. 31). And yet, "often a euphemism is linked with the speaker's point of view, dysphemism with some other view – it is an '*us* versus *them*' situation" (p. 49).

Politicians may not use dysphemism to attain their objective in a statement, but the audience may indeed understand the offensiveness and therefore regard it in a pragmatic sagacity, thus denying the speaker his due. Euphemisms are incessantly commonplace in politics, given that political language is meant to be persuasive and credible, communicated in an effortless and unproblematic way. Gladney (2005) adds, "When euphemisms are used

by those in power, the result may be the shaping of people's perception of many social, economic and political problems, which can lead to public inaction and lack of concern" (p. 1). This is especially applicable in war situations. The moment we desensitize ourselves to the verbal usage of euphemisms in war, we become eceptive of the violence that occurs. It is not a matter of overlooking the negativity of war and the corresponding moral and physical injury inflicted upon a community, we adopt the stipulation that if it is redundant to "think" about reason or alternative, then trust the politicians. We trust lawyers to provide the best advice; we trust doctors to perform successful surgery, and therefore, *ipso facto*, trust our politicians.

It is fortunate for politicians that the populous' preexisting attitudes facilitate the assimilation of the message in the speech and with their degree of interest and knowledge are able to deem the message as bureaucratic nonsense: "What isn't right and proper is that we have become yea-saying spear carriers in a military bureaucracy" (Gwyn, 1999, para. 8). Don Nilsen (1978) a specialist in English linguistics, wrote an article entitled *Doublespeak: The Anti-Establishment Strikes Back* explaining that " … bureaucrats are the only people in the world who can say absolutely nothing and mean it" (p. 20). He continues to say, "If we realize that we are being subtly manipulated by the language of bureaucrats … then we can laugh at the language, and laugh at ourselves for being so naïve as to be manipulated" (p. 20). We are either going to laugh out of naivety or out of fear; the manipulation is effective both ways.

USING EUPHEMISMS TO INDUCE FEAR TO CONTROL

Fear is one of the main reasons underlying the abundance of euphemisms used in reference to foreign countries and the possibility of nuclear war. Conspiracies of silence are generated by fear. Difficulties spring from significant cultural differences in the understanding of race, religious or genre problems. It is necessary "to impose silence … [and spread fear in countries] with the highest inequality in the world, thanks in no small measure to policies of the superpower that largely controls it" (Chomsky, 1996, para. 23). In his book, *The Culture of Terrorism*, Noam Chomsky (1988) insists that "… it was fear of the public that led to the expansion of clandestine operations [during the Vietnam] years, on the usual principle that in our form of democracy, if the public escapes from passivity, it must be deceived – for its own good" (p.6). It is fear that blocks politicians from being morally responsible for its hegemony. Siegel, Brown, and Hoffman (2006) agree that, "Fear can be contagious. In essence, the presence of fear incites more crime, increasing the chances of victimization and producing even more fear in a never-ending loop. It is a powerful influence" (p. 133). DeMartini (2009) reminds us that, "The root of a lie is fear, not dishonesty" (p. 197).

BELIEVING IN THE POWER OF "POLITICAL CORRECTNESS" AND POLITENESS

"Political correctness" is the concept of shaping one's statements, if not opinions, according to a certain political dogma. The phrase refers to language, ideas, policies, and behaviour. It involves the suppression of particular attitudes and terms in the belief that they are offensive or controversial. Valentine (1998) reveals that, "Political correctness is the desiccated remnant of old knowledge and opinion, and it has "the power to divide, classify and allocate" (p. 3). Thus, this expression is associated with abuse.

Euphemisms are necessary when politeness demands that the distasteful is noted or referred to in an indirect fashion. Valentine (1998) states mildly, "Namely, euphemisms are encouraged in a society where politeness is highly valued, where indirect reference is considered a sign of good taste, and where direct reference can be embarrassing" (pp. 4-5). In politics, it is vital to maintain a respectable image and one's leadership trustworthy. How

could positive change be encouraged at a time when there is so much emphasis on propaganda and the power of words?

<div align="center">IMPLEMENTING EUPHEMISM ABUSE IN POLITICAL PROPAGANDA</div>

For Habermas, "the function of the media has been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate within the public sphere into shaping, constructing, and limiting public discourse to those themes validated and approved by media corporations" (qtd. in Keller, n.d., para. 21). The media is also involved in the balance of power and expected to cultivate "a citizenry capable of actively participating in democratic politics" (qtd. in Keller, n.d., para. 58). Gladney (2005) notes that "there can be no doubt the press often picks up and transmits euphemistic language used by their sources when discussing numerous important issues such as welfare, taxes, and immigration" to mention only a few, but "when euphemism is used merely as the language of courtesy, it is morally justifiable" (p. 1). However, the propagandist's purpose is to make one part of the community ignore the fact that other parts of it are equally human. Findings suggest that euphemisms are powerful enough to affect one's actual behaviour. If a media message is displayed repetitively and cumulatively, it is capable of powerfully affecting public opinion. This is known as "piling on" (p. 2), and the "piling on" of a euphemism text is more powerful than a few individual words. Evolving perspectives on politics, gender issues, military strategies, and globalization require a new vocabulary that in turn shapes perceptions and actions. Martin (2007) explains that, "Political propaganda, especially unbridled during election years, is an obvious example of language being used as a tool of political persuasion" (p. 57). The advertising could be slight or transparent, but the terminology changes as society transforms itself and social expectancies vary. As we receive the information, it is critical to cognitively process the scores of terms as we attempt to distinguish between truth and its opposite.

Propaganda is the manipulation of opinion through language or images. "As the words change, our images and perceptions also undergo adjustments and modifications that subtly conform to the desired perception" (Martin, 2007, p. 57). Robert Fisk (2005) comments on the pressures brought to bear on American journalists over their word choices, highlighting the fact that editors "make sure that viewers" "sensitivities" don't suffer, that we don't indulge in the "pornography" of death (which is exactly what war is) or "dishonor" the dead whom we have just killed (para.12). For instance, the wall being constructed by Israel, "… journalists call it a 'fence' rather than a 'wall.' Or a "security barrier", which is what Israel prefers them to say" (para. 6).

Fisk (2005) states with much justification, "So let's call a colony a colony, let's call occupation what it is, and let's call a wall a wall. And maybe express the reality of war by showing that it represents not, primarily, victory or defeat, but the total failure of the human spirit" (para. 15). Interviewed by David Barsamian (2005) in *The Progressive Magazine*, Fisk is quoted as saying: "'Security contactors'. Those are soft words. It's another of these euphemisms like 'disputed territory' for the Occupied Territory in the West Bank. They're hired armed men. I call them mercenaries. I don't call them security contractors" (para. 25).

People construct models of euphemisms to shape the world's behaviour. Terms that are not true representations need not exist. Euphemisms are introduced because people sense a need for them; however, if they are not a part of our vocabulary, we have no assurance of their existence. Referring to the scarcity of journalists that divulge the truth concerning reality, Fisk says of journalism, "The banalities [common and predictable] in the mainstream … are certainly not worth reading" (qtd. in Barsamian, 2005, para. 24). Allen and Burridge (2006) suggest that, "Publishers and editors who supposedly value linguistic uniformity follow different guidelines from one another in their editing practices; they maintain different

standards, and will continue to do so because the social aspects of language work against homogeneity" (p. 112).

Propaganda manipulates opinion through language and affects the manner in which we make decisions. Martin (2007) focuses on this issue and stresses, "As the words change, our images and perceptions also undergo adjustments and modifications that subtly conform to the desired perception" (p. 57). Further, LaRocque (2010) reflects, "The influence of the media also is part of the problem: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, film, advertising… [We] are constantly bombarded with dull, imprecise, inaccurate and hackneyed writing and speaking" (para. 20). Habermas supports these statements in his theory but reiterates the fact that it is the media that shifts "the ratio of givers of opinion to the receivers" in favor of small groups of elites, who control or have access to the mass media (qtd. in Keller, para. 34). Therefore, issues in the media are manipulated by those in power, and truth or reality is often distorted.

CONCLUSION

Bigotry produces the necessity for a euphemistic vocabulary that creates tolerance, enabling us to engage with each other and discuss sensitive topics. Allen and Burridge (2006) state, "a large segment of contemporary western society is riven with guilt and shame for subjugating, enslaving, marginalizing and, in some cases, extinguishing other peoples" (p. 106). This has led to an alteration in the social balance in power, exactly what Habermas' theory relates: the nurturing and gradual enlightenment of the populous resulting in a better-educated class of people that will not accept the illusions language at times suggests.

This process, whereby euphemisms come to designate situations too directly, is what fuels the inflation of euphemisms: "We should not expect, therefore, to find that simple, plain and value-neutral term behind the euphemism … that stripping away a series of euphemisms will get us back to plain uncontroversial language" (Valentine, 1998, p. 9). It is natural for language to adjust itself to a fast changing world as multiculturalism and globalization alter the norms and quality of linguistics in general. The language used regarding politics is inappropriate, but this is validated by a distinct reasoning. The principal objective of politicians is to arouse and, having achieved that aim, to rationalize and justify such intrinsically agreeable sentiments as pride and hatred, self-esteem and contempt for others. As Huxley (2005) described it, "Faced by an enemy they do not allow an itch to distract us from our emotions; the mere word 'enemy' is enough to keep us reminded of our hatred, to convince us that we do well to be angry" (para.1). Furthermore, with intense pride for our country and our association to it, we judge or consider that misfortunes are due to our own reasoning. We endure illusions and misrepresentations to possess the excuse of ignorance and the alibi of stupidity, persuaded that politics should be everyone's concern. Huxley (2005) states frankly that, "Politics can become moral only on one condition: that its problems shall be spoken of and thought about exclusively in terms of concrete reality ..." (para. 3).

There are countless non-concrete terms used by government officials to communicate a point while avoiding damaging truths. When referring to political events, euphemisms are used loosely and convincingly; *friendly fire* referring to shooting at one's own troops, *collateral damage* referring to killing or wounding civilians, and *visiting a site* referring to bombing the site (Pulley, 1994, p. 273). Clearly, the euphemistic terms are disarmingly much gentler, and expressions such as *friendly fire* prove to be acceptable. Nevertheless, we are outraged. It is more than simply a breakdown in communication that people fear and is at stake. Noam Chomsky (1996) declares, "Throughout these grim years, nothing has been more

inspiring than the courage and dedication of those who have sought to expose and overcome the culture of fear in their suffering countries. They have left martyrs, whose voices have been silenced by the powerful - yet another crime" (para. 30).

In many people's minds, linguistic decline is linked to moral decline. Martin (2007) explains, "We return again to the thesis of sociolinguists, that language, as our primary tool of communication, offers an endless coded stream of information which mysteriously and simultaneously mirrors and shapes current social dynamics and prevailing attitudes" (p. 60). Allen and Burridge (2006) continue, "If you have no regard for the nice points of grammar, then you will probably have no regard for the law! Rules of grammar, like other rules in society, are necessary for the health of that society" (p. 122). It is encouraging to observe reconstruction of communication because of the constant changes in society, but Habermas stated clearly that this takes place within the functioning of communication within a society, and the state was responsible for "eroding the difference between state and civil society" (qtd. in Keller, n.d., para. 18). It is therefore a chronic vicious cycle between the system and public spheres. The governing body becomes powerful enough to dictate and language serves as a tool of power. Terrance Moran quoted George Orwell as saying, "If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (qtd. in Grant, 1977, p. 246). We do not desire corruption and untruths, but it is as if there is a misty glass between the state and the public spheres – a lack of productive, responsible diction. As Orwell (1946) directed, political language "is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (para. 23). These are the types of unsavory messages persistently presented through euphemisms. I concur therefore with Jurgen Habermas' public sphere theory, which states that people's outlook affects political action or behaviour. However, we must also acknowledge that there is flexibility for modifications and interpretation as technology and sciences of thought and communication evolve.

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