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EUPHEMISTIC EXPRESSIONS IN THE AMERICAN MASS MEDIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TYPES AND FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

Recently, the world has paid great consideration to the media in many fields of life. Due to this consideration, the need for euphemistic expressions becomes one of the most important matters in many fields, especially in politics. Therefore, this study aims to explore the types, functions, and origins of the euphemistic expressions used in some political articles in the common American newspapers, namely (the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post) in the last decade (2010-2020). Using euphemisms is sometimes equivalent to politeness, so the researchers explored the features of euphemism, and sorted out the concept of taboo language and the relation between taboo and euphemism. This study used a qualitative approach by selecting purposefully twenty-one articles from the newspapers mentioned above. Based on Allan and Burridge's theory, the researchers find out that euphemism has many types which are interconnected with many fields of life. Besides, politicians or even publishers build their speech euphemistically for many reasons such as covering up real facts or some criminal acts to avoid unpleasant terms, or even to make the politics of the country seem more stable. In everyday conversation, euphemism plays a very significant role, so the findings of this study facilitate the way to know the types of euphemisms for those who want to specialize in the same field.

Keywords: *Euphemism, euphemistic expressions, types, functions, American Mass Media, Qualitative*

1.   Introduction

To avoid harming or disturbing others, euphemism is generally described as a meaning of uttering words politely, thus it would be reasonable to presume that euphemizing serves good purposes and that the speaker uses euphemisms with honest intentions. According to Merriam

Webster, the concept of euphemism can be defined as a mild or indirect word or expression replaced by one that is considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to an unpleasant thing. However, it can be explained in another way: as the act or an example of replacing a mild action or a mild word, indirect, or vague term with something that is considered harsh, offensive, or blunt. Moreover, some people do not distinguish whether a specific term regards as a euphemistic or taboo term, thus, this study deals also with such variations especially those which are used in media.

Recently, the mass media has become an essential power around the world, particularly in America. It plays a central role not only in the political processes but in all types, ranging from coverage of world political events and organizations to impact on campaigns and elections, also in the lives of every person. Besides, Americans tend to use different styles of speech such as noun phrases, some code terms, and even some phrasal verbs to reach the close term to direct speech. Thus, Americans often tend to use euphemisms when talking about sensitive topics such as death, body parts, sex, and some political issues. Thus, the importance of using euphemisms or specific euphemistic terms in media also has the power to affect the positive mood, viewpoint, and behavior of people around many sensitive topics, such as gender, race, and age

2.   Literature Review

Dealing deeply with the use of euphemistic expressions in different areas of life is one of the best ways that lead how to be polite in communication, indeed, the researcher tries to sort out that this study uses Allan and Burridge's theory (1991) which is the theory of euphemism. The purpose of this theory is to explain the kinds of euphemism and dysphemism, and how people use them in many situations. According to the authors of this theory, euphemism can be used as an alternative to unpleasant terms, and dysphemism can be defined as an expression with connotations that are harmful either to the connotation or to people, or both.

Talking about the concept of "Euphemism" which comes from the Greek language, "Eu" means "*well*" while "phemism" means "*language, the expression*" Euphemism then simply means to speak in good words or a pleasant manner. Moreover, another expression also derives from the Greek language which means (*Well and Pannai*) to speak politely. This definition is very similar to the current one, which relates to the phenomenon that how people can replace offensive items with other items that are more pleasant (Yuwan, 2004). Additionally, McArthur (1992) explains a euphemism as a word or phrase that comes instead of a taboo word or represents avoiding fearful, unpleasant, or negative subjects. In the same case, euphemism also can be considered as a word or a phrase used as a polite substitute for another, which is considered too painful or offensive in many texts such as religious, political, and many literary texts. To analyze such data, the most important point is to know the main types of euphemisms.

According to (Paul. R., 2019), (Allan & Burridge,1991), and (Rusman, 2000), euphemisms can be classified into thirteen types, each type refers to some details. The following table shows briefly the types of euphemism:

Types of Euphemism	**Metaphor:** deals with something different from the literal meanings
	Idiom: a single unit whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separates parts
	Circumlocution: the use of many words when someone wants to say something in a few words
	Litotes: a figure of speech that consists of an understand case that is expressed by a negative case.
	The fifth type is the use of learned terms instead of common terms.
	Acronym and Abbreviation: this type contains a set of initial letters from a phrase that usually comes from another word.
	The seventh type is that general-for-specific it refers to a specific thing by using subclasses.
	Hyperbola: it deals with exaggerated statements, to make a point or show emphasis.
	Denial: a situation that is used by a person trying to distinguish the true meaning, or it is a statement that something does not exist.
	The tenth and eleventh types are closely similar to each other, they refer to the euphemistic dysphemism, which uses the location in euphemistic expressions but the illocution on dysphemism.
	Synecdoche: means a figure of speech that refers to the general thing in specific.
	Associative engineering or irony: means a figure of speech that intended meaning of something in the opposite of its literal meaning.

Table (1): The types of euphemism.

On contrary, Dysphemism refers to something that may sound worse than it is. Therefore "dysphemism" is the opposite of "euphemism" and was in essence modeled after the previous term. Moreover "dysphemism" can define as an offensive or degrading term or expression used in place of an agreeable or harmless one. Furthermore, Wardhaugh (2000) stated that taboo is considered to represent the process of prohibition or in other terms avoidance in communities, this occurs to behaviors that may hold harm the members of a specific society, taboo expressions would cause people to feel differently with anxiety, embarrassment, or shame. Thus, to conclude the difference between these three terms by a brief explanation, euphemism is a word or a phrase people use to make something or someone sounds good and likable, on contrary, dysphemism is used to make something or someone seems negative and unlikeable, while taboo is the avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harsh to its members and cause the shame or anxiety.

People when speaking in some situations must be careful in their speech, especially when they talk to those who might be offended or distributed by some situations. Moreover, to those who might be from another culture, so, the importance of using euphemistic expressions is to soften otherwise difficult or unpleasant things in speaking to avoid offensive words (Williams & Shipley, 1975). Fei Deng (2016) in his article mainly aims to discuss the explanation of the formal process to shape euphemism from the phonetic aspects leading to a well-formed and polite expression. Fei Deng found that euphemistic terms can be defined phonetically through different roots in other fields. He adds that phonetic deviations play a significant role in the forming process of an expression related to the notion of euphemism.

Another study was conducted in 2019 by Djennat also in the field of euphemism with the title *"Investigating the Use of Euphemism in Enhancing the Speaking Skill of EFL Learners: The Case of Third Year English Students at the University of 8 Mai 1945, Guelma"*, this study attempt to focus on how the euphemistic expressions are used to have an avoidance of directness and consequently face-threatening acts in specific situations and of course by promoting the areas of politeness. As applied to EFL students, the study is limited to the evaluation of students' improvement in the four skills of language. Djennat's research does not give considerable attention to the detailed discussion of euphemism types or functions of such important expressions. It also does not elaborate on the central problem of the current research, which is specifically related to euphemistic expressions in several political articles. Returning to the main purpose of the current study, there is a similar study belonging to Farid Munfaati (2008) also explores the euphemism that is used in political articles on Reuters.com. by conducting different theories and techniques, besides, the writer tries to find out the styles and some of the functions of the euphemistic expressions inside the articles that are published between the first to last of March 2008.

The use of euphemisms differs from culture to culture. In different languages, cultural variations may lead to making differences in the type and meaning of euphemistic expressions; therefore, the amount of using euphemisms depends on which culture a text will change. There are many problems that speakers face when learning about a particular culture and how to deal with people indecently, that is about everyday speech (Keyes, 2010). Therefore, many previous studies that dealt with euphemisms tried to explain the concept of euphemism and how it is used or interlinked with politics. Some of them aimed to explore the semantic role of euphemisms that are used in some political issues, aiming at investigating the phonetic aspects of euphemism, the frequency of the terms, or even investigating how those terms can be used in different ways, but no mentioning or covering to the types, functions, and the origins in one study as the current study.

This study has three objectives that can help the readers to obtain solutions to the main problems of this research. The first one is to explore the types, functions, and origins of euphemistic expressions used in the political articles of (*New York Times*), and the second one is to explore the types, functions, and origins of euphemistic expressions used in the political articles of (*The Wall Street Journal*), and the last one also is to explore the types, functions,

and origins of euphemistic expressions used in the political articles of (*Washington Post*), all of these objectives have been selected in the last decade (2010-2020).

3.   Methodology

Euphemisms often allow writers to discuss thoughts from multiple perspectives, or particular points of view, the current study tries to focus on the euphemistic expressions that are used in political articles in the American common newspapers (*Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and New York Times*). Politicians and publishers try to use euphemisms in their speeches whether in spoken texts or written contexts. Additionally, because the data of the study are in the form of words or utterances, the researcher uses the qualitative approach in his study. Agee (2009) points out that qualitative research can be defined as the method that collects and analyses non-numerical data, such as texts, videos, audios, etc. to get more information about concepts, experiences, or even opinions. This method can be used by researchers to gather in-depth opinions on a problem or create different ideas for the research. In such a qualitative study, it is noticed that this study draws out the purposive or quota sample. Moreover, it examines the previous works that cover such a range of studies. In sum, the researcher of this study focuses on some parts of the data and discussed them according to the criteria that are followed. When conducting such data, the researcher classifies the categories that are important to be analyzed for this study, and for which purpose these categories are used.

Talking about the data of this research have been taken from the form of written words in the political articles in the common media newspapers (*Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and New York Times*). The researcher did the following steps, first, the researcher looked for the titles which related to the political issues. Second, chose the articles published between 2010 and 2020. Finally, to find out the origin of each term, the researcher explained the data according to the statements of the research's problems.

In such a case, this study uses a clear strategy to create a clarification, outline, elucidation, and classification methodically and fittingly around actualities, characteristics, and connections between languages. Thus, the researcher mentioned the steps of analyzing starting with choosing the political articles from (*Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and New York Times* between 2010-2020 purposefully. Additionally, thoroughly examining the previously mentioned news and articles, as well as taking sentences, words, or expressions that conceivably include code words or words with uncommon meanings, then, classifying the identified euphemistic expressions or items into types of euphemisms that comply with Allan and Burridge (1991). After that, classify the selected terms according to their types, functions, and origins, and arrange the euphemistic expressions of each part (journal). The following diagram shows the steps of analysis:
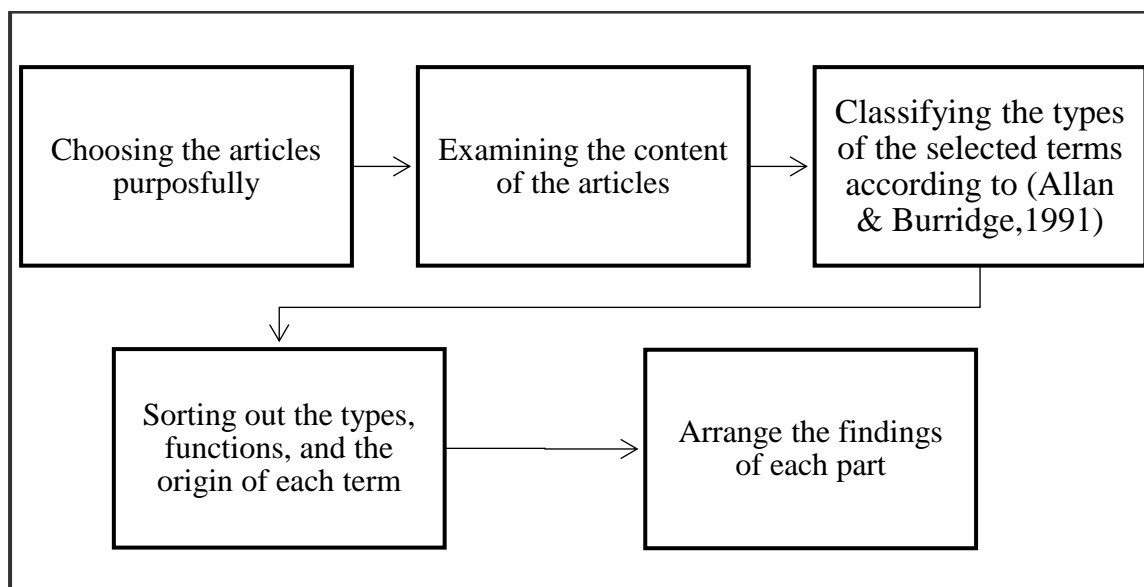
Figure (1): Data analysis techniques or steps

In this study, the researcher used hand analysis to analyze the articles. Moreover, he selected seven political articles of each newspaper and analyse them, besides, showing how the steps of data analysis have been done, the researcher gives a brief summary of each part. Starting with the political article that belongs to the *New York Times* journal, the first datum contains the term "*sharp*" and stands as an adjective. According to Allan and Burridge (1991), it refers to metaphor. Moreover, the writer mentioned another euphemistic expression which is "*anti-Semites*" as an idiom. The second selected datum contains a common metaphor that used by the politician which is "*code red*", which refers to the dangers of the function of using such a term is to refer to frightening or horror. The third datum includes a lot of abbreviation types of euphemisms in its contexts, the purpose of doing such a case is to squeeze a lot of words into a small space or to make the sentences easier to read. Moreover, the fourth datum includes a strange term which is "*plunged*" in the title to express the number of these groups and how it gets down. According to Merriam-Webster this term refers to moving oneself in such a manner or refers to someone who becomes headlong or violently pushed or forced upward and downward. It was noticed that the last type of euphemism which is associative engineering or irony is used to avoid such an embarrassing term.

The fifth selected datum includes the term "*white nationalist*", which refers to something related to racism. This item belongs to the fourth type of euphemistic expression "Litotes", it aims to avoid racial hatred between people. In the sixth datum, it was noticed that the term "*fat cats*" has been mentioned to refer to the thieves in the government instead of the thief term. This is a kind of metaphor, also its function is to inform something related to politics. The seventh one includes the item "*rebel*" which stands as an adjective, and also means "supporter of the American cause in the War of Independence" is from; a sense of "supporter of the Southern cause in the American Civil War". This term has been mentioned in some articles related to New York Times, thus, this term is used as a euphemistic expression.

In the second part of journals '*The Wall Street Journal*', the writer of the first datum mentioned the term "*cell*" as a type of euphemism specifically the tenth type of euphemism which refers

to a location, it also aims to hide unpleasant political term. The writer of the second datum used the word "***Beatles***" to describe the fighters of ISIS. According to the online encyclopedia of dictionaries, this term means a seminal rock and pop staff formed in Liverpool and England, these groups had hair like women and also have the same appearance, so the writer used such a term as a metaphor kind of euphemism. Its function is to refer to something connected with the frightening of these groups of fighters. In the third datum, the term "***goes awry***" which always comes with military expressions to clarify the path of fires, it stands as a circumlocution type of euphemism to get a politer term than the term "*failed*". Moreover, this datum also includes another euphemistic term which is "***armistice***", it has been mentioned as the last type of euphemism which is associative engineering, to avoid uncomfortable expressions related to a war or fire.

The fourth and fifth data of this part include different terms which are related to the same type of euphemism which is a metaphor. The term of the fourth datum is "***paddy wagon***" This term means literally an enclosed vehicle used by the police to transfer prisoners, but euphemistically, it stands as a metaphor type. In addition, its function is to neglect uncomfortable expression. The fifth datum talks about the election program of the United States, President Donald Trump mentioned the term "***run the table***" many times in his speech. In such a datum, the researcher focused on this term and found that the president used such a term as a political metaphor, it comes from billiard games. This American term has been used to cover up the consecutive wins of the United States election with a game term. In the sixth datum, the term "***overhaul***" can be used in political issues instead of "*catch up*". Therefore, the writer mentioned it as the fifth type of euphemism which is using some terms instead of common terms. It aims to avoid an embarrassing term that is connected with politics. The seventh datum of this part includes the term "***Cook County***", the writer mentioned it as a good location term that is related to Chicago. So that, this American term refers to the location type of euphemism, and its function is to cover a political term or to use one term instead of the other.

The last part of the "*Washington Post*" journal includes a variety of euphemistic types, starting with the first datum of this part which contains two different euphemistic terms, the first term "***red line***" which can be classified as an idiom type. The other one is "***on the table***", this term belongs to the circumlocution type of euphemism, its function is to neglect unpleasant terms. The second datum includes another idiom type which is the term "*red light*", the writer of this article tried to mention or warn of something risky. Besides, the writer of the third datum brought a euphemistic term which is "***intervention***" to hide the dark side of American occupation with a pleasant term. So, the writer used the fifth type of euphemism which is using some terms instead of the common one. Thus, it aims to cover or hide a dark side with a pleasant term in some political situations. The writer of the fourth selected datum mentioned the euphemistic expression "***hurt***" which is used by Minister Netanyahu to cause emotional distress, but in this data, the Minister asserted such a term to hide his big destruction behind the soft term. This term can be regarded as a circumlocution type of euphemism that reduces many items to one or two items.

The term "***peddling debunked***" has been mentioned in the title of the fifth datum, it stands as an idiom. It is an American term that is used by the writer instead of exposed. Moreover, its function is to avoid unpleasant terms in political speech. The writer of the sixth datum used the term "***little Sparta***" as an idiom that its items cannot be separated from each other, it describes the UAE as a small garden that supports the United States. This American term aims to hide unpleasant terms that are connected with politics. On the other hand, the writer also used another euphemistic expression which is "***gone all-in***". Euphemistically, this term means *full power*, or *working hard*, it can be regarded as a circumlocution type and its function is to inform something related to politics. The last selected datum of this part includes the term "***antisocial***". According to Merriam Webster, the term means a person who has strange behavior with people. Besides, using it refers to the aggression of the U.S against some cities across the U.S. This term can be regarded as the last type of euphemism which is associative engineering or irony.

4.   Findings

This study shows that the findings of the New York Times part involve seven types of euphemisms from the total types, four metaphors, two idioms, two types of Synecdoche, one circumlocution type, and one abbreviation type, one litotes, and associative engineering or Irony. Each type has been conducted and counted out with percentages according to the findings itself not to the contexts of data. It turns out that all the metaphor types have been used to inform something related to politics or even to warn something interlinked with the government. Besides, the idioms which have been conducted are used to neglect an offensive term and also to inform something in some cases. Finally, most of the terms' origins come from English, some of them come from Old Saxon and old Latin, and a few of them are American

In the second part, the researcher found that the Wall Street Journal post also conducted five types of euphemisms from the total types in its findings, three metaphors, two location types, one circumlocution, one irony or associative engineering, and the last one is the fifth type which is using some terms instead of others. Additionally, all the metaphors that are conducted are used to inform something or to neglect harsh terms as same as in the previous findings of the New York Times. Moreover, the location types have been used to cover up political terms or to alert something related to politics. The rest of the types that were conducted in this part are used to get pleasant terms or to avoid an embarrassing term. In the field of origins, it is shown that most of the terms in this part are Latin and Old English, the rest are American, Irish, and German.

In the last part, the researcher found that the findings of Washington Post articles involve four types of euphemism from the total types, these types were divided into four idiom types, one irony type, three circumlocution types, and the fifth type of euphemism is also used. On the contrary to the previous parts, this part has no metaphors. Therefore, the idiom types have been conducted to hide some harmful meanings or even to avoid unpleasant terms. Additionally, the circumlocution types have been used to inform something connected with politics. Most euphemistic terms' origins in this part are Old English and American, the rest are Proto-Germanic, Anglo-French, and Latin. The following chart shows the percentages of the use of euphemistic expressions' types in each part and shows the more frequent type that used:
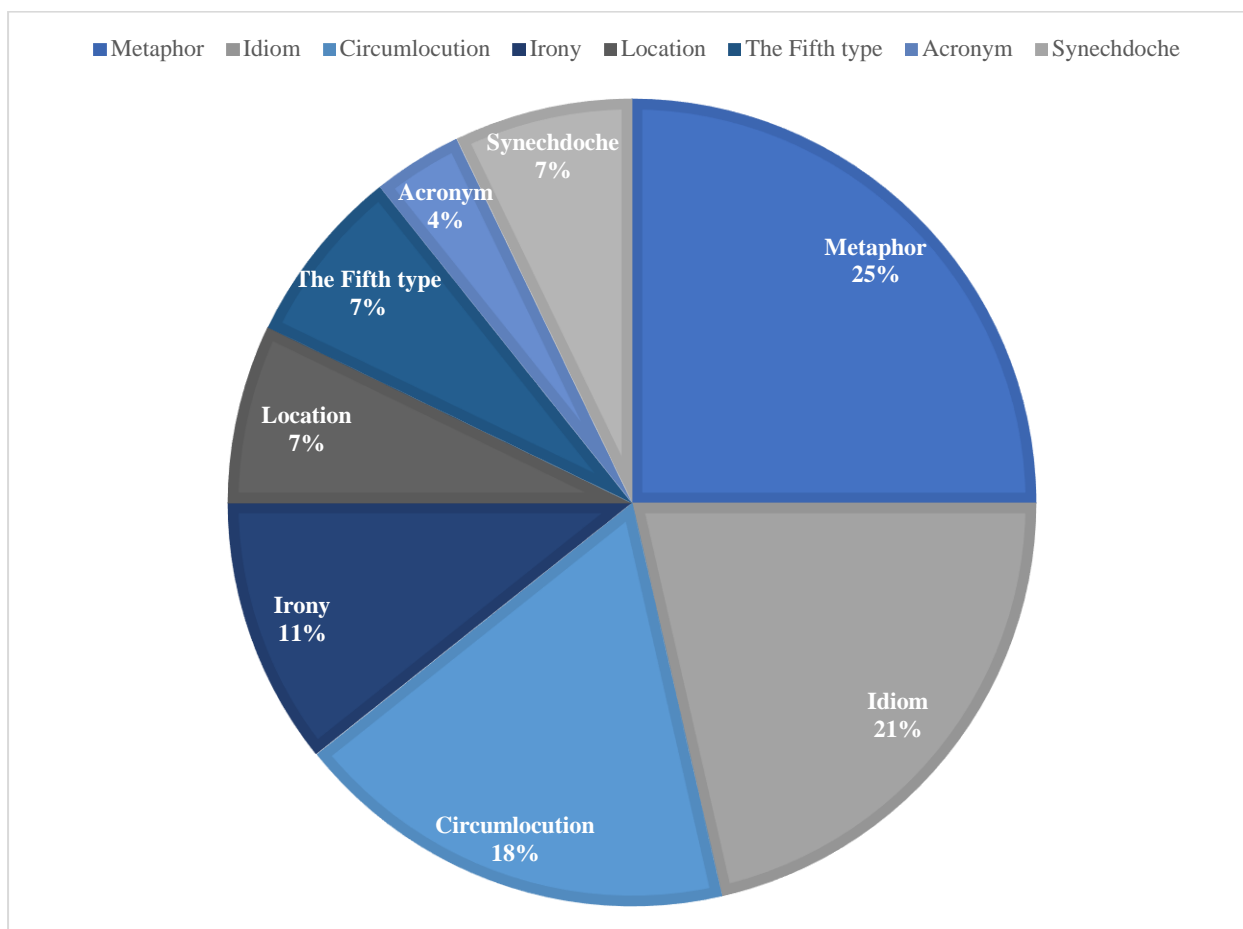
Figure (2): The frequency of the euphemistic types.

5.   Discussion

It is important to mention that the goal of this study is to explore the use of euphemistic expressions and show the types and functions in the common American newspapers, especially by selecting the political articles in the last decade (2010-2020). The various use of different types of euphemisms leads to many significant such as explicit the harm term into a pleasant term or hiding some taboo word and replacing it with another comfortable term. These significantly affect the point of view of the readers or the researchers who are fond of euphemism topics.

The researcher noticed that many of the previous studies and research are specialized in the field of euphemisms and tend to talk about the concepts of euphemism both in general and in detail, besides, people usually use euphemisms to replace those terms which are unpleasant and offensive. Thus, these studies showed how the code terms or euphemistic expressions are interlinked with many fields of life such as religion, politics, education, body parts, etc. Such as the current study, some of the previous studies tried to explore just the differences between euphemism and dysphemism, and the others showed the difference with taboo Therefore, this study investigated the differences between euphemism with both dysphemism and taboo, and also tried to explore the types, functions, and origins of each euphemistic term in the political articles of the American media.

In the part of differences, it turns out that many of the previous studies used the correctness theory in their analysis and how the euphemism differs from politeness, which means many of these studies dealt with discourse analysis. Besides, many related types of research are concerned with the frequency of using euphemistic terms inside the political discourses such as *"A Study of Euphemisms in the Context of English-speaking Media"* which has been written by Alireza Hojati (2012), another study related to Fei Deng entitled *"An analysis of phonetic formation in English euphemism"*, it aimed to discuss the explanation of the formal process to shape euphemism from the phonetic aspects, the analysis of such studies depends on the quantitative approach. On the other hand, some related studies used the same theory of the current study (*Euphemism theory*) of Allan and Burridge, but it focused on different aspects such as phonetic formation, or the style of euphemism.

Moving to the similarity part within the conducted articles, it was noticed that the results of the first part contained several types of euphemism, the researcher noticed that the New York Times publishers or politicians tend to use metaphors and acronyms or abbreviations in their speeches, this leads to cover up some of the political sides, using abbreviations also leads to reduce the spoken or the written contexts. Likewise, the results of the second part contained multiple types of euphemisms, it was noticed that the Wall Street Journal publishers try to use many types of euphemisms in their speeches. Moreover, the outcomes of the third part contained or used specific types, it turns out that the data of Washington Post that are selected contained the idiom type, also it contained another type of euphemism which is circumlocution. The selection of such types is to avoid some harsh terms and also to warn of some terms that are connected with wars or frightening.

Simply speaking, euphemism in any field refers easily to providing a way to reduce the tension in the conversation and make everyone involved feel more comfortable. Euphemisms should be used for supporting others without causing an embarrassing term in a certain situation. For instance, to be polite when talking to someone who is grieving the recent loss of a loved one, the term "*passed away*" rather than "*died*" can alleviate some of the negative feelings this topic may cause.

6.   Conclusion

The researcher in this work provided an explanation of the concept of euphemisms used in political speeches by politicians, or within the expressions of some journalists in their political articles. Besides, the researcher also showed an explanation of the types of euphemisms according to the principle of Allan and Burridge (1991). The main reasons behind the need for euphemistic terms are both social, for using suitable items to deal with people from another different culture, and emotional, since activities numerous discussions of prohibitions and taboo matters; for instance, sexual issues, personal appearances, as well as religious problems. Additionally, euphemism serves a crucial role in the pressure window while preserving an influential impression of delicacy. (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2014)

The most important thing the researcher wanted to convey in his study is to show the importance of euphemisms in dealing with people, whether with people within the same culture or people from other cultures. It also shows how to focus on ambiguous or uncommon terms

that are used in politics which is considered one of the areas of life. Thus, languages always accept additions, especially with the development of the world, because this world is in the media era, so, the readers in this field (politics) and other fields, should be aware and focus on the strange terms that are used in the media. Talking about the limitation of this study, it should be mentioned that this study is restricted to choosing some political articles in the common American newspapers (*Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and New York Times*) in the last decade (2010-2020) purposefully. In addition, the Allan and Burridge theory (1991) is conducted as a path of analysis.

Finally, it is necessary to suggest that the most important thing for further studies or researchers, not only for people who specialize in the fields of politics, is to distinguish between euphemisms and taboo words that are forbidden to use because this will help to understand what is meant in speeches, whether they are written or spoken. On the other hand, the researcher suggests that it is very important to read about a specific culture before reading its art, politics, or even literary texts because this will help readers to understand the code words or some euphemistic terms that are used. Furthermore, exploring the euphemistic expressions in another field like the economy, or education system can be interesting also because the world is always changing and a lot of items can be added or examined through mass media.

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Appendices

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