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Specificity of euphemistic lexis in media discourse on the example of Russian press from 2017-2021

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Abstract: In this article the issue of euphemistic lexicon used in Russian periodicals of the early 21st century is investigated. The purpose of the study is to analyse the functional features of euphemisms, the specifics of their use in media discourse, and to determine their role in the manipulation of public opinion. The material of the study consisted of texts in modern Russian socio-political periodicals. Examples of euphemistic units from the newspaper sub-corpus of the National Corpus of the Russian Language are used as illustrative material. The manipulative potential of euphemisms is manifested in masking the true meaning of the message by creating a neutral or positive connotation, distorting the real scale of events or phenomena. Publicistic discourse is a source of information for a wide audience, which strengthens the influential role of euphemistic lexicon. The central focus of the study is to identify priority topics belonging to the socio-political sphere that are subject to euphemisation in the modern Russian press. There is an indication of an increase in the number of euphemisms related to socially significant topics and spheres of human activity in the journalistic discourse. The characteristic feature of this group is its close connection with socio-cultural processes. The repeated use of euphemism weakens its key function and stimulates the formation of new euphemistic units. The use of some euphemisms in publicistic discourse is dictated by the norms of political correctness in modern communication. The results of the study presented in the article indicate a fairly wide use of euphemisms in the language of the modern Russian press.
Keywords: euphemism, manipulation, political correctness, publicist discourse

Introduction

In the language of modern Russian mass media, there is an active growth of euphemistic vocabulary. Words and expressions that serve to soften concepts and phenomena that can cause a negative reaction in the reader are widely used. Euphemistic substitutions make it possible to shift the connotative emphasis, levelling the negative judgment, and veiling the true meaning of what is referred to. The masking function of euphemisms, especially demanded in journalistic discourse, is a manifestation of their manipulative potential. The euphemism as a tool of manipulation influences the reader and the formation of their individual perception of the world. The use of euphemisms in newspapers and magazines is also dictated by the requirements of political correctness, the desire to avoid conflicts and failures in communication. The relevance of studying the characteristics of euphemistic lexicon functioning in the Russian press is explained by the rapidly increasing role of the influencing function in modern newspaper journalism. The aim of the article is to analyse the functional features of euphemisms, to identify their role in the implementation of manipulative influence on public opinion, as well as to determine the topics of priority and social importance that are most often subject to euphemisation.

1. The manipulative potential of euphemisms

Since the euphemism is a multidimensional linguistic phenomenon, it is considered through the lens of lexicology, stylistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. The study of euphemistic units in the aspect of speech pragmatics is especially relevant in modern linguistics because this approach makes it

possible to consider not only the linguistic nature of euphemisms but also the extra-linguistic factors that influence the emergence of euphemisms, as well as their interpretation. A considerable body of research has been devoted to the study of euphemisms in a pragmatic way (Allan, Burridge, 1991, 2006; Baskova, 2006; Bushueva, 2005; Bonhomme, 2014; Casas Gómez, 2012; Drozdova, 2016; Giezek, 2002; Kovshova, 2007; Lakoff, 1995; Latypova; Nikitina, 2011; Pohorila, 2022; Roscan, 2017; Todosienko 2019; Yakushkina, 2009). The pragmatic approach, in particular, explores issues related to the manipulative impact of euphemisms.

The main characteristic of manipulation is considered to be the hidden nature of the influence exerted. The object of manipulation should not notice this influence. According to the researcher A.M. Katsev (1988), "the ability of euphemisms to manipulate the recipient is determined by some factors: 1. Firstly, euphemisms conceal the true nature of a phenomenon by creating a neutral or positive connotation; 2. Secondly, the recipient usually does not have time to extract euphemisms from the context and comprehend them, as the abundance of information in modern society makes it difficult to navigate the linguistic material and evaluate it critically; 3. Thirdly, to categorise a word as a euphemism, the tabooed denotation behind the word must be identified, otherwise the euphemism will not be "recognised"; 4. Fourthly, not many recipients are familiar with this linguistic phenomenon; without knowing the essence of the phenomenon, it is impossible to understand how manipulative influence is carried out" (ibidem, p. 47).

Other researchers also draw attention to the difficulty of identification of the masked denotation by the recipient (Kateneva, 2013; Shapovalova, 2018). Baskova explains the manipulative effect of euphemisms in terms of two mechanisms: "the associative mechanism diverts the recipient's attention from the tabooed concept, changing the emotional sentiment of the message, and the "buffer" mechanism creates an intermediate link between the unmentionable word and consciousness" (Baskova, 2006). According to several researchers, manipulation through euphemisms is a means of referential manipulation associated with the distortion of the image of the denotation when describing reality. A euphemism hides the essence of the phenomenon by creating a neutral or positive connotation, allowing to divert the attention of the recipient from one characteristic of the denotation to another (Beliaeva, Kulikova, 2009; Ignateva, Builova, 2017; Vildanova, 2015).

The high manipulative potential of euphemisms is especially noticeable in mass media discourse. The mass media play an important role in shaping the media image of the world, as they not only inform the recipient about real events and phenomena but also interpret and form opinions about them. Dobrosklonskaia rightly points out the decisive importance of the influencing function of mass media: "The way media operate implies not only – nor even primarily – a reflection of the surrounding reality, but, more importantly, its interpretation, commentary, and evaluation, which contribute to the creation of a particular ideological background" (Dobrosklonskaia, 2009, p. 85). The way of presenting information largely depends on the editorial policy, the specific characteristics of a particular publication, and the personal position of the author. In situations where an overt statement is not possible or desirable, the journalist resorts to implicit ways of expressing information. One of the most effective linguistic means of creating implicitness is using euphemisms. Euphemistic substitutions allow to soften, and veil the essence of phenomena or events that can cause a negative reaction in the recipient.

Euphemisms are effective in modern political communication, having become firmly embedded in the speech of politicians and officials. Political euphemisms appearing in media texts can be effectively used in creating the public image of a politician, discrediting the opponent's activities, shaping political views and positions of citizens, etc. Euphemisms used in political communication allow to veil the negative aspects of reality and its processes. The aggravation of the political situation and serious socio-economic problems promote the use of euphemistic substitutions in mass media texts. The frequent use of euphemisms in journalistic discourse is also explained by the requirements of political correctness, the desire to avoid conflicts and

failures in communication. Mass media texts are of a public nature and addressed to a mass audience. Therefore, the coverage of controversial issues, and public problems related, in particular, to various types of social discrimination, is associated with the search and selection of linguistic means capable of mitigating negative evaluation. Euphemisms are an effective means of applying politically correct vocabulary because "the tighter the social control of the communicative situation and the speaker's self-control of his own speech, the more likely the appearance of euphemisms" (Krysin, 2008, p. 33). The aggravation of the political situation, serious socio-economic problems cause an active increase of euphemisation in media texts.

2. Material and methods

The demand for euphemisms in the discourse of mass media is caused by the fact that, in addition to other functions, they are an instrument of manipulative influence on the mass audience. Euphemisms are most developed in the discourse of socially important topics, topical issues of political and economic aspects of the state functioning. The necessity of using euphemisms in mass media is caused by the desire to veil negative phenomena from the sphere of economy, certain actions of authorities, relations between states. The use of euphemisms in the political sphere is nowadays often dictated by the rules of political correctness. In this connection, the role of masking function of euphemisms in mass media is increasing, based, in particular, on the idea of careful expression of thoughts in the conditions of political tension in the world. In addition, manipulation is quite often used in political communication to realise the political interests of individual leaders and political parties. In modern Russian media texts, euphemisation is also subjected to topics related to the coverage of emergency situations, natural disasters, etc. Intensification of the processes of euphemisation of the above-mentioned topics in mass media discourse has aroused our research interest in this problem. Therefore, the analysis of euphemistic units is based on the material of newspaper texts of socio-political topics.

The material of the study consisted of texts in modern Russian socio-political periodicals. Both electronic versions of print publications as well as texts from online-only media outlets from th 5 years (2017-2021) were used: „Izvestiia", „RIA Novosti", „Parlamentskaia Gazeta", „Vedomosti", „RBK", „Kommersant", „Komsomolskaia Pravda", „Vesti.ru", „Moskovskii Komsomolets", „Novaya gazeta", „Novye izvestiia", „Pravda", „lenta.ru", „gazeta.ru", „NEWSru.com", „Bizness Online". The article deals with word and phrase-level euphemisms. These periodicals publish information on topical issues of social, political and cultural life in Russia and abroad.

The choice of material was based on the authority and popularity of these publications. The above-mentioned national media are distributed throughout the Russian Federation and play an important role in the information space. Since printed periodicals are gradually losing their leadership in the speed of information delivery, modern users increasingly prefer online versions of printed newspapers or online publications. The publications we have chosen have a large audience reach, as evidenced, for example, traffic on the publication's website per month: „RBK" – 127 million visitors, „lenta.ru" – 103 million visitors, „RIA Novosti" – 95 million visitors, „Komsomolskaia pravda" – 87 million visitors, „gazeta.ru" – 51 million visitors, „Moskovskii komsomolets" – 41 million visitors, „Kommersant" – 33 million visitors, „NEWSru.com"- 27 million visitors, „Izvestiia" 21 million visitors, „Vedomosti"- 11 million visitors (data for December 2024). Many publications, whose texts were used as illustrative material in our article, are among the most quoted periodicals. According to Medialogy, in April 2025, the top 10 most quoted Russian newspapers according to the citation index (the citation index is an indicator of the quality of media content distribution) included: „Izvestiia" – 2 435,70; „Kommersant" – 2 014.73; „Vedomosti" – 768.34; „Komsomolskaia pravda" – 507.01; „Moskovskii komsomolets" – 311.26; „Parlamentskaia gazeta" – 301.86.

Examples of euphemistic units from the newspaper sub-corpus of the National Corpus of the Russian Language (NCRL) are used as illustrative material. NCRL is an information and reference system based

on a collection of Russian texts in electronic form, equipped with an automated search system. The system contains more than two billion words, provides a representative sample and allows the application of statistical methods to analyse the result.

The newspaper corpus was established in 2010, and its resources cover press texts since 1983 and are enriched annually. It is the largest sub-corpus of the NCRL in terms of volume and consists of national and regional media. The newspaper sub-corpus (national media) has a volume of 815,141,029 million words and 2,728,688 texts.[1] The newspaper sub-corpus provides representative data illustrating the use of particular word forms. The corpus can search for exact word forms, lemmas and collocations.

Nowadays, the use of language corpora plays a leading role in most linguistic research, and corpus-based linguistics is rapidly developing on the basis of corpora. A linguistic corpus is understood as "a unified, structured and labelled array of linguistic (speech) data in electronic form, intended for certain philological and, more generally, humanitarian research" (Zakharov, 2003, p. 52). A national corpus is characterised by a balanced composition of texts. This means that the corpus contains, as far as possible, all types of written and spoken texts represented in a given language (fiction of different genres, journalistic, educational, scientific, business, colloquial, dialectal, etc.), and that all these texts are included in the corpus as far as possible in proportion to their share in the language of the corresponding period.[2] The language corpus, as an array of texts of different genres and styles, reflecting the current state of the language, allows us to trace the picture of word usage dynamics. The national corpus of the Russian language is a representative and statistically objective tool for tracking the frequency of word usage. Most major languages of the world already have their national corpora. The British National Corpus (BNC), in particular, is a recognised model, and many other modern corpora are oriented towards it. The Czech National Corpus (Český Národní Korpus, ČNK) and the National Corpus of Polish (Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego, NKJP) stand out among the corpuses of Slavic languages. A detailed overview of Slavic corpora is presented in Reznikova's study (Reznikova, 2009). Such linguists as Atkins (Atkins, Clear and Olster, 1993), Baranov (2003), Biber (Biber, Conrad, Reppen, 2011), Leech (1992), McEnery (McEnery, Hardie, 2012), Meyer (2002), Plungian (2008), Sinclair (1991), Zasina (2018) and many others have made great contributions to the formation of corpus linguistics. The importance of corpus-oriented research is also evidenced by regular conferences, monographs, special issues of scientific journals entirely devoted to the problems of corpus linguistics (Charciarek, 2022; Plungyan, 2019). The methodological apparatus of corpus linguistics allows using quantitative indicators in the field of foreign language teaching (Ivanova, Kulagina, 2020; Sibirtseva, 2013), translation (Kurenko, 2017; Potapov, 2022), mass-media language research (Komarova, 2020), language history (Kochetova, 2020), dialectology (Zyuzkova, 2020), lexicography (Grabowski, 2011).

The following methods were used in the research: selection of lexical material, descriptive method, lexicographic analysis, semantic analysis of the word, contextual analysis and quantitative method.

3. Results

The study revealed that euphemisms in mass media discourse are actively used in the texts of newspaper publications on economic and socio-political topics. Table 1. presents the number of samples of euphemistic units in the newspaper corpus (national media) on the basis of the NCRL data.

The NCRL service allows us to trace the chronological distribution of euphemistic units, the dynamics of increasing and decreasing frequency of use. For example, the dynamics of the use of the word combination pension reform within the given time boundaries from 2010 to 2021 in the mass media language demonstrates a significant increase in use in 2015 and 2018 (Figure 1.).

1 From: https://ruscorpora.ru/en/search?search=CgQyAggD, (access: June 16, 2025)
2 From: https://ruscorpora.ru/en/page/terms, (access: June 16, 2025)

Table 1. The use of the selected euphemisms in 2017 – 2021 according to the NCRL

euphemism	number of examples	euphemism	number of examples
tension in the labour market	36	unfriendly step	289
release	37	unfriendly countries	51
pension reform	1096	air support	79
negative growth	17	preventive strike	188
price liberalisation	40	power vertical	132
liquidity efflux	21	forceful methods	440
blast	911	disarm	63
thermal point	40	two hundred	4
symmetrical response	145	waterlogging	270
mirror measures	291	hard landing	427

Source: compiled by the author.

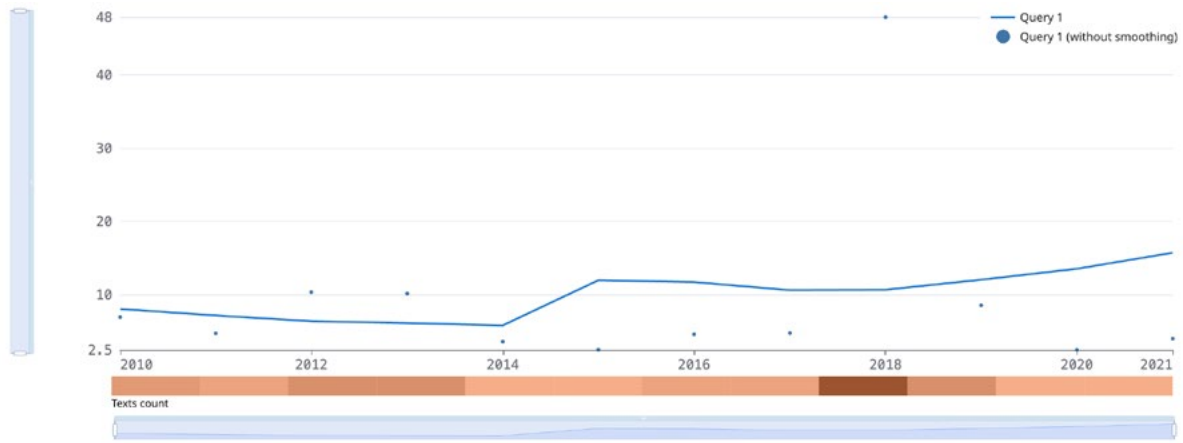


Figure 1. Graph of the frequency of the use of the phrase "pension reform" according to the newspaper sub-corpus of the NCRL, 2010-2021. Complited by the author from data search on: https://ruscorpora.ru/s/82EZL. Below the graph is a heat scale showing the number of texts in which examples of gas blast are found. The darker the colour on the scale, the higher the index.

The automatically generated graph of word usage frequency correlates with the fundamentally important changes in the Russian pension legislation in this period. The vertical axis of the graph shows the relative frequency of use of a given lexical unit (in ipm–items per million). The statistical data of the newspaper sub-corpus also provide information about the periodicals in which the word or combination of words appears more often. The largest number of references to the pension reform is found in the newspapers „Kommersant" (20.88%) and „Vedomosti" (14.26%, Table 2.), which are among the most authoritative business media in Russia.

The main attention of these newspapers is paid to the analysis of the situation in various branches of economy, news of social and political life, analytical materials are accompanied by comments of experts. The situation with the euphemism unfriendly countries is an illustrative example of the increased frequency of use of euphemistic units caused by social factors. This notion appeared in response to restric-

Table 2. Frequency of the use of the phrase "pension reform" in Russian newspapers according to the newspaper sub-corpus of the NCRL, 2010-2021. Complited by the author from data search on: https://ruscorpora.ru/s/9rgZZ)

№	Newspaper	Texts	Contexts	IPM
1	Kommersant	675	1263 (20.88%)	15.56
2	Vedomosti	496	863 (14.26%)	18.77
3	Izvestiya	334	542 (8.96%)	7.39
4	RIA Novosti	231	429 (7.09%)	7.96
5	Parlamentskaya gazeta	263	371 (6.13%)	9.99
6	Vesti.ru	224	365 (6.03%)	4.89
7	Lenta.ru	223	355 (5.87%)	4.96
8	Trud-7	217	320 (5.29%)	7.16
9	Komsomolskaya pravda	213	302 (4.99%)	5.29
10	lenta.ru	165	213 (3.52%)	3.84
11	RBK Daily	108	211 (3.49%)	8.13
12	NEWSru.com	60	186 (3.07%)	24.99
13	Moskovskiy komsomolets	78	106 (1.75%)	10.94
14	Nezavisimaya gazeta	53	100 (1.65%)	3.01
15	Argumenty i fakty	64	83 (1.37%)	2.18
16	gazeta.ru	65	79 (1.31%)	6.67
17	Novyy region 2	52	73 (1.21%)	4.03
18	RBK Deyli	53	72 (1.19%)	7.64
19	Novaya gazeta	29	54 (0.89%)	7.9
20	Nezavisimaya gazeta (prilozhenie «NG-Politekonomiya»)	15	24 (0.4%)	18.06
21	RBK	10	10 (0.17%)	2.58
22	Rossiyskie vesti	6	9 (0.15%)	15.44
23	Nezavisimaya gazeta (prilozhenie «Krug zhizni»)	5	8 (0.13%)	7.7
24	Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti	3	5 (0.08%)	3.27
25	Mariya Selivanova	1	2 (0.03%)	1,018.85
26	Nezavisimaya gazeta (prilozhenie «Sodruzhestvo-NG»)	1	1 (0.02%)	1.2
27	Nezavisimaya gazeta (prilozhenie «Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie»)	1	1 (0.02%)	0.28
28	Nezavisimaya gazeta (prilozhenie «NG-Regiony»)	1	1 (0.02%)	0.65
29	Nezavisimaya gazeta (prilozhenie «Ex Libris NG»)	1	1 (0.02%)	0.24
30	Sovetskiy sport	1	1 (0.02%)	0.04

IPM – items per million

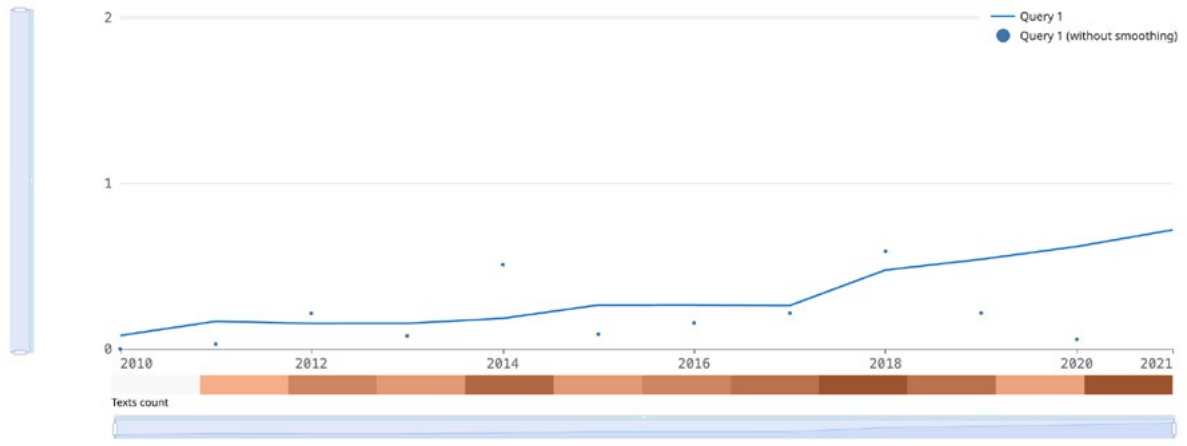


Figure 2. Graph of the frequency of the use of the phrase "unfriendly countries" according to the newspaper sub-corpus of the NCRL, 2010-2021. Complited by the author from data search on: https://ruscorpora.ru/s/jR8rl .

tive political and economic measures introduced by states and international organizations against Russia. The presented graph (Figure 2.) clearly shows an increase in the frequency of the lexical unit in 2014 and 2018, when the concept of unfriendly countries appeared in the Russian legislation. The frequency of use of the euphemism unfriendly countries correlates with the time of aggravation of Russia's relations with Western countries and is caused by political trends.

4. Discussion

Euphemistic vocabulary is an integral part of journalistic discourse, as it allows us to avoid the direct naming of realities and phenomena that can cause negative emotions in the mass audience. Based on analysing the material of socio-political periodicals, several thematic groups were singled out, in which an increase of euphemistic substitutions was observed. At the same time, the typical topics subject to euphemisation, such as physiological processes and conditions, sexuality, human body and its parts, illness and death, etc., remained out of our focus. Euphemisms are actively used in the socio-economic sphere described in the modern Russian press. Euphemistic substitutions allow to smooth out the negative aspects of the described processes and phenomena, such as falling incomes of the population, increase in the retirement age, demographic problems, etc. A serious problem in the labour sphere is unemployment, which officials choose to refer to as tension in the labour market: "The member of parliament noted that the decision of the Cabinet will reduce *tension in the labour market* [*напряженность на рынке труда*], as currently the number of the officially registered unemployed has sharply increased" [„Парламентарий отметил, что решение кабмина позволит снизить *напряжённость на рынке труда*, так как сейчас резко выросло количество официально зарегистрированных безработных"] (Parlamentskaia gazeta, 03.07.2020); "*Tension in the labour market* has increased, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Family, Labour and Social Protection Lenara Ivanova said at a working meeting in the government yesterday" [„*Напряженность на рынке труда* выросла, сообщила вчера на оперативном совещании в правительстве вице-премьер, министр семьи, труда и соцзащиты Ленара Иванова"] (Kommersant, 27.05.2020). Tension in the labour market is perceived as some kind of strain and does not carry a negative connotation like the word unemployment. This euphemistic substitution allows to disguise of the true essence of the problem denoted, reducing its significance.

Euphemisms avoid direct reference to denote a difficult economic situation. For example, in one of the newspaper articles of the mainstream media, the fact of mass dismissal of workers is described as a release: "In most cases, the employer does not carry out the intended *release* (*высвобождение*) of employees completely, or withdraws the notice of release from the employment service altogether" [„Отметим, в большинстве случаев работодатель не проводит предполагаемое *высвобождение* работников в полном объеме или совсем отзывает уведомление о *высвобождении* из органов службы занятости"] (RBK, 29.03.2019). Let us turn to the dictionary definition of the verb to *release*: 1. Remove, pull out of sth, free from sth constricting, obstructing movement. 2. To free from sth and direct for another use, implementation (Kuznetsov, 2002, p. 181). The euphemism release masks the true meaning of the denotation, and changes its connotative meaning, as it is associated with the words liberate, freedom, which carry a positive sentiment. On the pages of newspapers, information about job cuts is also presented using the euphemism *optimisation* [*оптимизация*]: "Gyms have seen a sharp increase in spending because of the pandemic, says Olga Kiseleva, president of the Association of Fitness Industry Operators: 'There has been an *optimisation* of staff in the industry [...]" [„В отрасли прошла *оптимизация* количества персонала [...]"] (Kommersant, 14.08.2020). According to Kuznetsov's dictionary, optimisation is the choice of the best (optimal) variant from a set of possible variants or increasing the intensity of something in order to achieve high results (Kuznetsov, 2002, p. 721); from the Latin *optimus* – the best. A word with a positive evaluative component acts as a euphemism naming a negative social phenomenon, which causes a contradiction at

the semantic level. The word *optimisation* in some contexts has come to mean: to reduce something or make someone redundant. This is the meaning in which the word is widely used in journalistic discourse when it comes to optimisation of medicine (reduction of the number of medical institutions), science and education (reduction of funding, number of schools, etc.): "The health system was not prepared for a pandemic because *optimisation* led to doctors being laid off, hospitals being downsized; all that had to be re-created in a state of emergency" [„Система здравоохранения не была готова к пандемии, потому что *оптимизация* привела к увольнению врачей, к сокращению больниц, и нужно было заново в экстренном режиме все это создать"] (Kommersant, 20.07.2020). Health care and education are among the most important elements of the social sphere. This explains the frequent mentions of the word *optimisation*, which has acquired a negative connotation. As a result, the euphemistic function is erased, as the euphemism ceases to veil the negative aspects of the phenomenon. As an illustration, here are a few examples of newspaper headlines: "Russian medicine: '*optimisation*' or a step into the future?" [„Российская медицина: «оптимизация» или шаг в будущее?"] (Komsomolskaia pravda, 12.03.2019); "Perhaps the problem would have remained at the regional level and the empty surgical wards would have been closed under the guise of *optimisation*" [„Возможно, проблема так и осталась бы на региональном уровне, а опустевшие хирургические отделения, не исключено, просто закрыли бы под видом *оптимизации*"] (Vedomosti, 28.08.2019).

According to researcher A.D. Vasiliev, such euphemisms as optimisation, reform and some others, despite their proximity to individual-contextual substitutions of one word for another, are not occasional: "Their use has a systematic, massive and purposeful character" (Vasilev, 2010, p. 147). Indeed, authors of media texts often use the euphemisms optimisation, reform when referring to negative phenomena. For example, the phrase *pension reform* [*пенсионная реформа*] is used in press materials concerning the government's initiative to raise the retirement age: "Experts are confident that the *pension reform* and tax changes have had a key impact on the expectations of Russians" [„Эксперты уверены, что ключевым образом на ожидания россиян повлияли пенсионная *реформа* и налоговые изменения"] (Izvestiia, 11.06.2019). However, the euphemism pension *changes* [*изменения*] is also used alongside this euphemistic expression: "First Deputy Prime Minister and Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov called the reaction of Russians to the pension *changes* unexpected, and also noted that these *changes* were necessary to improve the quality of life of pensioners" [„Первый вице-премьер, министр финансов России Антон Силуанов назвал реакцию россиян на пенсионные *изменения* неожиданной, а также отметил, что данные изменения были необходимы для улучшения качества жизни пенсионеров"] (Izvestiia, 15.01.2019). In the second example, the neutral word *change* replaced the word *reform*, which may cause negative associations in the recipient. This substitution is explained by the fact that in the mass consciousness, the word *reforms* has acquired a negative meaning: a difficult period in the country in the late '80s – early '90s (perestroika), as well as other reform initiatives in recent history which mostly led to the worsening of the situation of citizens. The pension reform announced in 2018 involves raising the retirement age, which has caused public discontent and strong criticism of the reform. Initially, a *reform* denominated a progressive change, usually for the better, but under the influence of extra-linguistic factors, a negative connotation of the word was formed. The change in the pragmatics of this word is evidenced by the contexts of its use in mass media: "The word '*reform*' is already in the general subconsciousness, causing one to bristle..." [«Слово 'реформа' уже в подкорке, заставляет шерсть становиться дыбом...»] (Bizness Online, 2018).

Although traditionally euphemisms are regarded as a type of synonyms (Arapova 1998; Kviatkovskii, 1966; Galperin, 1981; Katsev, 1988), it is difficult to disagree with the researcher Shmelev, who argued that euphemistic substitutions are caused "not by the proximity of the meanings of words, but precisely by the essential differences in their semantic content" (Shmelev, 2003, p. 145). Another researcher of the

semantic peculiarities of euphemisms, Sammani, notes that the search for a new form of denotation is carried out with the purpose of ennobling the meaning (Sammani, 2014, p. 648). Sometimes the denotation is acquired from the opposite, i.e. convergence of opposite concepts. The above examples confirm this idea since these euphemistic substitutions are based not on similarity, but on the difference in the meaning of the euphemism and the original denotation. In addition, a denotation with a negative meaning can be replaced by a denotation directly opposite in meaning, e.g. *peacekeeping mission* [миротворческая миссия] instead of *military operations* [боевые действия]. The root of the word *peace* contains the seme 'absence of war', the euphemistic expression *peacekeeping mission* contains a meaning diametrically opposite to the meaning of the word *war* (война). This constitutes an effective manipulation technique that masks the true state of affairs. In this sense, the euphemistic substitutions that appeared in media discourse during the pandemic (COVID-19) are particularly revealing: *vacation* [*каникулы*], *long weekends* [*длинные выходные*], *non-working days* [нерабочие дни] (instead of *quarantine* [*карантин*], *self-isolation* [*самоизоляция*]). The words *vacation* and *weekend* do not have a negative connotation, on the contrary, they evoke positive emotions.

An interesting situation has developed with the term *negative growth* [*отрицательный рост*], which regularly appears in media texts. Negative growth rate is a term generally applicable in economics and statistics, used to describe a situation when indicators of economic or social development are declining compared to previous periods. The term is used to convey information about negative changes in a particular factor. Journalists, quoting statements by officials of economic ministries, used this term in their publications, which contributed to its transfer from the sphere of professional jargon into the media discourse: "In April-May 2020, *negative growth* affected many sectors" [„В апреле-мае 2020 года о*трицательный рост* отразился на многих секторах"] (RIA Novosti, 06.07.2020). The expression *negative growth* is used instead of the more understandable and familiar for the mass audience economic recession, decline, and the focus of reader's attention is shifted to the word *growth*, which allows to reduce the intensity of negative evaluation. Terms that are often used as economic euphemisms include*: price liberalisation* [*либерализация цен*] instead of *uncontrolled price increases,* [*неконтролируемый рост цен*]; *liquidity efflux* [*отток ликвидности*] instead of *banking crisis* [*банковский кризис*]; *restructuring* [*реструктуризация*] instead of *reduction* [*сокращение*]; *recession* [*рецессия*] instead of *economic decline* [*экономический спад*], etc. Texts overloaded with terms obscuring the meaning of the wording, may not be fully understood by a wide audience.

An active increase of euphemistic substitutions is observed in media texts reporting on various emergencies, catastrophes and natural disasters. The mass media regularly publish official comments by experts from the emergency services on the tragic events that take place. Professional vocabulary from the speech of employees of the relevant departments seeps into newspaper and journalistic materials. For example, the technical term *blast* [*хлопок*] is used in newspaper headlines often in place of the word *explosion* [*взрыв*]. The term itself is found in job descriptions and specialist literature (Instruction on investigation and accounting of fires at power facilities, 2002): "*Blast* (outburst) – the rapid combustion of a flammable mixture, not accompanied by the formation of compressed gases capable of destroying structures or installations" [„*Вспышка* (хлопок) – быстрое сгорание горючей смеси, не сопровождающееся образованием сжатых газов, способных разрушать конструкции или установки"]. According to the same manual, an *explosion* is "a rapid exothermic chemical transformation of an explosive medium accompanied by the release of energy and the formation of compressed gases capable of producing the destruction of structures or installations" [„быстрое экзотермическое химическое превращение взрывоопасной среды, сопровождающееся выделением энергии и образованием сжатых газов, способных производить разрушение конструкций или установок"]. As the definitions suggest, the main difference between *blast* and *explosion* is the lack of significant destruction. However, a *blast* instead of an *explosion* appears

in news reports, even when serious destruction and casualties are involved: "Last Sunday in a two-storey house in the village of Voznesenka a *blast* occurred, as a result of which the ceiling collapsed, and a person died" [„Напомним, в минувшее воскресенье в двухэтажном доме в селе Вознесенка произошел *хлопок*, в результате которого обрушилось перекрытие, погиб человек"] (Vesti.ru, 14.09.2020). The use of the term *blast* when describing domestic gas leakage incidents is intended to disguise the true state of affairs, to prevent the spread of panic. It is also important that the word *explosion* is firmly associated in the mass consciousness with terrorism. This is explained by a series of terrorist attacks in the recent history of Russia, when there were bombings of residential buildings, explosions in the underground, etc. Therefore, when analysing euphemisms, it is also necessary to take into account the socio-cultural context. The active growth in the use of the word combination gas blast in the Russian press in recent years is well illustrated by the graph obtained in the newspaper sub-corpus of the NCRL (Figure 3). This graph shows the frequency of occurrence of the mentioned word combination in the newspaper sub-corpus from 2010 to 2021. The graph is constructed taking into account data from 2010, which allows us to track changes (noticeable growth) in the frequency of use of this word over ten years.

Similarly, in order to reduce the real scale of the emergency situation, the euphemistic substitution of the word *ignition* [*возгорание*] instead of *fire* [*пожар*]is used in newspaper articles. The website of one of the specialised research and production companies (Technologies and systems of fire safety, n.d.), which designs and manufactures fire extinguishing systems, provides an explanation of the words *ignition* and *fire*: "*Ignition* is the initiation of the process of combustion of materials by an external source of ignition. [...] A *fire* is an uncontrolled combustion process outside of a designated area. The process is accompanied by the destruction of inventory and endangering public health and safety" (Technologies and systems of fire safety). Attention is drawn to the fact that the fire can die out on its own during the ignition phase. That is, a *fire* is an *ignition* that is out of control and requires action by firefighting professionals. The analysis of publications showed that the term *ignition* is also used in cases where a large fire is involved: "The *ignition* occurred over an area of 5,000 square meters. 73 specialists and 24 units of equipment were sent to the site to extinguish the *ignition*" [„*Возгорание* произошло на площади в 5000 кв. м. На место тушения направили 73 человека и 24 единицы техники"] (Vedomosti, 21.12.2021). In the above example, the euphemism was used to substitute notions in order to soften the negative effect of the word *fire*.

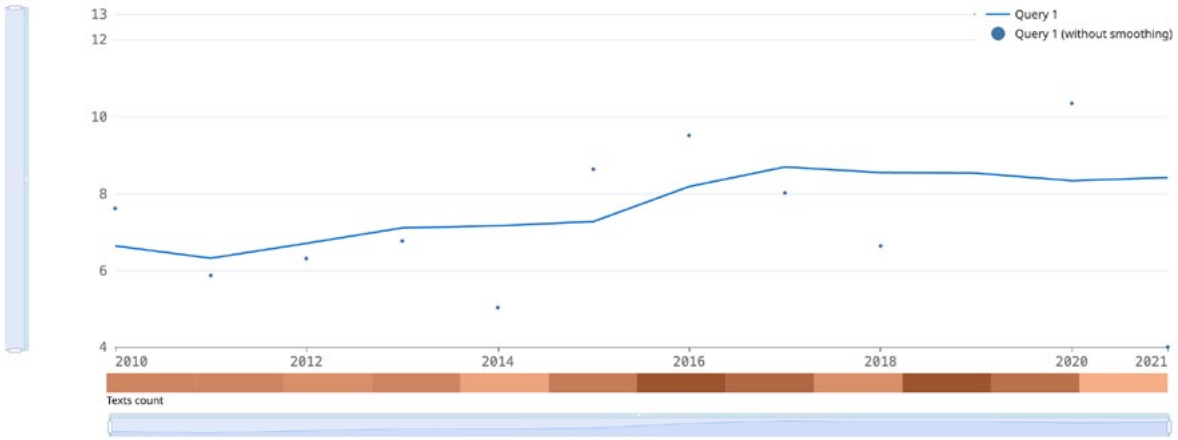


Figure 3. Graph of the frequency of the use of the word "blast" according to the newspaper sub-corpus of the NCRL, 2010-2021. Complited by the author from data search on: https://ruscorpora.ru/s/kR7vE .

The euphemism *waterlogging* [*подтопление*], which is used in place of the word *flooding* [*наводнение*], is intended to diminish the scale of the disaster. Information posted on the official website of the department (Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters, n.d.) designates *waterlogging* as an increase in the level of groundwater, leading to disruption of economic activities in the affected area and changes in the structure and functions of natural biogeocenoses. *Flood* – inundation of a territory with water, which is a type of natural disaster; it can occur due to a rise in water levels rising during high water or freshets, ice jams, ice blockages, as a result of a surge in the river mouth, as well as in case of failure of hydraulic structures (Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters, n.d.). Despite the serious consequences and loss of life caused by the flooding, media texts refer to such instances as *waterlogging*: "The death toll from *waterlogging* in the Irkutsk region has risen to 23 people, with eight more individuals missing" [„Число погибших в результате *подтопления* в Иркутской области возросло до 23 человек, еще восемь числятся пропавшими без вести"] (RBK, 08.06.2019). Replacing the word *flooding*, which has a strong negative connotation, with the term *waterlogging* provides a reduction in the intensity of negative evaluation. In addition to euphemisms, such words and expressions as *high water* [*паводок*], *big water* [*большая вода*] are used as substitutes in media discourse. Avoiding direct naming allows the true meaning of the information to be hidden. The masking function of euphemisms is closely related to the manipulating function because by using specific linguistic means, the author of the text forms the recipient's perception of a given phenomenon or event. In order to downplay the scale of the disaster, to mislead about the real state of affairs, newspapers use euphemisms such as *smoke accumulation* [*задымление*]; *thermal point* [*термоточка*] instead of *fire*; *hard landing* [*жесткая посадка*] *i*nstead of *plane crash, crash landing* [*авиакатастрофа, крушение самолета*]. This set of euphemisms is designed to soften the perception of the real state of affairs, to create a less dangerous, less frightening picture. Cautious wording creates a certain soothing tone, thus influencing the perception of the mental image in the mass audience.

A third large thematic group, identified based on the analysis of newspaper publications, is related to the field of politics – domestic and foreign policy, military actions, actions of the authorities, etc. The language of diplomacy is characterised by the frequent use of euphemisms necessary to soften direct statements and maintain a respectful tone in international relations. This sphere of communication implies the use of restrained phrases, careful formulations, adherence to the principles of political correctness and official speech etiquette. As Krysin rightly points out, "the communicative tasks that diplomats and politicians have to deal with cannot be solved using only direct nominations, without insinuations, innuendos, understatements, camouflage, i.e. without everything that euphemisms are designed to express" (Krysin, 1994). Euphemistic substitutions give politicians the opportunity to issue a serious warning to a foreign country. Thus, a euphemism *symmetrical response* [*симметричный ответ*] implies a wide range of commensurate responses that are not explicitly indicated but can be speculated by the recipient: "Moscow warns the European Union against imposing new sanctions against Russia, they will inevitably be followed by a *symmetrical response,* Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said" [„Москва предостерегает Евросоюз от введения новых санкций против России, на них неотвратимо последует *симметричный ответ*, заявила официальный представитель российского МИД Мария Захарова"] (Parlamentskaia gazeta, 11.02.2021). This euphemism has a rich synonymy: *adequate /mirror /proportionate response* [*адекватный / зеркальный /пропорциональный ответ*]. The euphemisms *mirror /adequate measures* [*зеркальные / адекватные меры*] are used with a similar meaning in media discourse: "Russia will take *mirror measures* after US sanctions against the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline" [„Россия предпримет *зеркальные меры* после американских санкций против газопровода Северный поток-2"] (Lenta.ru, 26.12.2019);

"On 15 February, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov said that if the United States withdraws from the treaty on the elimination of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles (INF Treaty), Russia will take *adequate measures* in response to any threats from the United States" [„15 февраля вице-премьер России Юрий Борисов заявил, что в случае выхода Соединенных Штатов из договора о ликвидации ракет средней и меньшей дальности (ДРСМД) Россия будет принимать *адекватные меры* в ответ на любые угрозы со стороны США"] (Izvestiia, 16.02.2019). These euphemistic substitutions allow to convey a message that will be unambiguously deciphered by the recipient without resorting to direct threats and aggressive statements.

In diplomatic speech, euphemistic expressions are used to express dissatisfaction with the actions of the authorities of a foreign state (reduction in the number of ambassadors, imposition of sanctions) in a softened form. The euphemism *unfriendly /unamiable step* [*недружественный / недружелюбный шаг*] is used for such a purpose, for example: "The Czech side acted dishonestly and unworthily by taking this *unfriendly step*" [(„Чешская сторона поступила непорядочно и недостойно, пойдя на этот *недружественный шаг*"] (Izvestiia, 05.06.2020). A synonymous expression *unfriendly actions* [*недружественные действия*] is used in the following example: "All sanctions imposed by the Russian Federation are responses to *unfriendly actions* of other states, which manifest themselves through the measures taken" [„Все санкции РФ – это ответы на *недружественные действия* других государств, которые проявляются через санкционные решения"] (Izvestiia, 19.05.2020). It should be noted that in the Russian media discourse of recent years the expression *unfriendly countries* is actively used, which was connected with the list of foreign states and territories "committing unfriendly actions" against the Russian Federation, its citizens or legal entities: "*Unfriendly countries* are mobilising social media to pressure Russia" [„*Недружественные страны* привлекают соцсети для воздействия на Россию"] (Moskovskii komsomolets, 18.02.2019).

In media texts, information is presented in such a way as to avoid direct nomination of frightening phenomena, events. Thus, the word *war* [*война*], which has a sharply negative connotation, associated in the mass consciousness with the death of large numbers of people and large-scale destruction, will be replaced by the expression *armed conflict* [*вооруженнный конфликт*] or *military operation* [*военная операция*]: "There has been an ongoing *armed conflict* in Syria since March 2011" ["С марта 2011 года в Сирии продолжается *вооруженный конфликт*"] (Izvestiia, 31.12.2020). As a result of euphemistic substitution, the emphasis is shifted to neutral keywords – *conflict*, *operation*, which allows to reduce the negative reaction of the audience. Euphemisms carry semantic ambiguity, thus improving the negative character of the denotation: *air support* [*поддержка с воздуха*] *i*nstead of *bombing* [*бомбардировка*]; *line of contact* [*линия соприкосновения*] *i*nstead of *war front* [*фронт*]; *preventive strike* [*превентивный удар*] instead of *attack*, *military invasion* [*атака, военное нападение*]. Euphemisms help to disguise or soften the unsavoury aspects of warfare and everything related to it.

The names of forms of government and the structure of the state apparatus are subject to euphemisation. For example, referring to centralised state administration in which lower levels are unconditionally subordinate to the upper ones, the euphemistic expression *power vertical* [*вертикаль власти*] is used: "The contractor agreed with the acting governor of Khabarovsk Krai, Mikhail Degtyarev, who said it was necessary to attract money to the region and strengthen the *power vertical*" [„Исполнительница согласилась с врио губернатора Хабаровского края Михаилом Дегтяревым, который заявил о необходимости привлекать в регион деньги и укреплять *вертикаль власти*"] (Lenta.ru, 22.07.2020). Euphemistic substitutions are used when referring to the actions of various power structures. For example, when reference is made to repressive actions of the authorities, the euphemism *to detain* [*задержать*] (meaning to *arrest – арестовать*) is used: "Dudnikov had already been *detained* in October 2020 when he stood up for a child who was going to be *detained*" [„Дудникова уже задерживали в октябре 2020 года,

когда он вступился за ребенка, которого хотели *задержать*"] (NEWSru.com, 29.05.2021). Another example is *forceful measures /methods* (used to mean *military action* in this context): "The new version of the National Security Strategy enshrines Russia's actions to stop unfriendly and threatening steps, including the imposition of sanctions and *forceful methods*, the Security Council secretary said" [„В новой редакции Стратегии национальной безопасности закреплены действия России для пресечения недружественных и угрожающих шагов, в том числе введение санкций и *силовые методы*, заявил секретарь Совбеза"] (RBK, 31.05.2021).

Over time, euphemisms may cease to fulfil a mitigating function, as their denotative component becomes contaminated (Vildanova, 2015; Nikitina, 2009), and the linguistic element begins to denote the negative notion it used to mask. The connection of euphemisms with various external and internal factors, the dynamic nature of euphemisms is noted by many researchers (Arsenteva, 2012; Sammani, 2014; Moskvin, 2010; Kovshova, 2007). For example, the euphemism *killer* [*киллер*] instead of *murderer* [*убийца*] or *the highest punitive sanction* [*высшая мера наказания*] is a euphemism adopted in Soviet and Russian legal practice to denote the *death penalty*. The euphemism *liquidate* [*ликвидировать*] meaning to *kill*, *destroy* [*убить, уничтожить*] now has synonyms such as *neutralise*, *disarm* [*нейтрализовать, обезвредить*]: "As a result of the special operation, 24 members of this group were *disarmed*, another 35 were detained and the hostages were released, the agency reported" [„В результате спецоперации были *обезврежены* 24 члена этой группы, еще 35 задержаны, а заложники были освобождены, заключили в ведомстве"] (gazeta.ru, 20.05.2019). The literal meaning of the word *disarm* is to deprive of the ability to cause harm, to render harmless. The negative meaning of the denotation is replaced by a lexeme that evokes associations with something useful, stopping harm. The manipulative impact of euphemisms is manifested in reducing the intensity of the negative attribute by shifting connotative accents.

The term *two hundred* [*двухсотый*], also *cargo 200* [*груз 200*], derived from the military lexicon, used to name human losses in military operations, is increasingly common in journalistic discourse: "For some reason, I remembered the voice. It sounded like a terrible triumph of a wife and mother, hoping that her male relatives were no longer targets, but could send a sufficient number of enemies to the *"two hundred"* themselves [„Почему-то запомнился голос. В нем звучало страшное торжество жены и матери, надеющейся, что ее родные мужчины теперь больше не мишени, но сами могут отправить к «*двухсотым*» достаточное число врагов„] (Novaya gazeta, 24.08.2017). This designation of a fallen soldier dehumanises the person, hiding the real tragedy behind a number. A significant part of political euphemisms are words having diffusing properties. For example, the word *special* [*специальный*] is part of some euphemisms: *special contingent* [*спецконтингент*], meaning *prisoners* [*заключенные*]; *special operation* [*спецоперация*] instead of *military invasion* [*военное вторжение*]; *special measures* [*спецмеры*] instead of *torture* of arrested persons [*пытки арестованных*], etc. In the camouflaging function words with generalised meaning are used: *incident* [*инцидент*], *action* [*акция*], *event* [*событие*]: "'Guilty of organising a public *event'*, Svetov wrote on his Twitter, explaining that the court considered one of his tweets on January 23 to be a call for an unsanctioned *action.* On this day a rally was held in support of Alexei Navalny, founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK; recognised by the Justice Ministry as a non-profit NGO)" [„Виновен в организации публичного мероприятия», – написал Светов в своем Twitter, пояснив, что суд счел призывом к несанкционированной *акции* один из его твитов 23 января, когда проходила акция в поддержку основателя Фонда борьбы с коррупцией (ФБК; признан Минюстом НКО-иноагентом) Алексея Навального"] (Vedomosti, 26.04.2021). In the above example, the euphemism *action* is used instead of *opposition rally*.

Conclusion

To sum up, there is an ongoing process of formation of euphemisms, which are widely spread in the modern Russian press. Euphemistic substitutions are used as a way of indirectly softening denotations, allowing

to shift the connotative accent, neutralise or reduce the degree of expression of negative attributes, veil the true meaning of the denoted. Socio-political and economic phenomena, emergencies and natural disasters are topics which are most susceptible to euphemisation in the journalistic discourse. The study revealed that lexicon from the professional jargon actively penetrates into the media texts from official comments of departments and speeches of officials. The terms used as euphemisms, due to their specificity, may not be understood by the mass audience, can obscure the essence of what is denoted, as well as distort the true scope of events or phenomena. Camouflaging of meaning is also achieved by using words with broad or diffusing meanings, as well as loanwords. Due to the associativity mechanism, euphemisms divert the recipient's attention from the object or action that can cause a negative reaction. Euphemisms have a high manipulative effect, as they allow to hide the true essence of the phenomenon, to present information in the appropriate light. The use of euphemistic vocabulary in socio-political periodicals is dictated by the desire to hide the severity of social problems, to create a more favourable image of the world via influencing the system of evaluation and the formation of public opinion. When analysing euphemistic units, it is also necessary to take into account the socio-cultural background.

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