Euphemistic Choices: Face-saving Strategies and Sexual Discourse in Selected Nigerian Novels

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of euphemism as one of the politeness strategies that speakers deploy to lessen the effect of an expression which might be interpreted as threatening to the hearer. Drawing insights from face theory, the paper argues that to preserve the self-image of the hearer is equally the preservation of the hearer's identity and to disregard the self-worth of hearer is to disregard the hearer's identity. Using Helon Habila's Waiting for an Angel, Vincent Egbuson's Love My Planet, Abimbola Adelakun'sUnder the Brown Rusted Roofs and Okey Ndibe's Arrows of Rainas representative texts, the analysis shows that euphemism is a strong discourse strategy that is not only deployed to tone down the effect of an expression on hearer, but a linguistic modality which discourse participants activate basically for politeness reasons. Four categories of sex euphemisms are identified – sex as movement/journey, sex as food, sex as a biological process of maturity and the sex organ as a manipulative object. Syntactically, except for one lexical and one phrasal euphemism, the euphemisms found in the sampled texts occur at the sentential level. Also, it is revealed that the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu exerts significant pressure on conversationalists' use of language.

Key words: *euphemism, identity, politeness, culture, sex, sexuality*

Introduction

It is perhaps needless to mention that language is the vehicle through which literature is driven.The success of any artwork relies on the writer's creative ingenuity, the ability to manipulate the resources of language in conveying their creative intentions. Basically, language gives expression to literature: the writer's success depends much more on their familiarity with the resources of language than with the content or thematic inclination. Fowler (1996:13) maintains that "literature is the creative use of language … the one people most immediately acknowledge as creative". Language is energetic. It gives force to the writer, enabling them to articulate their creative intentions.

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The issue of language of African literary narrative, though almost as old as African literature in English and French expressions, can hardly be glossed over, provided the critic's interest has to do with language.The problem of the language to be employed in narrating the African experience is in every sense tied to Africa's peculiar colonial history which has, in diverse ways, shaped Africa's existence in intriguing ways.Despite the ambivalence of whether to write in their indigenous language or the language of the colonialist, the Nigerian writer, as have other African writers, has continued to use the English Language in nuancedways to capture the Nigerian reality. This nuanced way of using language to portray Nigeria's sociocultural realities has led to a robust harvest of scholarly works relating to language issues in Nigerian literature. Osundare (2004), taking a socio-stylistic perspective, draws attention to the fact that language can be calibrated in the construction of nationality. He argues that Nigerian novelists' use of idiomatic expressions in their creative ambience is a clinical instantiation of their Nigerian identity. In Igboanusi's (2002) study of south-eastern Nigerian novelists' adoption and adaptation of Igbo speech forms into the syntax of English, he maintains that such linguistic practice typifies the Nigerian writer's conscious efforts to "bend" the English Language so as to enable it to heave with cultural thoughts. Following a discourse-stylistic approach in the analysis of Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Ushie and Aboh (2013) hold the view that the novelist's use of indigenous expressions in his narrative discourse is an act of Igbo ethnic identity construction. Also, Lamidi and Aboh (2011), adopting the analytical methods of discourse analysis, connect the use of names in Nigerian novels to identity construction. They argue that names, as used in the novels they examined, are not used haphazardly, illustratinga character's given name is tied to an identity type. Aboh (2014), locating his work within the theoretical provisions of ethnic identity discourse, maintains that Nigeria's novelists' linguistic practice of loaning lexical items from indigenous languages into English where English equivalents exist is not to fill up some narrative space, but a linguistic means of constructing ethnic identity. As illuminating as these studies are, in relation to the use of language in the Nigerian novel, they are yet to examine the discursive functions to which euphemism is put in terms of politeness and sexual identity formulation. In an attempt to bridge this gap, this paper undertakes a discourse-pragmatic analysis of euphemistic choices commonly associated with sexual discourse as depicted in the sampled Nigerian novels. The purpose of engaging in this scholarly exercise bifurcates into: first, to reveal that sex and sexually oriented topics are concepts that are reflected in literary discourse; and second, to account for how the need to observe the face want of a hearer necessitates a speaker to deploy euphemism in interactive situations.

Conceptual Issues

The argument offered in this paper is anchored on euphemism and face as embedded within politeness theory. It has been argued that language users resort to euphemism with the purpose of mitigating the potential dangers of certain taboo words or expressions taken to be too blunt or offensive for a social situation. Crespo (2005: 79) writes that euphemism is "a more general phenomenon that participants in communicative exchanges employ with the purpose of softening the effects of what they really wish to communicate, avoiding, as much as possible, offence and conflict". Though not quite different from other scholars' views on euphemism, implied in Crespo's conjecture is the idea that any linguistic unit or verbal strategy which tries to avoid conflict in interpersonal communication can be said to be euphemistic. Furthering his views, Crespo writes how

> euphemism undoubtedly constitutes a faithful linguistic politeness marker within the approach followed by Lakoff, Leech and Brown and Levinson which favours indirectness as an ideal behaviour for mitigating conflictive situations and insuring the mutual protection of face. (78)

Corroborating Crespo's views, Ma (2011:802) accords that euphemism "literally means to speak good words in a pleasant manner". Traditionally, euphemism acts on taboos that the speaker (S) attempts to tone down the effects of an expression on the listener (L/H). Euphemism, regarding sex and death, for example, has been variously pursued (Epstein, 1985; Ushie, 2012). However, the use of euphemism as a face strategy in describing or referring to sexual discourse is yet to attract the attention of critics of the Nigerian novel. This is despite the fact that euphemism is one of the many discursive strategies deployed in the Nigerian novel in the discourse of sex and sexual identities. Euphemism is a prominent speech pattern in Nigeria's linguistic situation, especially in sex and sexually etched discourses.

As for face, it is a technical term that is associated with politeness theory. Politeness theory works in tune with the notion that people in interactive situations have a social image that they consciously or unconsciously project as well as protect. Politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1978), can be seen as the means employed by a language user to be mindful of another person's face. Face is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown and Levinson, 1978:66). Brown and Levinson divide the notion of face into two: negative and positive face. Negative face reflects a person's desire not to be impeded or imposed upon. Positive face describes an individual's desire to have their self-image

approved of by others. Activating a negative or positive face depends largely on the social positions of the people involved in the conversational exchange (Cutrone, 2011). Therefore, in everyday conversation, interactants, cognizance of politeness principles, generally behave as if their face wants will be acknowledged and respected. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), in the bid to be polite, if S's verbal action is interpreted as a threat to H's face, S can say something to weaken the perceived threat: this is termed face saving act (FSA). Similarly, if S says something that instantiates a threat to H's expectations in relation to self-image, it is known as face threatening act (FTA). It implies that between linguistic choice and social interaction euphemism is intrinsically connected to identity. To save a person's self-image is to acknowledge the person's identity. Different types of euphemistic strategies, motivated by identity construction goals, are obviously linked to discourse participants' desire to be polite in social relationships. McGlone and Batchelor (2003) have proved that euphemistic use basically serves self-presentational purpose, protecting the speaker's positive *self* without much concern for the *other's* discomfort. The psychological need to protect peoples' face/identity has seen the plethora of euphemism taking root in language.

From this point of view, euphemism, face and identity are mutually dependent phenomena in the sense that the need to be polite determines euphemistic use in a corresponding manner. The discursive strategy provided by euphemism, in turn, contributes significantly to language users' awareness of their identity in its sexual form. Arguably, the main aim of euphemism coincides with a basic discursive function: reinforcing social relations in interpersonal communication. This works in a corresponding manner in the sense that identities are based on shared sets of values, agreed-upon cultural understandings and the ideologies which underlie our use of spoken and written discourse.

Embedded in the foregoing argumentation is the idea that euphemism can be seen as a twofold phenomenon: first, as a linguistic material which discourse participants rely upon to avoid taboo language; and second, as a set of discourse strategies which S generally employs to save H's face, to model some verbal behaviour that does not conform to conversational conventions, and also, to threaten H's face. Euphemism is always associated with taboo language. Put differently, euphemism is usually employed in conversational situations to avoid taboo language. Moreover, sex, so long as the Nigerian sociolinguistic context is concerned, remains a taboo topic that is not discussed openly. In fact, in all cultures of the world, people have created euphemisms "to describe genitals, sexual acts, sexual body parts, and body products" (Timothy, 1999:144). It follows that there are various euphemistic ways of referring to sex, sexual acts and parts. An

interesting linguistic feature of euphemism lies in its elastic nature. Depending on the social relationship between discourse participants – speaker and hearer – the situational context and the discourse genre, speakers in specific conversational setting select euphemism to save H's face and achieve the communicative purpose.

In the world of literary arts, writers employ euphemistic expressions to perform various communicative functions. Besides the fact that prose fiction provides an elaborate platform for writers to be vivid in their use of language, many Nigerian sub-cultures are characterised by high degree of indirectness –a compelling example of how the medium can be the message. The implication is that, when euphemism is used, there is an undercurrent message to the primary message. The subtext speaks to the S's and H's ultimate understanding of the discourse and systematically shapes their use of language. What emerges from this stream of argument is that euphemistic choices and politeness are mutually dependent such that there is an intertwined link between them: the need to conform to the conventions of interpersonal communication motivates euphemistic choices, which also helps language users to enact sexual identities either with or without an FTA. This builds largely on the social relationship of the interactants. In turn, identity is defined by the euphemistic choices that are made by discourse participants. The interface of euphemistic choices, politeness and identity, being the fulcrum of this research, is discussed in the section on "The Findings".

Texts under Study

The novels – HelonHabila's *Waiting for an Angel* (hereafter *Angel*), Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet* (hereafter *Planet*) Abimbola Adelakun's *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs* (hereafter *Rusted Roofs*) and Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (hereafter *Arrows*) – that have been sampled for analysis in this paper are in the Nigerian periodization jargon described as third-generation Nigerian/African novels. The act of breaking Nigerian artwork into generations of writers has been considered a fuzzy and nebulous adventure (Ima & Aboh, 2015). This paper will not derail into such periodization palaver because Nigerian literature written in English, as Ima and Aboh (2015) have argued, is too young to come under the weight of literary periodization. In corollary, the novels under this research were not selected based on generationalization paradigm, but by their eloquent testimonies of how euphemism is deployed as politeness strategies in sexual discourse. This implies that other forms of euphemism that do not describe sex and sex-oriented topics are not considered for analysis in this paper.

While the paper identifies the various types of euphemism – lexical, phrasal and sentential – deployed in the selected texts, the paper is neither concerned about detailed quantification of the euphemisms found across the sampled texts nor is it concerned with comparing the novelists in terms of how they have appropriated euphemism in their respective narratives. The core of the paper is to examine euphemism as one of the many linguistic strategies, which in line with the Nigerian cultural narrative, Nigerian novelists engage in their narratives to account for sex and sex-related topics. It seems needless to say that this research is without some limitations. First, the rich cultural diversity in the country is ignored in a search for cultural linguistic regularities and homogeneities. Second, selecting these texts from a country with diverse cultures and several writers is a herculean task on its own.

The Findings

Euphemism describing sex and sexual acts are considered from four analytical directions: sex as movement/journey (*Rusted Roofs* and *Planet*), as food (*Angels* and *Rusted Roofs*), as a biological process of tracking maturity (*Rusted Roofs*, *Arrows* and *Planet*) and the sexual organas an object (*Rusted Roofs*). It is also realized that *Rusted Roofs* has more uses of euphemism and *Angel* has the least number of euphemisms. This is not unconnected with the setting of both novels. While *Rusted Roofs* is set in a rural area where indirectness to "taboo" topics such as sex is considered a communicative necessity, *Angel* is set in Nigeria's commercial city, Lagos. Lagos is a mix of people from different parts of the world. Expectedly, the tendency for communicative directness will be high. Syntactically, three forms of euphemisms have been identified: lexical, phrasal and sentential. Except for the use of lexical and phrasal euphemisms in *Rusted Roofs*, all the euphemisms found in the sampled texts exist at the sentential level.

In the examination of euphemistic choices, the paper focuses attention on conversational exchanges because it is within interactive situations that euphemism can best be understood as face-saving or face-threatening strategy. For example, during a gossip Sikira tells Alake:

> "It's true. It is too late for her anyway even if she repents now. I don't think she can conceive any more even if she wants to."
> "Yet she will go into Alhaji. Instead of leaving those of us that can give birth alone to him," Sikira said and hissed.
> "She still goes in to Alhaji?" Alake asked but Sikira was not ready to start a fresh topic. (*Rusted Roofs*, 143–4)

In sexual discourse, verbs such as *go* and *come* are used to describe movements. A journey can be defined as "a process of travelling from one place to another" (*Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*, 2004). The euphemism, *go into* (an active verb and also an instance of phrasal euphemism) calls up the image of movement from one point to another, and captures the actual experience of sexual intercourse. However, the meaning of the expression relies on the socio-cultural knowledge that is shared by the discourse participants. In the context of the novel, Sikira laments to Alake that in spite of Afusa's age, she still *goes into* (has sexual intercourse) Alhaji. The conjunction "yet" explicitly ties the meaning of Sikira's verbal choice together with her sexual identity reproduction. It makes the meaning of *go into* coordinate Afusa's sexual engagement with Alhaji. Accordingly, the expression *go into* signifies the experience of love making. In terms of identity construction, Sikira distances herself from women who, in spite of their age, still have sexual intercourse with their husbands. Sikira and Afusa are both married to Alhaji, and Sikira is the youngest of Alhaji's three wives. Alake, Sikira's friend, whom she laments to, is also the youngest wife of a polygamous marriage.

It can therefore be said that the inclusive plural pronoun, *us*, constructs a positive face for Sikira and Alake. Being younger members of polygamous marriages, the polygamous milieu in which they operate provides materials for sexual identification as younger wives who are entitled to *go into* their husbands. Critically, Sikira's euphemistic choice is informed by the exogenous ideology that the essentiality of sex between couples in most traditional African cultures is not for sexual pleasure but for procreation. According to this ideological sentiment, it is therefore inconsequential for Afusa to *go into* Alhaji since she has reached her menopause. The use of *go into* is informed by the need to be polite. It is Sikira's calculated observation of Alake's positive face want which resonates with the cultural ideology of indirectness while discussing taboo topics.

In the example that follows, Akidi is involved in extra-marital sex and when her husband confronts her, she activates euphemism to back up her sexual escapade in the excerpt below:

> A woman was insulting her husband and her son was shouting at her to stop. The man was begging his son to leave his mother, let her insult him as she had done since he married her – had it affected him in any way?
>
> 'That is because you are not a man!', his wife told him. 'That is why you have no shame. You are not

> ashamed that you cannot take care of your wife! Hoooo!
>
> The son asked his mother: 'you, Akidi, are you not ashamed? You spread your legs on the road for young boys to walk through'. (*Planet*,170)

The sententialeuphemism, *you are not a man,* does not denote or refer to the componential meaning of a man. Rather, it is euphemistically loaded with various conceptual and dissociative meanings which can only be understood on the wider matrix of Akidi's dissatisfaction with her husband's inability to satisfy her sexually. Akidi presupposes that her husband will infer that her involvement in extra-marital sex is prompted by the desire to derive sexual contentment, not for money or material things as her husband hitherto purports. Akidi's euphemistic choice has a pragmatic force of appealing (saving her face) to her listeners to hear the reason she indulges in extra-marital sex. Her argumentation lies in the fact that her sexual act is not immoral. In so doing, she ends up in saving her face, but threatens her husband's face because she degrades his self-worth by revealing that he is *not a man* – sexually impotent. The deictic reference *that* has a mental reference: it refers to something both discourse participants are aware of, and forms a platform for Akidi's defense of her face and sexual identity. The defensive mechanism is imbued in the sense that *to be a man* is to be able to meet (to take care of) the sexual needs of a woman. On the whole, Akidi's euphemistic strategy is face-threatening: it threatens the absolute autonomy of men over women, and also the fact that her husband is *not a man.* In the light of this, Akidi meta-pragmatically projects the idea that women whose husbands are *not men enough* are free to seek sexual satisfaction elsewhere. This is the reason she turns to "young boys", who, unlike her husband and probably men of her husband's age, are sexually energetic. Akidi's euphemistic selection also generates an implicature: that any man who fails to sexually satisfy his wife should naturally be ashamed of himself. Akidi's son's illocutionary act is both face-saving and -threatening. For him to be euphemistic, as in the use of the sentential euphemism, *You spread your legs on the road for young boys to walk through*, he conforms to the conversational norm of cultural indirectness, but then, given the filial position: mother-son, his verbal affront on his mother is totally an FTA. The implication is that a euphemism can simultaneously function as face-saving and face-threatening, depending on the pragmatic context. Moreover, Akidi's son describes sex as movement, a journey one undertakes to get to somewhere. This view of sex as a journey to some place is articulated in the nominal item, *road* and the verb entity – walk.

In *Rusted Roofs*, sex is euphemistically described as food –something one eats. There is commotion in Lamidi's house, and we are told:

> The young man, having slowly recovered, understanding crept up to him. He burst into tears. Meanwhile, Iyabo was dressing up too as quickly as she could. The crowd outside grew larger as people came from neighbouring *agbooles* too when they heard the noise and saw the crowd….
>
> "Rashidi, did I hear right", he asked between hard breaths, "that you have been using knife to eat your brother's yam behind his back?"
>
> "Baba, it is Esu," Rashidi pleaded.
>
> "Nothing good will come to you, you son of a dog!" (*Rusted Roofs*, 85)

Baba n'sale employs a euphemistic expression to question Rashidi's sexual defamation of his elder brother's wife, Iyabo. The example above is a direct translation of a Yoruba expression. Baba n'sale uses *yam* to refer to the female genital. It is the cultural pressure not to openly discuss sex and sex organs that makes S indirectly call the female organ *yam*. The euphemism, drawn from Yoruba agrarian society, presupposes that it is abominable for Rashidi to *eat* his brother's *yam*. The weight of the euphemism is hinged on the fact that a person does not exist all by himself: he exists because of the existence of the other people, a demonstration of the African communityspirit of one being a brother's keeper. Thus, it is culturally expected of Rashidi to protect his brother's *yam* but not to *eat* it with a knife. The nominal item, *knife*, in the context of the euphemistic expression, is described as an acerbic instrument that is capable of destroying familial ties. The above use of language by S shows the reflexivity between face want and euphemistic choices. Baba n'sale's verbal act, though euphemistic is threatening, disregards Rashidi's desire not to be impeded upon. As noted earlier, the interactional context necessitates that S (Baba n'sale) deploys blatant expressions to drive home his communicative intent. Euphemism in specific contexts is thus always interpretive and expressive of a distance from referenced opinions or attitudes that are diametrically opposed to in-group norms. In this sense, the word *knife* is a euphemistic echo of Rashidi's"despicable" sexual behaviour.

Closely related to the foregoing example also taken from *Rusted Roofs*, Rafiu'sphallus is described as a manipulative object:

> "Remember, it's someone that put those goods on her head," Alake warned. "And that woman knows how to display madness. What happens when that one asks her to render account of herself and she mentions your name?"
>
> "She will know that madness passes madness. It is *Iyale* Agba that will answer for it eventually. I believe she knows that her son has been exercising his 'thing' on his sister's friend every day." (*Rusted Roofs*, 42)

The item *thing,* in the context of the novel, refers to the male genital organ. Sikira uses *thing* to intimate Alake with the illicit sexual affair that has been going on between Rafiu and Mulika. As deployed within the context of the above exchange, *thing* refers to Rafiu's phallus, a manipulative object, which he *exercises* on Mulika. Although Sikira's use of *thing* works in tune with the cultural pragmatics of using indirect expressions to refer to sex organs and sexual acts, the euphemism has an implicit FTA. Sikira's euphemistic description of Rafiu's illicit sexual exploit is anchored on the premises that sex, at least from the cultural practices of some Nigerian people, just as in most sub-cultures of the world, is essentially reserved for the married. Here again, the conceptualization of sex as a biological process is discernable. Rafiu and Mulika's sexual engagement, considered a penetration of a circle which they do not legally belong, prompts Sikira's speech act that undermines Rafiu and Mulika's face want. It could be said that Sikira's verbal choice is subversive since she describes Rafiu's phallus as a *thing*. Drawing significant insights from the context in which the expression is used, one would conclude that her verbal act is an instance of negative politeness, as it unmistakably damages Rafiu's self-worth. This can be connected to the fact that she and Rafiu have never been in a cordial relationship.

Moreover, in the example drawn from *Angels*, the act of sex is described as food, something someone can eat and derive satisfaction. In this instance, a prison Superintendent employs euphemism to concurrently save his face and perform FSA. He tells H, a woman he is wooing:

> She sips her drink, avoiding his eyes.
> 'I love you, Janice. Very much. I know you think I am not serious. That I only want to suck. The juice and throw away the peel. No.' He suddenly dips his hand into the pockets of his well-ironed white kaftan and brings out a yellow paper. (*Angel* , 22)

The female genitals, including the breasts, are equated with fruit – food. The verbal activity *suck* calls up the image of an orange or any other fruit that can be sucked, the juice squeezed out and *the peel* thrown away. The euphemism works as a persuasive strategy in the context of the novel. The Superintendent assures Janice, the woman he is wooing, that he wants her as a permanent companion, not for sexual pleasure. Throwing away *the peel* means abandonment. Most probably, the Superintendent and Janice share the same background knowledge of men who *suck* women and abandon them. The euphemism achieves a communicative goal because it expresses the Superintendent's intention: the intention to stay even after he *sucks* the *juice*. There is a subtext to the Superintendent's expression: that most relationship between a man and a woman ends in bed. It, however, exonerates him from the actions of other men who throw the *peel* (walk away) after *sucking* the *juice* (sleeping with a woman), and self-categorizes in a positive light. By this act of self-positive categorization, the Superintendent successfully stamps his identity in the class of gentlemen who do not woo women for the sake of *sucking* and throwing away the *peel*. It can be seen how the Superintendent employs euphemism, expressions that are necessitated by the need not to impede on Janice's face want. In this way, the Superintendent succeeds in performing a FSA as his verbal constructs are pragmatically calibrated not to encumber H's self-worth.

Like in the examples discussed in *Rusted Roofs* and *Planet*, there is also the use of euphemism in referring to sex as a biological process of maturity.in Ndibe's *Arrows*:

> On the first night Iyese had been worried that her lover's ecstatic cries might scandalise the villagers, but the next day she met the village chief, an old hunched man with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. Smirking, he asked her, 'Daughter, are you the one making our son a man?'
>
> Embarrassed, she asked, 'What do you mean, elder?'
>
> 'Every child cries when it is born,' explained the chief. 'It cries to announce its arrival. It also cries because of all the evil it sees in the world. But every child has another cry waiting in the future, the cry of love. It is the cry that makes a boy a man, a girl a woman…. (*Arrows*, 135–136)

The euphemistic expression, an example of sentential euphemism, captures the pivotal role sex plays in transforming boys into men. Contextually, sex is regarded as a biological process that transports "boys"

to "men," and "girls" to "women." The chief of Utonke's euphemistic deployment is apt. In an effort not to be offensive and not to mention sex directly, S employs "…the one making our son a man" and "It is the cry that makes a boy a man, a girl a woman…" to ask H, Iyese, if she is the one who is accountable for their son's, Dr Jaja's, sexual transformation from childhood to adulthood. The chief's comment is encapsulated in the ideological construct that sex in most Nigerian cultures, as it is the case with other cultures of the world, is solely meant for adults. Ideologically, it emphasizes the fundamental and complimentary involvement of sex in changing people's status. Also, embedded in the cultural euphemism is the idea that one is only counted as a man if one has sexual knowledge of a woman.

Cognizance of the tabooed nature of sex, the chief deepens his politeness effort by noting that:

> 'Last night, we heard our son crying the cry of manhood. It put much happiness in our breast.' (136).

The chief's comments are strategic signifiers or pointers of how discourse participants deploy euphemistic expressions as face-saving strategies when making reference to taboo topics. Invariably, *the cry* which is probably associated with orgasm is that of manhood but not of childhood or when one is hurt. It is a *cry* that accompanies sexual pleasure and contentment. From the chief's perspective, Iyese's sexual adventure with Dr Jaja is biological: it processes Dr Jaja into the circle of "men", hence identity. In a nutshell, the chief's euphemization of sex presupposes that sex signifies a man's maturity. Moreover, sex is seen as a transformational process; a process that confers manly responsibilities.

Conclusion

In drawing this exercise to a close, it is pertinent to mention that besides the ability of euphemism to avoid unpleasant ideas, it can have sinister motivation too: to blur reality, not so much to avoid offence, but to deceive. These sets of euphemistic expressions are explored when sinister ideas are discussed. The use of euphemism, the analysis suggests, is all about mouthing the right-sounding words for situations that deal with sex, genitals and sexual acts. In this way, the political nature of people is clearly articulated. The analysis also betrays the relationship between language and cultural patterns of existence. Implicitly, there is a strong bond between euphemistic expressions and people's peculiar cultural ways of using language. It can therefore be surmised that euphemism is a politeness phenomenon that helps to preserve, and make conversation

appealing to discourse participants, i.e. it is not a matter of linguistic code, but a discourse strategy in which discourse participants "weigh" the interactive situation before they deploy euphemism; making euphemism a comprehensive phenomenon with a primarily discursive dimension. Also, euphemism invokes points of view; for example, sex as food, as journey to somewhere through life, etc.

Needless to say, the ideological sentiment held by some linguistic "purists" that literary texts should not be considered veritable data for linguistic analysis seems to have been faulted by the analysis done here. A literary work is a composition of linguistic artifacts. Hence it remains an interesting data for linguists who are interested in the social and cultural meaning of language in use.

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