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EUPHEMISMS IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S JANE EYRE: A LEXICAL-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article examines the use of euphemisms in Charlotte Bronte's novel "Jane Eyre". Euphemisms serve as important linguistic devices that soften unpleasant, taboo, or socially sensitive concepts and reflect the cultural and moral values of Victorian society. The study analyzes lexical-semantic features of euphemistic expressions found in the novel and classifies them according to thematic categories such as death, mental illness, social status, morality, religion, and interpersonal relations. The research demonstrates that euphemisms in "Jane Eyre" perform not only a stylistic function but also contribute to characterization, social criticism, and the representation of Victorian etiquette. The findings reveal that euphemistic language plays a significant role in shaping the novel's linguistic and cultural landscape.

Keywords: euphemism, lexical semantics, Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, Victorian literature, stylistics, linguistic analysis, taboo language.

Introduction

Language reflects the social, cultural, and moral values of a particular historical period. One of the linguistic phenomena that demonstrates this relationship is euphemism. Euphemisms are indirect or polite expressions used instead of words that may be considered harsh, offensive, embarrassing, or socially unacceptable.

The Victorian era (1837–1901) was characterized by strict moral codes, social hierarchy, and linguistic politeness. As a result, Victorian literature frequently employed euphemistic language to discuss sensitive issues such as death, insanity, poverty, sexuality, and social inequality.

Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" is one of the most influential novels of the Victorian period. The novel presents numerous examples of euphemistic expressions that reveal the social conventions and cultural attitudes of nineteenth-century England. Therefore, the study of euphemisms in "Jane Eyre" provides valuable insights into both linguistic and literary aspects of the novel.

The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the euphemisms used in "Jane Eyre", determine their lexical-semantic characteristics, and explain their communicative and stylistic functions.

Materials and Methods

The research material consists of euphemistic expressions extracted from Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre"

The following methods were employed:

1. Lexical-semantic analysis– to determine the meanings and semantic transformations of euphemistic expressions.
2. Contextual analysis – to examine euphemisms within their narrative contexts.
3. Descriptive method – to classify euphemisms according to thematic groups.
4. Literary-stylistic analysis – to identify the artistic and communicative functions of euphemisms.

Results

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The analysis revealed several major categories of euphemisms in the novel.

1. Euphemisms Related to Death

Victorian society often avoided direct references to death. Instead of using the verb **"to die,"** writers frequently employed more polite alternatives.

Examples include: "passed away","departed this life", "gone to a better world","taken from us"

These expressions present death as a peaceful transition rather than a biological ending.

Lexical-semantic function

The euphemisms reduce emotional distress and provide religious consolation, reflecting Christian beliefs prevalent in Victorian England.

2. Euphemisms Related to Mental Illness

One of the most significant examples in "Jane Eyre"concerns Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife. Instead of explicitly calling her **"mad"** or **"insane,"** characters often use expressions such as: "mentally afflicted", "unfortunate condition","a troubled mind".

Lexical-semantic function

These euphemisms conceal the severity of mental illness and maintain social decorum. They also reflect Victorian discomfort with discussing psychological disorders openly.

3. Euphemisms Concerning Social Class and Poverty

Victorian society was highly stratified. Poverty and lower social status were often described indirectly.

Examples include: "in reduced circumstances","without means","humble position", "modest background"

Lexical-semantic function

Such expressions soften economic hardship and preserve personal dignity.

Jane herself frequently describes her social position through modest and indirect language rather than openly emphasizing poverty.

4. Euphemisms Related to Morality and Sexuality

Victorian literature generally avoided direct references to sexuality.

In "Jane Eyre", sensitive issues are expressed through indirect language:

"improper conduct", "moral failing", "indiscretion", "attachment".

For example, Rochester's previous relationships are often discussed using vague and euphemistic descriptions rather than explicit terminology.

Lexical-semantic function

These euphemisms reflect Victorian standards of modesty and moral restraint.

5. Religious Euphemisms

Religion occupies an important place in the novel.

Examples include: "called by God", "summoned to heaven", "the next world", "Providence"

Lexical-semantic function

Religious euphemisms help characters discuss suffering, death, and destiny in a culturally acceptable manner.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that euphemisms in "Jane Eyre" are deeply connected to Victorian culture. The novel was written during a period when social etiquette strongly influenced language use. Consequently, direct references to death, insanity, sexuality, and poverty were often avoided.

From a lexical-semantic perspective, euphemisms operate through semantic substitution. The denotative meaning remains largely unchanged, while the emotional and evaluative components

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become less negative. For instance: die → pass away, poor → in reduced circumstances, insane → mentally afflicted

This semantic transformation allows speakers and writers to communicate sensitive information while maintaining politeness and social harmony.

Furthermore, euphemisms contribute to characterization. Jane's restrained language reflects her moral values and education, whereas Rochester's euphemistic speech often conceals uncomfortable truths about his past. Thus, euphemisms serve not only linguistic but also narrative purposes.

The analysis also shows that euphemisms function as instruments of social criticism. By revealing the indirect language used to discuss taboo subjects, Brontë exposes the constraints imposed by Victorian society.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that euphemisms occupy an important place in Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre". They are primarily associated with death, mental illness, poverty, morality, religion, and social relations.

The lexical-semantic analysis shows that euphemisms soften negative meanings without changing the essential referential content. Their use reflects Victorian cultural norms, social etiquette, and religious beliefs.

In addition to their communicative function, euphemisms contribute to characterization, thematic development, and social commentary. Therefore, the study of euphemisms in "Jane Eyre" provides valuable insights into both Victorian language and literary style.

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