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## Assessing Media Euphemism During Covid-19 in India

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### Abstract

Semblance of print media in forming community language in pandemic time has been a matter of discourse. It precedes the scope of linguistic creativity. Dealing with language in the time when the entire nation struggling with the second wave is indeed an allegiance work. This research attempts to analyse euphemistic expressions or figurative language in the context of Indian public press reporting for masses during Covid 19. This led to an outburst of new words and phrases in English or other languages. To reduce solemnity of the language and placed it in a bit pleasantry manner must be the rudimentary step of public press. Carter explains language as a brawny weapon that plays a crucial role in human discourse. In communication, the words have more place than the truth. Euphemism implies to replace phrasing that would otherwise be considered harsh, impolite or offensive. This is an observational study based on print media and find out the ways of convince the people of the second largest country India. It requires profuse application of various linguistic and stylistic means that is where euphemism comes in power to comfort the reader through obliquely used connotations.

**Keywords:** Euphemism, Public Press discourse, Linguistic creativity, Connotations, etc.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*A disjointed slumber slowly lulls us into its grasp. (IE, 2021)*

In this sentence, 'disjointed slumber' defines as 'Corona Virus' that slowly kills the population without showing its symptoms. Manipulation and persuasion are the integral parts of mass media. Currently, Corona virus has been spreading like a forest fire in India. The entire world is on the verge of debacle. In this tumultuous breakup, the ingenuity of public press falls under the spotlight as one of the most efficient mode of communication to the masses. They have a crucial role to make a bridge between society and communication of such diseases. Public press involves a scrupulous choice of language means and stylistic devices to become a mouthpiece of public anguish in this tough time. Several times, language appears too intimidating to survive. The coping mechanism is to reduce the hostility of the language. Elena Samino (2020) says, "Some aspects of hostile language such as 'the fight against the coronavirus' help to communicate how serious the situation is, and can foster a spirit of solidarity in the face of an external threat." Overall, there's a wealth of linguistic creativity that hasn't yet entered the dictionary, but reflects the role of novel language as a coping mechanism. These innovative usages and linguistic creativity are the products of societal influences.

## *1.1 Background of the Study*

Since March 2020, we have seen the situation spiral out of control to the extent that people are now left with no choice but to live with this 'New Normal'. Newspaper is media genre. In this ferocious wave, the only way to overcome anxiety and uncertainty is to get courage and fight it together. Public press employs euphemistic words with a less pronounced 'negative load' or resort to indirect nomination of processes and objects by means of metonymy or word-play. It avoids negative language and undesirable connotations. Media ought to reconcile language creativity and cultural aspects to understand more about the masses.

## *1.2 Research Objectives*

As the cases rapidly rise in India, people's fear of life take a shape of mental stress and anxiety. It leads to isolation or quarantine measures and distress. They hugely confront social stigma. Euphemism is a linguistic device use to ease the burden of heavy or taboo words. Many Indians have the tendency to denial of the situation. Therefore, euphemism could be communication approach for dealing with the invisible enemy. Public press attempts to manipulate direct expressions and camouflage or minimize the effect of Covid-19.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

Upsurge of infectious diseases is not recent emergency in the world. Several countries were already affected by such hazardous and venomous diseases like Ebola, Sars, HIV, etc. caused crisis across the globe. India is fighting a new and lethal pathogen like covid-19. News reports document contemplate its dire covid-19 crisis. The purpose of public press is to ensure and understand the basic sentiments of the people by conveying the appropriate messages. So the people of India could mentally prepare themselves for this precarious virus. Press communication means are instruments and objects of cultural dominance, and the mirror of ideologies which constitute the power language to reassure with a social conscience. The entire history of mankind witnessed different circumstances which helped them rise to new ways of expressing their emotional turmoil. Although there are many words which are using just now and a lot of terminology is actually older. Terms such as 'natural disaster', 'perfect storm,' 'quarantine,' etc. creates the impression that the pandemic is unavoidable and unprecedented. The practice of quarantine began during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in an effort to protect coastal cities from plague epidemics. Many terms have been newly added in the dictionary. There is a call for linguistic experts to find an alternative ways to talking about Covid-19. A nuanced communication campaign is the need of the hour and it should be robust vocabulary based communication via public press.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Discuss Tony Lawson says, "Allow us to name whatever it is that's going on in the world. And one you can name the practices, the event, and the social conditions around a particular events, it just gives people a shared vocabulary that they can all use as a bit of shorthand. I think untimely if you can name it, you can talk about it and if you can talk about it, then it can help people cope and get a handle on really different situations." (bbc.com) Many words and phrases have become the household names in the wake of novel corona virus such as "self-isolating", "pandemic", "quarantine", "lockdown", "frontline workers" "corona appropriate behaviour," "social distancing," etc. although many phrases and slangs have already been in the dictionary. With the outbreak of pandemic, many words and phrases came into vogue. There is a large part of lexicon used to mild or mask the real nature of things.

A euphemism is not the contemporary phenomenon. The word "euphemism" drives from Greek word *euphemismos* which means eu=well and phomi= I speak (I speak well). Katsev A.M. points out that the taboo language "served as the powerful lever of word creating process." (Katsev 1998) Even Ronald Carter explains that language should not just ornamental but practical. Germans have been successful to placed non-offensive words and phrases, which make the beauty of linguistic creativity. Euphemisms are defined to mitigate, soften or downplay the gravity of the grim situation. It uses as

language tool to fulfill the socially accepted standards of communication and ease the grief. Medical practitioners and political leaders are frequently using periphrasis, circumlocution and as double speak expressions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi says, “We have an invisible enemy in front of us and this enemy is also an imposter.” (2021) this statement gives the glimpse of the grim situation at the same time maintain language circumlocution. WHO Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus says, “Covid is like a forest fire.”(2021)

“Euphemisms are units of secondary denomination used to mitigate unseemly or unpleasant information, or downplay the details that might be perceived as transgressing the rules of speech etiquette.” (Abbott, 2010) the information circulates by public press is extended for the mass consciousness, and therefore it should be more precise and easy to attract the attention of the reader. Van Dijk (1998) suggests that “language functions not only within the framework of discourse and its pragmatics, but also in response to multiple social factors, such as public opinion, social status of language users etc.” Since March 2020, we have seen the situation spiral out of control to the extent that people are now left with no choice but to live with this ‘New Normal’. Newspaper is media genre. In this ferocious wave, the only way to overcome anxiety and uncertainty is to get courage and fight it together. Public press employs euphemistic words with a less pronounced ‘negative load’ or resort to indirect nomination of processes and objects by means of metonymy or word-play. It avoids negative language and undesirable connotations. “The process of euphemisation has to do with the speaker’s assessment of the subject matter being discussed will require indirect designation of objects and phenomena that might be associated with rudeness, indiscretion, harshness, indecency, etc.” (Rawlings et al, 2017)

As the cases rapidly rise in India, people’s fear of life take a shape of metal stress and anxiety. It leads to isolation or quarantine measures and distress. They hugely confront social stigma. Euphemism is a linguistic device use to ease the burden of heavy or taboo words. Many Indians have the tendency to denial the situation. Therefore, euphemism could be communication approach for dealing with the invisible enemy. Public press attempts to manipulate direct expressions and camouflage or minimize the effect of Covid-19. “Most communication relies on figurative, rhetorical tropes, metaphorical expressions, and connotational markers.” (Gibbs, 1994) “Some aspects of hostile language such as ‘the fight against the coronavirus’ help to communicate how serious the situation is, can foster a spirit of solidarity in the face of an external threat.” There is a call for linguistic experts to find an alternative ways to talking about Covid-19. A nuanced communication campaign is the need of the hour and it should be robust vocabulary based communication via public press. M. Venkaiah Naidu (2021) in *The Indian Express* expresses “The dark night we are passing through will certainly pass. The question is: how do we maintain a steady course despite the tidal waves lashing us on all sides. As the adage goes, “when the going gets tough, the tough gets going.”(7) It reflects the robust statement to boost the morale of the

masses. We have in our collective consciousness an indomitable ability to overcome extreme hardships.

Allan and Burrige (1991) points out “speakers frequently aim to adopt acceptable or agreeable expressions to safeguard themselves from offensive or frightening things and introduced disease as a cross culturally and diachronically effects, people use different language when expressing emotional and social aspects of disease. Thus the choice of language is powerful in circumventing the taboo surrounding stressful issues and disease like Covid-19 disease. Since Covid-19 is prevailing sensitive disease, mass media may resort to euphemism to avoid directly mentioning the anxious thought of Covid-19 dying. It should avoid direct effect of very blunt or crude messages.”

Upsurge of infectious diseases is not recent emergency in the world. Several countries were already been affected by such hazardous and venomous diseases like Ebola, Sars, HIV, etc. caused crisis across the globe. India is fighting a new and lethal pathogen like covid-19. News reports document contemplate its dire covid-19 crisis. The purpose of public press is to ensure and understand the basic sentiments of the people by conveying the appropriate messages. So the people of India could mentally prepare themselves for this precarious virus. Press communication means are instruments and objects of cultural dominance, and the mirror of ideologies which constitute the power language to reassure with a social conscience. The entire history of mankind witnessed different circumstances which helped them rise to new ways of expressing their emotional turmoil. Although there are many words which are using just now and a lot of terminology is actually older. Terms such as ‘natural disaster’, ‘perfect storm,’ ‘quarantine,’ etc. creates the impression that the pandemic is unavoidable and unprecedented. The practice of quarantine began during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in an effort to protect coastal cities from plague epidemics. Many terms have been newly added in the dictionary.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This research observes the linguistic aspects of euphemisms while framing reports about Covid-19 by public press. Social and cultural factors have been played a vital role in the formation of language during pandemic. The research investigates public press (*The Indian Express*) in the English language and uses the method of linguistic observations.

### 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Indian Express has been awarded with green rating for its integrity and credibility by Newsguard, a global service that rates news sources. The following expressions show the inventiveness and thoughtfulness of the press:

1. Shortfall of humanity during Pandemic, pandemic – weary permissiveness all around.	3 <sup>rd</sup> April
2. Out-flanking the virus.	10 <sup>th</sup> April
3. Battle against Covid-19 is more in the mind. We need to be resilient, fatigue can't be an excuse.	10 <sup>th</sup> April
4. Corona beds “running houseful”.	15 <sup>th</sup> April
5. Crack the virus.	15 <sup>th</sup> April
6. Bending the second wave.	15 <sup>th</sup> April
7. ‘Cafeteria approach’ (of bringing more affordable, global vaccine alternatives to market, while simultaneously stimulating indigenous production).	15 <sup>th</sup> April
8. War against the relentless second wave.	22 <sup>nd</sup> April
9. Getting a foot in the door for a shot in the arm.	25 <sup>th</sup> April
10. A silent pandemic of anxiety and mental ailments is here.	1 <sup>st</sup> May
11. The covid-19 epidemic has come back with vengeance.	3 <sup>rd</sup> May
12. Strange reluctance.	9 <sup>th</sup> May
13. The distribution of Covid-19 vaccines across the length and breadth of the country had achieved a degree of cohesion and was more or less seamless despite supply constraints.	10 <sup>th</sup> May
14. There is a lockdown that is burning a hole in our pockets.	10 <sup>th</sup> May
15. Vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel.	10 <sup>th</sup> May
16. Testing, treating, isolating and masking.	10 <sup>th</sup> May
17. People in many areas still resist getting vaccinated. There is a dearth of knowledge and trust.	10 <sup>th</sup> May
18. Silver lining.	14 <sup>th</sup> May
19. India is currently in a throes of a catastrophic second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic	15 <sup>th</sup> May
20. Virus in the village.	18 <sup>th</sup> May
21. Lack of anticipating of the second wave became the Trojan horses.	18 <sup>th</sup> May
22. To look for a light at the end of the tunnel.	7 <sup>th</sup> May
23. We may have lost this battle, but we must still prevail in this war.	1 <sup>st</sup> May
24. Mammoth vaccination exercise.	15 <sup>th</sup> April
25. Jibs at Jabs.	3 <sup>rd</sup> May

*The Indian Express* endeavors to employ their sufficient knowledge of the choice of words or linguistic devices while communication with the large gathering about covid-19 to convey comprehensible messages. Besides it helps medical practitioners to adopt euphemistic expressions and make their statements general to reach the maximum population. It helps to reduce the level of stress and improve their chances of recovery. Use of euphemistic expressions increase the positivity rate among the patients and it also change their attitude towards certain things. In the fast moving world, public press write about all the events occurring in the world and come out to be their catalyst. Euphemisation is largely a tool allowing describing a product vividly and catchy while at the

same time observing etiquette rules. Metaphors in euphemism are the outcomes of language creativity of human mind. In the opening section, entitled "Goals of Linguistic Theory," Chomsky writes: The central fact to which any significant linguistic theory must address itself is this: a mature speaker can produce a new sentence of his language on the appropriate occasion, and other speakers can understand it immediately, though it is equally new to them. Most of our linguistic experience, both as speakers and hearers, is with new sentences; once we have mastered a language, the class of sentences with which we can operate fluently and without difficulty or hesitation is so vast that for all practical purposes." (50-51) The central idea is to demystifying the language or construction of a sentence should be according to the circumstances without hurting the sentiments of the people. Chomsky quotes Cordemoy's observation that "to speak, is not to repeat the same words, which have struck the ear, but to utter others to their purpose and suitable to them." This, too, contains reference to appropriateness." (radicalanthropologygroup.org)

## 5. CONCLUSION

The coronavirus manifests the frailties of human existence and impotence. We should join together with the help of all scientific and spiritual methods, to overcome the venomous effect of this novel corona. People in many areas still resist getting vaccinated. There is a dearth of knowledge and trust. The approach should be radical to reach the maximum readers by public press. Language creativity can help us step out of the vicious echo chambers of our minds. Keeping people alive on air and on hope require a balanced approach of words, phrases and metaphors. Press must choose kind, polite and acceptable expressions to soothe the situation. Several researches indicate that international news coverage of diseases spread maintains socio-cultural differences amongst communities. It is advisable to public press that they need not to remove taboo expressions but to present them in slightly different manner. In Pandemic, public press communication should be easily conceivable and keep people informed and observant on the grim scenario.

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