EUPHEMISMS AND MILITARY TERMINOLOGY

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Abstract

When we want to avoid words that have unpleasant, awkward or tabooed associations, and thus avoid possible misunderstandings, conflicts and embarrassing situations, we resort to euphemisms. The more formal the situation and/or the more unfamiliar the audience, we tend to be more observant of the words we choose. Contemporary politics and their constant companion, the military, tend to blur distinctions between war and peace, violence and humanity, and this provides a good opportunity to employ linguistic creativity, to find new evasive and non-violent expressions which mask or alleviate violent and unpleasant nature of their referents. Within the whole range of different linguistic tools, euphemisms have become increasingly used, adding new value to the already existing words and ideas. They serve the practical needs of particular military groups but also support the ideological role of the military, particularly in global affairs around the world. Consequently, they contribute to the ever-changing perception of modern reality.

1. Introduction

The modern world is perceived as a 'global village' in which contacts, cooperation, and the exchange of goods, people, knowledge, experience and information have become widely accepted. Whenever there is contact, an exchange takes place, not necessarily of material goods, but an exchange of experience from all walks of life. The exchange that has become the most frequent and available is that of information through a global network, the world wide web. People rarely consider the extent of the underlying influence of different cultures on one another in everyday global affairs and information that they share. This availability of information would not have been achieved without the assistance of the world languages such as English, which to some are an imperialistic tool and to some a useful means for establishing contact and reducing barriers between the peoples of our planet. How one culture is perceived by another largely depends on the language and translation competences of the people

whose job is translation and interpreting. This job would be impossible without the shared knowledge and experience of the members of different cultures.

One of the fields of human activity with an ever-enlarging community is the military. The military community can serve as a bridge between two or more countries, who participate in world affairs under the same flag(s) of the UN and NATO. The members of this community share registers of a limited scope since they apply to a limited professional group, but if we take into account how dominant the issues of security and threats to it are in the general public, we can say that these registers are constantly expanding and permeating other registers of human activity, particularly politics and the public discourse.

Over the centuries, the past one in particular, military terminology has been accompanying the social changes and technological progress which are constantly transforming the armed forces, their capabilities and roles in their respective countries and worldwide. Most terms used by the military arise in the course of their work, and are easily understood by those who approach the subject. However, new circumstances require both new terms and a change in rhetoric. Where do they find the new terms to suit their new needs? In the already existing vocabularies whose meanings are extensible and can acquire new shades in different contexts, thanks to their metaphorical or figurative nature and with the help of the wit and the inventiveness of those who create them.

In this creative business, military terminology plays two roles: one is practical, the other ideological, both being an inexhaustible source of linguistic creativity. The practical role results in jargon, slang, time-saving acronyms, abbreviations, arcane words, and neologisms, whereas the ideological role provides euphemistic expressions used in propaganda, giving an ideological spin to wartime news reports, preparing ground for new strategic movements, etc. The euphemistic expressions that we find in military terminology will illustrate how language can be manipulated to add value to certain words or ideas with the aim of masking or alleviating the violence that is an inevitable part of military operations.

2. Euphemisms

Euphemisms (from Greek **eu** – 'good' and **phem** – 'speak') are words, phrases and expressions employed in communication when one wants to avoid the words that do not suit the situation because they have unpleasant, embarrassing or taboo

associations (Kuna 2007: 95), thereby also avoiding possible misunderstandings, conflicts and embarrassments.

The speakers of any language use euphemisms to express any number of everyday realities, while the listeners and readers decode them daily to properly understand the discourse in the workplace, the world of business, the mass media, etc. Most people are perhaps unaware of their existence, particularly in informal situations where there is no need to pay attention to formality, politeness or political correctness. The more formal the situation, the more unfamiliar the audience, the more observant people tend to be of the words they use.

A possible, and very illustrative, definition of what euphemisms are is the following: "Euphemisms are unpleasant truths wearing diplomatic cologne" (Crisp 1984).

There are many situations that are reminiscent of the role of diplomats when establishing and maintaining diplomatic relations in foreign countries and social environments quite unfamiliar to people in their home countries, trying to avoid any possibility of offence or misunderstanding while trying to accomplish their diplomatic tasks. Some of the same considerations may be used in less formal situations in everyday life, especially in professional environments, where people want to show appreciation and politeness towards their colleagues, peers, superiors or subordinates while performing their tasks, which may result in differences of opinion or even conflicts.

Thus euphemisms express the speakers' attitudes toward the subject matter, the audience and the context, but also their linguistic elegance, their appreciation of the right to be different and ultimately perhaps their skill in ideological manipulation: evasion, distortion and falsification of the truth.

In his *Oxford Dictionary of Euphemisms*, Holder (2008: 7) claims that "in speech and writing, we use euphemism for dealing with taboo or sensitive subjects. It is therefore the language of evasion, hypocrisy, prudery, and deceit." If we take a closer look at the sentence:

> In the mid 1980s the USSR claimed to have been invited into Afghanistan; the Americans claimed that the Russians were aggressors there.

The two words having the same meaning of "taking military action in a foreign land" are used for different purposes, thus *invited* has a euphemistic value, and *aggression* is its opposite, i.e. dysphemism. This is a good example of ideological

manipulation, where the words are used to inflate or soften the true meaning and mislead the reader.

There are a number of factors which have to be considered when deciding what kind of language behavior counts as polite: the audience, the relationship between the participants in communication, the subject matter, the context, place and time.

2.1   Taboos

It is impossible to talk about euphemisms without reference to taboos, which are considered the main cause of euphemisms. "Taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual's behaviour where it can cause discomfort, harm or injury" (Allan and Burrige 2006: 1). Any such behaviour is subject to taboo, because of a potential danger to oneself or others, and even an unintended violation of a taboo risks condemnation. Since times immemorial, at all stages of development of human civilization, in every corner of the world, taboos have existed either in the form of ritual prohibition typical for ancient civilizations or in the form of avoidance, typical of modern society. Taboos and the attendant censoring trigger changes in language, which are used as a shield against unpleasant situations, as a weapon against enemies or as a release valve when we are angry, frustrated or hurt.

Probably the most tabooed denotata traditionally include bodies and their effluvia, the organs and acts of sex, diseases, death and killing, naming, addressing, touching and viewing persons and sacred beings, objects and places (Allan and Burrige 2006: 1).

It should be noted that there is no absolute taboo. Not all people, in all situations, at all times, recognize the same taboo. It is subject to change due to cultural and social norms, which are community specific, time specific and context specific. A good example would be the word *nigger*, which, when used by white people, is considered highly offensive, and when used by black people can have a connotation of belonging to the same community sharing the same background, and simply mean "man".

2.2   Euphemisms, dysphemisms, orthophemisms

We can define politeness and political correctness in terms of inoffensiveness. They are associated with orthophemisms (straight talking) and euphemisms (sweet talking) (Allan and Burrige 2006: 29). On the other hand, impoliteness and offensiveness are

their opposites, and they are associated with dysphemisms (harsh, blunt, impolite expressions).

Synonyms are more or less euphemistically marked in a given context, due to the need to use a different expression for a denotatum which is susceptible to tabooing.

Every language has variability as its natural trait, allowing the same content to be expressed in different ways (Kuna 2007: 98). Using euphemisms to substitute some expressions with those that in a particular community have positive or at least neutral connotations provides a base for stylistic synonymy and the resulting words and expressions enrich the language. Thus, we will find the expression *people with AIDS,* emphasizing survival, preferable to *AIDS victims*, which implies the loss of life (itself a euphemism). This example illustrates a shift in the perception of the illness and a growing acceptance of the stigmatized illness by the society.

Dysphemisms, words that are considered taboos, are identified as marked behaviour. On the opposite end of the "politeness scale" are euphemisms or polite, evasive and politically correct expressions, and orthophemisms as neutral, direct and formal expressions; both are polite by default and thus promote well-being for ourselves and for others. This constant battle between taboo/impolite and neutral/polite leads to language censoring, which motivates the creation of inventive and often playful new expressions, or new meanings for old expressions.

Sometimes a synonymous expression may push the other out, making it passive or unmarked. The word *toilet*, which was once considered as euphemistic, is changing from euphemism to orthophemism, and is being superseded by the euphemisms *bathroom* or *restroom* in American English and *loo* in British English (Allan and Burrige 2006: 43).

However, this process can also go in the opposite direction, with euphemisms becoming dysphemistic and then being replaced by a new, politically correct expression. For example, *a mentally handicapped child* has been replaced by *a child with learning difficulties,* which has itself become pejoratively used among children who call each other *LDs* as an insult (Allan and Burrige 2006: 99).

The process of choosing between alternative expressions plays a central role in rationalization or (un)conscious self-censoring. When we call someone a *terrorist or insurgent*, we may be using a dysphemism, making an activity seem worse than it actually is. When we call the same person a *freedom fighter*, we may be using a

euphemism, making an activity sound better than it really is. Either way, by using these words, we rationalize the harming of others. Clearly, euphemisation is one of the generators of synonymy in language.

2.3   Euphemisms – reflecting the social consciousness

Euphemisms are directly linked to the customs, traditions, conventions and norms of social groups and peoples around the world. The use of euphemisms is wide and diverse if we consider the contexts or fields that employ them. They pervade private and public communication, and euphemistic expressions seem to be used more frequently than before, perhaps because of the increased care and appreciation in modern society's attempts to show more tolerance in terms of educational, social, racial, ethnic, religious, sexual and other kinds of diversity. Politeness and political correctness have become a norm in public discourse and in public institutions, and the terminology inspired by the political correctness is euphemistic.

How do we decide what kind of behaviour is subject to sanction and calls for the use of euphemisms? Humans as social beings are members of different groups, starting with gender, family, generation, then friendship, occupation, interest, etc. All of them have unwritten rules governing the standards of behaviour, and sanctions for their breach. The result is the self-imposed censoring on the one hand, and the censoring prescribed by an authoritative body within that group on the other. This in turn means that language is constantly subject to censoring, either by individuals themselves or by those in power, supposedly acting for the common good. An example is the word *chairperson* introduced instead of *chairman,* which was considered discriminatory in terms of sex.

Among the most interesting taboos, especially common in the military, are death and defeat. Death, as one of life's greatest mysteries, and "its inevitability has been a source of wonder, fear, hope and puzzlement throughout history" (Moller 2011). It is a constant companion of the military deployed worldwide in various types of operations. In the past, rituals accompanying death, such as grieving and burial processes, served to connect dying and grieving persons to a broader community, offering comfort and strength to those affected.

However, in the twentieth century, the social and psychological landscape was transformed. Cultural, social and personal experiences of death were redefined. As a result of this transformation, dying, once an integral part of social life, has become

stigmatized and vanquished from the public eye. The presence and support of the community in everyday life is replaced by individualism and withdrawn from the dying and grieving processes. Secularism and materialism as a way of life offer opportunities and pleasures, but seem unable to offer meaning and comfort at the end of life. In addition, technological advances have created conditions in which humanity is fighting against dying, forestalling death. As a result dying is no longer seen as a natural, necessary and important part of life, but has rather become an enemy; it is a matter of success whether we can control and defeat it. "As death has become frightening and meaningless, a culture of avoidance and denial has correspondingly emerged. This has led to a widespread pretence that suffering, death and grief do not exist" (Moller 2011).

The same can be applied to defeat, which is seen as a metaphor of death. No operation or initiative launched by a powerful government can be seen to end in defeat. Even if it does, defeat can be presented in such a way as to mask the truth by using euphemisms. Both death and defeat have become inconceivable and unbearable, and are therefore stigmatized.

Thus, instead of saying *he died*, we tend to say *he has gone to a better place*, offering the idea of death as the beginning of new life, or *he passed away,* seeing death as a journey. When a patient dies, the doctor will say to the family, *We did all we could*, avoiding the mention of death and focusing on the effort to prevent it. Instead of *retreat* of the armed forces, the expression *strategic withdrawal* is used.

3. Military terminology

The military as a specific domain of human activity covers certain concepts which are particular to its field; thus we can say that the military use or require the terminology that is most useful or effective in specific military contexts. Military organizations and personnel, in order to function properly, have developed a specialized language which distinguishes the military from other fields of human activity and without which it would be impossible for them to perform their tasks. All specialized languages used by particular groups tend to narrow the potential meaning of words and their potential interpretations and ambiguities characteristic of general language. Military terminology is used by the military, primarily for internal use, ranging from very specific terms pertaining to different services such as the army, the navy and the air

force, to more general terms, such as those referring to military strategy, policy and diplomacy. For example,

> Forward presence is a vital naval mission,

a sentence used by the US military, conveys the likelihood of a future conflict (*naval mission*), the possible location of future conflicts (*forward presence*, not in the US territory) which will involve national interests (*vital*).

Because of the specific role of the military in the modern world and its world-wide presence in the form of NATO-lead operations and UN peace keeping operations (another euphemism), the need for the official military terminology has become crucial in order to avoid possible misunderstanding and catastrophe, by reducing the likelihood of error or misjudgement in an international environment in which personnel from different countries perform joint tasks. This "internationality" of the military, NATO membership in particular, has resulted in a constant widening of the military vocabulary that is shared by a specific and increasing group for which it constructs a social reality, and that is often understandable without misinterpretations only to its members. Thus the military terminology serves to clarify, especially in the case of multinational operations, and eliminate ambiguity and misunderstanding that might otherwise occur among personnel from different, often very distant countries.

Military language has become exceptionally productive in the past century. Members of the armed forces, whether soldiers, sailors, pilots or military officials, have all contributed to this constant enrichment. New crises emerge, creating new vocabularies. For example, the US troops' engagement in the Gulf War was termed *assertive disarmament*, military power became *coercive potential*, the use of bombs in preparation for ground engagement was referred to as *softening*, a war fought with advanced technology is *techno-war*, while automatically guided missiles were dubbed *fire and forget*. Some expressions are used as euphemisms, to mask the true activities behind them, while some are used simply as jargon, understood by those participating in a fighting mission.

Specialized military terminology can provide some evidence about the group that uses it, about how they see themselves as exclusive members of a group. It emphasizes the expertise of those who use it, and in this case it contains a specific notion of hierarchy typical of the military. The ability to use and understand this specialized language determines the membership in a military community, and within it the membership in particular branches and services (for instance, the infantry

frequently uses the word *wade,* meaning "to walk through water", which is unimportant to members of the air-force). Those unable to understand specialized military terminology will experience difficulties in performing their everyday tasks. If we add the abundance of jargon (in-group language), abbreviations and acronyms, and the arcane statements emanating from them, all of which are frequent among the military, ranging from the smallest units to the highest levels of NATO commands, we can see how the military language and military terminology delineate the military community and its members.

Here are some examples of jargon: the forward air-controller word *frenzy*, meaning "the target has not been destroyed"; *shit-hot* is used to refer to the "most elite kind of a fighter pilot"; *bogey* stands for an "enemy fighter aircraft"; *big stand easy* means "death". *To bag* means to "kill" while *bravo* stands for the "second letter of the phonetic alphabet". Changing letters for words is essential in communication, when precise spelling of a term or name is of the utmost importance. The abbreviation *HUMINT* stands for "human intelligence", referring to the information about the enemy gathered from people.

If we can say that general language, if we observe its cultural role, is closely related to the identity of the communities and individuals who share it, we can say that specialized (in this case military) language is indispensable for communication within the subgroups of the wider community.

The social role of specialized military terminology has two facets. One is the reinforcement of the connection between speakers who use it. It can also emphasize the rivalry between, and the social cohesion among members of different branches, services and military subgroups. On the other hand, specialized military terminology distinguishes the military from the outsiders, people who do not use it.

However, we should note another role of the group-specific military terminology, that is, to achieve linguistic economy. This role is particularly evident in the case of neologisms, such as the term *backseater,* which is used for "radar intercept officer" by naval fighter pilots.

3.1   NATO terminology

NATO, or North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has existed as a military alliance for more than a half-century. Over the years, it has undergone numerous changes and transformations regarding its size, tasks and policies; it has also been continuously

admitting new countries and their military forces. There are two official languages of the Alliance, English and French, used by all member nations, i.e. their representatives in different bodies and committees. The same is true of members of the units operating in a multinational environment in NATO-lead missions worldwide.

Terms (and their definitions) used by the member nations have been collected, approved and declared standard by the NATO Committee for Standardization. On the official NATO website it is possible to add new words to the existing glossary of terms and definitions, and thus record the changes that occur in the use of terminology. The purpose of this glossary is to "enable more effective cooperation between NATO nations, commands, agencies and staffs, and with Partner and other nations, by promoting the use of a common and accurate terminology (including abbreviations) leading to better mutual understanding" (NATO Glossary of Terms). This has been proved crucial for the normal functioning of an organization as complex and multinational as NATO, especially in the light of the fact that all decisions on NATO policy and operations are made unanimously.

Some examples include *aerodrome,* which has become the preferred term to *airfield*, *contact report,* which is preferred to *amplifying report* (a report indicating any detection of the enemy). *Multinational* is preferred to *combined*, which is more used among the English-speaking military personnel. *Objective* is a frequently used term which determines a "clearly defined and attainable goal for a military operation"; *preparation fire* is delivered before an attack to weaken the enemy position; *recovery*, when used in air operations means "that phase of a mission which involves the return of an aircraft to a base"; *WIA* stands for "wounded in action" i.e. a battle casualty that has incurred an injury. These are some of the terms from the NATO glossary, which illustrate their specific meaning when used by the NATO community, sometimes synonymous, sometimes homonymous to the same words used by civilians.

Today, there are many dictionaries of military terms, glossaries created for NATO officials and employees, but also practical glossaries that are disseminated to participants of any kind of military training, or exercise which offer official terms that are used and recognized at a particular event. Dictionaries of military abbreviations and acronyms are also very useful, sometimes essential for working in a multinational environment. For example, the abbreviation *SSM* stands for *surface-to-surface missile*, a missile designed to be fired from a launcher on a ship/on the ground at a target on the ground, whereas *SAM* stands for *surface-to-air missile*, one fired at

enemy aircraft. The acronym *VSI* stands for *very seriously injured*, an expression essential for *MEDEVAC – medical evacuation*, which is a frequently used abbreviation.

4. Euphemisms in military terminology

At first thought, we associate euphemisms with figurative language, with literature or etiquette, and very often we are not aware of their presence in our everyday life. However, the metaphoric nature of language provides innumerable possibilities to say or write something in different ways, depending on the situation and the participants in communication. The military, both in professional communication and in public discourse, use this possibility to choose between the existing synonymous expressions, or even come up with new ones in order to achieve the communication goal. Because of the particular nature of the military profession and its activities, the latter happens even more often than in other areas of life. The organization is strict, rules are imposed and obeyed, sexual harassment is carefully avoided, and polite communication among military professionals is an imperative. All of this makes euphemisms particularly welcome.

4.1   Euphemisms in specialized military language

Through language, groups of individuals form discourse communities. The language used within a given community serves both to construct a vision of the world into which initiates are socialized and to draw a line between those within the group and those on the outside. In official language, this occurs through the use of technical terms and acronyms. Such terms may be less euphemistic, because official terminology represents the institution to outsiders. In informal language this is accomplished by the knowledge of terms whose meanings are not available except through direct participation in the group - meanings that do not appear in formal glossaries. Such informal language is designed to emphasize the insider status of the participants, as the examples below will illustrate.

The expression *friendly fire* is used when allied forces "accidentally kill their own side". *Blue-on-blue* is "shelling or bombing your own troops". *Buffer zone* is the "area between the warring sides", usually under the control of the UN forces. *Surveillance* is a euphemism for "spying". *Take out a target, neutralize* and *salvage* are all euphemisms for "killing selected targets". *Camping* means "waiting for the enemy to appear (in order to kill them). *Mopping up operations* are undertaken to "kill off the

remnants of the resistance". *Unwelcome visit* is a euphemism for "invasion". *Cleansed* means "cleared of enemy troops"; however, this word has become more associated with ethnic cleansing, and may cause misinterpretations. *Anti-personnel mine* is a "mine designed for killing humans", *blow away* is a euphemism for "killing with gunfire at short range", *battle fatigue* is a euphemistic expression used by the military doctors to diagnose "inability to continue fighting". *Home address* is the "place where U.S. nuclear bombs are aimed", *Christmas trees* are "nuclear missiles on board US submarines" – these domestic metaphors convey the meaning that the US nuclear weapons are safe for the US military to handle. Names of missiles and weapons represent another field of use of euphemisms. For example, *Sparrow* is a name of an "air-to-air missile", *Tomahawk* is a "long range cruise missile", *Daisy Cutter* is the nickname for "BLU-82B/C-130 weapon system", used in Vietnam and in Afghanistan known for its ability to flatten a forest into a helicopter landing zone, *Black Hawk*, *Cobra*, *Viper* are all names of different kinds of "military helicopters", while *Hornet* is a "combat airplane".

4.2   Military euphemisms in public discourse

The world changes rapidly. Changes involve new crises and new means have to be devised to manage them. The military forces have to come up with new strategies, tactics, and objectives to aid politicians to achieve their goals. Modern politics tends to evade the taboo spheres of violence and death. Euphemistic language can thus serve to mask and play down what the words are actually referring to. It is easier to refer to *surgical strikes* than to "bombing attacks". Thus the linguistic creativity of the military moves in the direction of an evasive, soft and indirect language.

The military alliance as the omnipresent force in matters of global security needs to communicate with those outside. When a crisis occurs, the information that reaches the public puts additional pressure on public relations officers, who have to deal with all the aspects of the crisis and decide what to say and how to say it. In the 20th and 21st centuries, "military violence" has become *the use of force*, "war" has become *pacification* or *peace keeping*. During a conflict, the official rhetoric can emphasize the humanitarian concerns of the launched operation or can distract attention from the costs inevitably incurred when the military is engaged. Descriptions can focus on the technology that has been destroyed, so that there are reports on the number of sorties successfully completed, the number of aircrafts or tanks destroyed. This

permits a focus on objects and away from the people affected by the destruction. *Collateral damage*, a euphemistic expression for the "killed innocent civilians" has been used so often in the last few decades that it is no longer considered a euphemism. The mention of killing and death is avoided, and euphemisms come to the fore.

Death, violence, and killing are normally taboo, unless the affected are criminals or enemies branded by the government. In cases of war, we tend to see two opposite sides, with the enemy being portrayed as evil, aggressive, immoral, inhuman and unjust, while the expressions related to the home side are euphemistic. The enemy is dehumanized, for example, by being referred to as *softskin targets*. They are *terrorists, aggressors, invaders* and *insurgents* whereas the home soldiers and their allies are *freedom-fighters, liberators.*

Further examples of this practice include the *Coalition of the Willing*, *Operation Provide Comfort* (an airlift for Kurds during the Gulf War), *Operation Infinite Justice*, later *Operation Enduring Freedom* (the invasion of Afghanistan), *Operation Iraqi Freedom* (launched after *9/11*). Attacks on targets in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lybia are *protective reactions*, *preemptive strikes.* The aggressive rhetoric of enemy leaders is *softened up* by bombs before being *degraded* and *attrited*. *Incontinent ordnance* is bullets, bombs and shells killing innocent civilians and comrades whereas *discriminate deterrence* is pinpoint bombing.

The word "war" itself is being avoided at all costs, and *confrontations, hostilities, conflicts, operations, interventions* and *incidents* are used instead.

As we can see, the same practices are given different names, depending on the side of the battlefield. This is the kind of terminology used by the spokespersons of defence ministries and by news reporters, often in the service of blunting the public sentiment when civilian casualties take place, or the destruction is too obvious and questions might arise about the necessity of such actions.

5. Appropriation of military terminology

Military terminology is not limited to military contexts, but merges and intertwines with other fields of human activity, such as news reporting, hospitals, and other organizations. All of them have their own specialized vocabularies, but also take over some expressions and use them for their purposes, thus expanding their conceptual fields. For example, *bombed out* means "under the influence of narcotics". Medicine

also borrows from the military in when it speaks about the "war against the enemy disease". Journalists and TV commentators reporting on the 2011 Royal Wedding in the United Kingdom used the expression *rules of engagement* to refer to the protocol to be followed during the wedding ceremony by the participants, guests, the press, etc. *Rules of engagement* is a military term, commonly used as an acronym ROE.

Colllateral damage is often used by the press when reporting on the consequences of the present recession. Being *fired* has become common in business contexts; however, people tend to forget that the expression has been taken from the military. The military language has offered the abundance of expressions used by organizations in managing their workforce and business processes. Today many companies use the appropriated military terminology such as *mission, strategy, defence, attack (offensive strategy), tactics, scenario, discipline*, etc. In many civilian communities, militarized language denotes a level of seriousness that could not be conveyed as effectively in other ways: the headquarters of the presidential candidate can be referred to as a *war room*, a system of substitutions in college basketball is known as *platooning*, while team leaders are *floor generals*.

The figurative, conceptual power of metaphors is what makes such expressions understandable and accepted in unrelated contexts. Military terminology is incredibly flexible and it often infiltrates the language of civilians. It is in turn affected by specialized civilian vocabularies, e.g. the military borrows from the medical profession when it conducts its *surgical operations* to remove *the cancer*. Expressions *nuclear forensics* and *terrorist nuclear abstinence* have also been taken from the medical terminology.

6. Conclusion

Euphemisms contribute to the richness of language. When used thoughtfully in everyday situations, particularly in public discourse, they can uphold interpersonal relationships. Conversely, when used for ideological reasons, euphemisms can create a haze of deceptions, a layer of lies.

The use of force has become legitimized by policy makers through invocations of humanity. Wars are often portrayed as operations launched to rescue and protect endangered peoples, democratic regimes, world security, etc. while their aim is in fact to reshape societies and the world order.

Contemporary politics and their constant companion, the military, use discourses and practices that blur distinctions between war and peace, between violence and humanity. These discourses provide a fertile ground for linguistic creativity, for finding new evasive and non-violent expressions which mask the violent and unpleasant nature of their referents. Among the whole range of different linguistic tools, euphemisms have become increasingly used, adding new values to words and ideas, being affected by and at the same time contributing to the ever changing perception of modern reality.

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