

# THAI POLITICAL EUPHEMISM

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## ABSTRACT

Abstract—Euphemism is resorted when people try to mention unpleasant subjects or issues. In politics, the politicians or political participants not only use euphemisms, but also create new euphemisms to serve their political purposes. The aims of this study were to investigate Thai political euphemism formation by adopting Warren's model and analyze their function in political context. The results revealed that more than half of Thai political euphemisms were created by compounding and semantic innovation. They played a crucial role in concealing and reducing the degree of violent situations or faults. The political euphemisms that were reproduced through media influenced people's attitude and finally manipulate their mindset.

Keywords—Political euphemism, Political purpose, Politician

## INTRODUCTION

Euphemism is the practice of referring to something offensive or delicate in terms that make it sound more pleasant or becoming than it really is [5]. Euphemism can be used in various areas such as disease, sex, and crime. It functions to reduce unpleasant sense and encourage positive sense of receiver. For this reason, it is often used in political context. In Thailand, political euphemism is widely used. It can be seen obviously during political unrest in 2004. Political leaders and people gathered to protest for some political requirements. Then it leads to riots. Group of people clashed with police officers and military officers.

It can be observed that there are some political euphemisms in the statement which is mentioned to political unrest. This means that the situation is severe but the word that is used to describe is quite soft. Many new words were created by politicians or government and have been used in the present. It is interesting to investigate the formation of Thai political euphemisms and analyze their function in political context.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***1.1. Concept of Political Euphemism***

Ibi [9] asserted that the language of politics seems to be particularly full of euphemisms. It is the nature of politicians to be considerate and care of people's feelings in order to win their favor. They must avoid words that have unpleasant associations and might be coldly received. No wonder that the language of government service of any kind is overwhelmingly euphemistic. In politics, political euphemism is created to serves political purposes. It is a tool for political participants to hide scandals, disguise the truth, and guide public thoughts when discussing social issues or events [4]. Additionally, Allan and Burridge [3] said that face concerns play a crucial role in understanding euphemism as a social phenomenon. Indeed, euphemistic use in political language responds to the politicians' need that their self-image be appreciated and approved of in the community. This means that they try to maintain their positive face.

### ***1.2. Euphemism Construction***

Warren [1] presented the classification of the main devices for constructing euphemisms. There are word-formation devices, phonemic modification, loan words, and semantic innovation.

#### ***1.2.1. Word-formation devices***

##### ***A. Compounding***

The combining of two individually innocuous words forms a euphemism for an otherwise

unacceptable term. For example, the word “hand job” is used instead “masturbation”.

#### *B. Derivation*

The modification of a Latin term to form an acceptable modern word. For instance, the word “fellatio” derived from “fellare” which is the Latin word. It means to suck. So, fellatio is a euphemism that used for oral sex.

#### *C. Blends*

The concept of blending is two or more words are put together. There are two processes for creating blending words. First, delete some parts of the original words. Then compose them to a new word. For example, edutainment comes from education and entertainment.

#### *D. Acronyms*

Acronym is the product of selecting the first alphabet of each word and compounding them respectively. SNAFU comes from “Situation Normal All Fucked Up” which is used for military blunder.

#### *E. Onomatopoeia*

The new word is created by imitate natural sound. The word “bonk” comes from the sound during the sexual act. It means sexual intercourse.

### *1.2.2. Phonemic Modification*

#### *A. Back slang*

The words are reversed to avoid explicit mention. For example, “dratsab” is used instead bastard.

#### *B. Rhyming slang*

The target word is replaced by rhythmic code. For instance, “bristols” is the rhythmic code for breasts.

#### *C. Phoneme replacement*

The vowel sound or consonant sound of the offensive term is replaced. For example, vowel sound of the word “shit” is replaced by “shoot”.

#### *D. Abbreviation*

It is a shortened form of a word such as “eff” from the word “eff off”. It means fuck (off).

### *1.2.3. Loan words*

One way to increase new word is using the vocabulary from another language in your own language. In English, there are many Latin words are used such as “feces” for excrement.

### *1.2.4. Semantic innovation*

#### *A. Particularizations*

A general term is used which is required to be particularized within the context to make sense, e.g. “satisfaction” for “orgasm” and “innocent” for “virginal”. These general terms require contextually based inference by the reader or listener to understand.

#### *B. Implications*

In this case, several steps are required to reach the intended meaning. For instance, “loose” implies unattached. It leads to the interpretation about having sexual easily.

#### *C. Metaphors*

Some property of the conventional referent is also a property of the contextual referent. For example, “mole” is metaphor of secret agent because both mole and secret agent work under cover.

#### *D. Metonyms*

There is a co-occurrence relationship between contextual and conventional referents. For example, “skirt” is a metonym of woman under the concept that skirt is a thing and woman is a user.

#### *E. Reversals*

In some context, the speaker try to express the word in the meaning that is opposite of its conventional meaning for sarcasm. For example, in some context “huge” means very small.

#### *F. Understatements*

The conventional meaning of a word fits our favored contextual referent provided the degree to which some feature of meaning applies is boosted, such as “sleep” that means “die”.

#### *G. Overstatements*

The conventional meaning of a word fits our favoured contextual referent provided the degree to which some fearure of meaning applies is attenuated, such as “fight to glory” which means “death”.

## RELATED WORKS

Samoskaite [5] studied political euphemisms in English newspapers. The findings revealed that political euphemisms were found in the articles about political issues and politicians in a large number. It showed that politicians intend to select the words when they mention to political issues or give a speech. The language strategy that was found most is compounding. There is not any phonemic modification because political texts tend to be serious rather than playfulness of sound. Metaphor is the largest group of semantic innovation device that is used to create political euphemisms. Political euphemisms performed five pragmatic functions including politeness, taboo avoiding, covering up, inducing, and tactical. The covering up was found most. It showed that politicians used political euphemism to cover up the true nature of events and deceive the public with nice-sounding words.

Crespo-Fernandez [6] studied euphemism and political discourse in the British regional press. The discourse analysis approach was adopted to investigate data at word level and sentence level. In word level, the language strategy that was found most is understatement. Litotes and underspecification followed respectively. In sentence level, passive voice was used in high frequency and modal verb such as can, may, might are followed. It functioned for avoiding commitment. Moreover, there is no denying that vagueness is an important feature of political euphemisms. The politicians avoided mentioning the issues directly and also sent vague information to people. The unclear information would be interpreted individually

## METHODOLOGY

After literature review and research delimitation, the data was collected from fan page named The Contemporary Thai Politicianary [8]. This fan page is the source of data which contains political vocabulary, definition, and origin. The samples was collected and selected by criteria that can distinguish political euphemisms from political vocabularies. The word which was considered as political euphemism must meet the definition of political euphemism. Political euphemism is created from polite word and nonviolent. In addition, it is used for serving political purposes. Then the construction of political euphemism was investigated by adopting Warren's model [1] and the function in political context was interpreted. Finally, the research finding was summarized and suggestion for future work was proposed.

## RESULTS

### *1.1. Thai Political Euphemism Construction*

The main way in which Thai political euphemisms can be constructed is compounding. One word was compounded with the others to create a new word for particular situations, for example, righteous minority and honestly mistake. The definition of "righteous" is morally correct, and "minority" means a smaller number. It is widely acknowledged that in democracy the majority vote will be accepted. Righteous minority was created to break this rule and legitimize. "Mistake" means to be wrong about. The meaning is quite negative. On the other hand, the meaning of "honestly" is positive. It means in a way that is truthful. When these two words are compounded, it means unintentional fault and the offender will not be punished. The finding is consistent with Samoskaite's research [5]. It could be claimed that politicians or government attempt to select and create new political euphemism for particular issues. Furthermore, semantic innovation is another device to create Thai political euphemism which is included particularization and understatement. Particularization is using general word for special context. For instance, the word "space" in political context means the politicians temporarily stop political activities because they were found guilty. Understatement is a statement that describes something in a way that makes it seem less serious or bad than it really is. For example, the word "military intervention" is used instead of coup d'état. "Non-drained water" is used to called flood condition in Bangkok. The finding is similar to Crespo-Fernandez's results [6]. The understatement also has unclear meaning to distract people attention. Besides, loanwords also are found in Thai political euphemism such as set zero and freeze.

### **1.2. The Function of Thai Political Euphemism**

Most of Thai political euphemism is used for dissimulation and reduction violent degree of situations or faults. Chilton and Schaffner [2] said that there are two types of dissimulation: quantity dissimulation and quality dissimulation. From the data, it found that Thai political euphemism can do quality dissimulation and reduction the violent degree at the same time. The politicians use the word “non-drained water” to conceal the water volume and degrade the severe of flood situation in Bangkok. “Honestly mistake” is not only used to decrease the degree of faults, but also dissimulate the real action. Likewise, pragmatic function, covering up, that was found in Samoskaite’s research [5]. Moreover, legitimation function can be found in Thai political euphemism such as the word “righteous minority”.

## **VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK**

In politics, political euphemism are created and used over and over. Political euphemism is language strategies to decrease level of seriousness. Some words are created for particular issues and faults. The results revealed that more than half of Thai political euphemisms were created by compounding and semantic innovation. Additionally, loan words can be used in political context. The main function of Thai political euphemism is concealing and reducing the degree of violent situations or faults. The good-sounding word that covers unpleasant truth can be accepted easily without contemplation. Also, vagueness can distract people attention. The political euphemisms that were reproduced through media influenced people’s attitude and finally manipulate their mindset.

It is possible to expand and do further research in the area of comparative research, Thai and English. Besides, it could be a research that is conducted with language learners to investigate the perception and comprehension [7].

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