

The Euphemism of Death in Hakka, Mandarin, and English

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Abstract

"Taboo" generally exists in every human culture., Every race has many taboos that have the common goal "to incline to lucky avoiding disaster" no matter in the Eastern or Western society. Humans deliberately choose the gentle, semantically vague statement, "the tactful language" (Euphemism), instead of some taboos words and expressions for the sake of the agreeable communication within the conversation.

The so-called Euphemism is an antonym of the taboo. The saying of Euphemism comes from Greek that indicates the meaning, "the speech that is pleasant to hear". Richards (2000) define this tactful language as "the speech is used to replace for some offensive, disturbing, or unpleasant words or phrases to the listener."

Every creature would die. People get used to use the tactful language such as 'to pass away', 'to return to heaven', 'to go to heaven', 'to get rebirth', and 'to join the immortals' instead of talking about the word 'death' since people believe that they can avoid the disaster in the case of not speaking this word, death. The variety usages of the death euphemism depend on the identity of the specific referented object. For instance, in the ancient Chinese, some expressions like 'jia53 bong55', 'bong55', 'bong55 shii53', 'bong55 cu53', 'bing55 kong55', 'bing55 tian55', and 'shan53 xian55' represent the death of the king or emperor; moreover, the phrases 'hong55', 'hong55 bei53', 'hong55 shii53', 'hong55 xie53', and 'hong55 suen214' refers to "the feudal baron or officials that have high oppositions". Average citizens would say the common way like 'be gone', 'hit the bucket', and so on. Soldiers use "to sacrifice", "to bind with the leather", "the corpse is bound up", and the death is replaced for the expressions 'mie53 du53', or 'nie53 pan24' for Buddha. Therefore examples above show that the euphemism is relevant with the social relationship between superior and inferior or intimate or remote. 'Politeness' is the result of maintaining this kind of the social relationship. One of the main ideas of the article discusses the semantic collocation of the death euphemism and the referented object.

In Hakka, we have many special death euphemisms such as 'kui33 ka33', meaning to go to one's long home, 'tzong31 boi55', 'lo31 e11', interpreted to be more

older, 'ko55 sii55', 'ko55 sen33', 'lo31 e21 nin11', or 'kui33 si33', and etc. Someone calls dead elders as 'tseu31 e11', or 'tiu31 tet2'. Even the topics of food and living could be used to address someone's death like 'm11 sit5 fang55', or 'm11 tso24 e11'. Besides, Hakka has a kind of black humor to death in the representation of some expressions like 'bun33 ian11 lo11 vong11 niat2 jio2'. There are also many kinds of usages of Euphemisms in English, for instance *to be no more*, *pass away*, *cross over*, *expire*, *bite the dust*, *bite the ground*, *bite the sand*, *buy the farm*, and these usages represent different semantic connotations. This article mainly studies the death euphemism classification from the factor or viewpoint of culture and psychology by using sample investigation and the language contrastive analysis method.

The death euphemism mostly has the semantic ingredient which expresses the respect, commend, and retrospection to the dead, for example, 'chang33 mian33', 'an55 si33', 'jiuan33 chiu33', 'jio31 i31', and so on. On contrast, the death euphemism could be expressed as the negative meaning to represent the contempt to the dead. However, the euphemism reveals the close relation with the collocation of the referent. In short, we have collected more data about Hakka euphemism, and pay more attention on the linguistic contrast among three languages so that we will know the limitation or inclination within languages.

Keywords: Euphemism, Taboo, Cognitive Linguistics, Linguistics of culture, Hakka

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