

Exploring euphemism in standard Songhai

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Résumé

L'euphémisme comme substitut au tabou linguistique semble caractériser toutes les langues. La présente étude porte sur l'euphémisme en Songhaï, la principale langue du nord du Mali. L'étude a pour objectif de déterminer les typologies et d'expliquer les fonctions de l'euphémisme dans cette langue en utilisant les théories de travail de « figuration » de Goffman (1972) et de Politesse de Brown et de Levinson (1978, 1987). Les données sont extraites du film malien « Faraw! Femme de sable » réalisé en Songhaï standard. L'analyse de ces données montre l'existence de cinq principaux types d'euphémisme: l'euphémisme dans le contexte du mariage, l'euphémisme sous forme de constructions asyntaxiques, l'euphémisme lié à la peur, l'euphémisme religieux et le proverbe comme euphémisme. Les fonctions identifiées sont principalement celles de la protection et de la communication exprimées sous forme de stratégies de politesse et de sauvegarde de la face.

Abstract

Euphemism as a substitute to the linguistic taboo seems to characterize all languages. The present paper examines euphemism in Songhai, the main language of the North of Mali. It specifically aims to determine the typologies and to explain the functions of euphemism in that language using Goffman's Face Work Theory (1972) and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978, 1987). The data are collected from the Malian movie "Faraw! Mother of the Dunes", realized in standard Songhai. The findings uncover the existence of five basic types of euphemisms: marriage related euphemisms, non-syntactic euphemistic constructions, fear related euphemisms, religious euphemisms and proverbs as euphemisms. The functions identified are basically protection and communication expressed in terms of politeness and face-saving strategies.

Keywords: songhai, euphemism, face, politeness, communication.

Introduction

Language is a social means whereby individuals express their thoughts, needs, wants, likes, dislikes, desires, aspirations, etc. It is both a social and cultural phenomenon that can be found nowhere else save in human society and is used to express cultural patterns. It is a multi-edged sword that requires tactful use to soothe, mend, sway or destroy⁸. The language of a given community always displays the cultural patterns of that community. There is no known human society without language, and no culture can survive and be transmitted without language. For language, culture and society are intertwined.

Social interaction requires rules the respect of which ensures effective communication. Among these rules, observance of face maintenance according to implicit mutual agreement appears outstanding. An important feature that all cultures of all societies display is the existence of taboos. A 'taboo' is any act - linguistic or non-linguistic - forbidden in a social group. Non-linguistic taboos pertain to things not to perform while linguistic taboos appear as distasteful, vulgar or shocking words or phrases that people generally avoid for fear of causing offense, shame or even misfortune, the

⁸G. Fakuade, N Kemdirim, I, NNaji and F. Nwosu. Linguistic taboos in the Igbo society: a sociolinguistic investigation, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, 2003, p117.

unmentionables. In fact, language never constitutes taboo in itself; it is rather a community's cultural beliefs that determine what language is taboo or not taboo and what linguistic strategies are adopted to mention what is not to mention. "Therefore language appears as a set of innocent collection of sounds until a particular speech community comes to surround it with connotations and decrees where and when it can be used"⁹.

The other significant feature that all cultures in all societies display is the existence of euphemism. In fact, cultures have all devised appropriate roundabout strategies (euphemisms) to cope with linguistic taboos because there are times and places where a spade cannot be called a spade¹⁰. Euphemism is developed as a linguistic strategy used to talk about distasteful topics and to avoid by the same token, embarrassment, shame, superstition, offence, etc. in communication. In other words, euphemism is used to lubricate communication¹¹. It is a linguistic device adopted to alleviate or lessen what is seen as a taboo. To put it plainly, it is an attempt to make language that is seen as socially and culturally unpleasant or indelicate sound more pleasant and more acceptable with the aim of softening linguistic behavior which is thought to be potentially offensive or face-threatening. Euphemism is a figure of speech in which a delicate word or expression is substituted for one which is offensive to good manners or to delicate ears¹². R. W. Holder¹³ (2008: vii) sees euphemism as the language of evasion, hypocrisy, prudery and deceit. As a face saving conversational strategy, it appears both speaker and hearer-oriented. In the words of Fowler¹⁴, euphemism means the use of a mild or vague or periphrastic expression as a substitute for blunt precision or disagreeable use. Speakers of English have certainly found the term 'toilet'(room) distasteful and have decided to find out more acceptable and more pleasant substitutes like 'bathroom', 'water closet', 'rest room', 'men's room' and 'ladies' room'.

The North of Mali is dominated by the Songhai ethnic group speaking the Songhai language. Songhai people are highly modest in every aspect of their lives. That can be felt in their way of dressing. Both man and woman wear large and non-transparent clothes that do not allow perceiving the body or the body contours under the clothes. Therefore, a person who wears tight and/or transparent clothes is said to be 'naked'. Every part of the body should be covered (including the head for even man, let alone woman). For example, a man with a naked head (no hat or turban) is not socially well accepted as people should not see the forms of the head, the kind of hair, etc. Likewise, yawning without covering the mouth with at least the hand is not well perceived as people should not see what is in the mouth (the teeth, the tongue, etc.). The first thing a person you pay visit to will do is to quickly find something to cover the head. In short, all the behavior (including the linguistic behavior) is guided by that principle of modesty.

Language makes no exception to that rule of modesty. The Songhai language is highly euphemized. And people who deliberately do not or cannot observe this modesty rule are treated as either 'garaasa' or 'hoošaw' (sorts of cast people who lack decency and modesty in their behavior). In the Songhai social milieu, people talk about sex and sex related issues without naming them. In the same way, they discuss marriage, birth, death and related matters without explicitly naming them. A person who does not observe such a linguistic behavior is treated as 'boro kaŋ si ba subu daabu /jajaw' (literally: a person who does not even cover or surround with grass); reference is clearly made to the non-observance of the politeness rule of euphemism.

⁹ Ibid. p.120.

¹⁰ D.G. NNyakoe, P M Matu and D O Ongorora. Conceptualisation of 'Death as a Journey' and 'Death as Rest' in EkeGusii Euphemism. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol.2, No7, July 2012. Academy Publisher, Manufactured in Finland, P.1452.

¹¹ Ibid. P.1452.

¹² The new Webster English Dictionary [vol.1:30].

¹³ R W Holder, How Not to Say What You Mean. Oxford Dictionary of Euphemisms. OUP, 2008, vii.

¹⁴ Fowler, Modern English Usage. In: R. W. Holder 2008. How Not to Say What You Mean. The Oxford Dictionary of Euphemisms 1957, P.vii.

While all societies make use of euphemistic language to smoothen the messages they intend to convey, the songhai society appears particularly keen on that strategy, the ignorance or non-observance of which is often conducive to conflicting situations, communication breakdown and interruption. For instance, death cannot be announced by just anyone, but by people skilled in the art of speaking, in roundabout communication, in doublespeak, people who have the art to say what is not to say in certain circumstances. Likewise, in marriage, an admirer cannot just walk to the loved one or to her family and tell people right away, I want to marry your daughter, nor can he just send anyone on his behalf for that purpose. Rather, a knower in the matter, highly skilled in cover language is chosen and sent to that family to inform only people who are allowed to know about the matter at that stage, about his intention to build 'marriage ties' between the two families – in Songhai, they would use the phrase, ka hura X hugoo ra (to enter the family of X). In either context, failure to observe these principles may be conducive to communication breakdown. That is the reason why Songhai people usually say that few appropriate words are enough to sheathe a sword. And that is the reason why the language abounds of proverbs, maxims, adages and sayings meant to smoothen, introduce and say what is not to be bluntly said.

I. Literature Review

Studies on euphemism abound. In most societies, male and female subjects do not have the same linguistic behavior; in some African societies in particular, they are even not permitted to do so. Gao Gao (2008) finds that in most societies, men tend to use more taboo language than women save for 'emancipated feminine figures' who deliberately attempt to make men accept them as their equals. In plain words, women are experts at euphemism—while men carelessly blurt out whatever they are thinking¹⁵. Understandably, society tends to allow man to bluntly say what he wants but only tends to allow woman to imply what she wants.

Euphemism is a characteristic of all languages and the Arabic language as researched by Khanfar (2012) does not make an exception. Khanfar finds that the use of euphemism is widespread in Arabic and is a very salient feature of the Arab culture and the reasons for its use and its typology are the same as those displayed by most languages around the world. The study uncovers that euphemism in Arabic obeys the same rules and principles as in the other languages.

Euphemistic language appears sometimes in the form of metaphors, especially when it comes to talking about death and sex related issues. Eliecer-Crespo Fernandez (2006:113)¹⁶ conducted an investigation about the use of metaphors as death related euphemisms in the Irish mid-nineteenth century newspaper obituary pages. The investigation reveals that most such pages (influenced by Christianity) perceived death as a desirable event. Fernandez identified six euphemistic consolatory metaphors for 'death' and 'dying' which are as follows: death as a journey, a joyful life, a reward, the end, a rest and a loss. All of these metaphors were created and used to lessen the emotional weight contained in the taboo 'death'. Kerry Linfoot-Ham (2005) carried out a diachronic investigation of how sex related euphemisms are formed in three novels: *Emma*, by Jane Austen, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, by D H Lawrence, and *Well Groomed*, by Fiona Walker. Linfoot-Ham points out the existence of hundreds of euphemistic substitutes for sex organs. Damaris, et. al. (2012: 1452) focuses on the use of two death related metaphors (euphemisms) in the EkeGusii community of Kenya where death is seen as journey and a rest. The EkeGusii perceive human beings as travellers who set for a journey (source domain) but who have to stop a while to rest before they pursue their journey to their final destination, death (target domain).

The reasons for using euphemisms are social, psychological and communicative. And Linfoot-Ham (2005:228) emphasizes that,

¹⁵ Robin Tolmach Lakoff (2004:80). In: Gao Gao. *Taboo Language in Sex and the City: An Analysis of Gender Differences in Using Taboo Language in Conversation*, 2008, P.5

¹⁶E. C. Fernandez, *The Language of Death: Euphemism and Conceptual Metaphorization in Victorian Obituaries*. SKY Journal of Linguistics. 19. Journal of the Linguistic Association of Finland, 2006.

"the need for euphemism is both social and emotional, as it allows discussion of 'touchy' or taboo subjects [such as sex, personal appearances or religion] without enraging, outraging, or upsetting other people, and acts as a pressure valve whilst maintaining the appearance of civility".

But, isn't the purpose of these devices to facilitate communication which appears quite difficult in such circumstances? Again, Linfoot-Ham (2005:228)¹⁷ answers the question when he points out that in order for communication to progress smoothly and without conflict, accommodations are continually, and often subconsciously, made. Communication is guided and facilitated by the observance of euphemism. That is why Damaris, et. al. (2012: 1452)¹⁸ contend that the euphemistic effect of using 'kind words' will enable language communication to go smoothly and successfully and broaden people's vision of euphemism as well as understanding of social cultural communication.

Euphemistic language is used to carry out communicative functions. Speakers and hearers make use of this linguistic strategy to imply that though the topic under discussion may be unpleasant, communication should continue. Kate Burridge (2012: 65-83)¹⁹ conducted research to determine the functions of euphemism and the linguistic strategies used in its creation. The study discloses six functions: i) protective euphemism to shield and to avoid offense; ii) underhand euphemism to mystify and to misrepresent; iii) uplifting euphemism to talk up and inflate; iv) provocative euphemism to reveal and inspire; v) cohesive euphemism to show solidarity and to help define the gang; vi) ludic euphemism to have fun and to entertain. Mohsen Bakhtiar (2012)²⁰ identifies three principal functions of euphemism in Persian: i) euphemism as a face saving strategy for both the speaker and the hearer; ii) euphemism as a stylistic marker making use of soft language; and iii) euphemism as a political strategy to carry out an ideology.

The field of politics makes an immense use of euphemisms. Politicians often resort to this linguistic strategy to control masses, to drive them to their own goal, to carry out their political programs and at times to criticize. For A. M. Khanfar (2012:31) considers that politicians use euphemism as a tool of indirect bitter criticism²¹ to create a sense of humor, irony or mocking. Savo Karam (2011)²² pinpoints that politicians make use of grandiloquent expression conscious of its subversive capacity.²³ They also transgress justice and commit crimes with their overwhelming command of euphemisms²⁴. The use of euphemisms appears as both cultural and changing and adapting to the changing political scene.

Euphemism is not just a linguistic phenomenon; it is also cultural. In fact, translation is a process which requires from the translator sound knowledge of both the source and target languages and the use of two cultures behind them. Evidently, language appears innocent until a community surrounds it with cultural meaning. In this sense, B. S. Pour (2010) carried out research about euphemisms in cultural translation and proposes four translation options of concepts thought to be offensive: i) straightforward transfer from the source language to the target language, ii) use of euphemisms, iii) understatement, and iv) omission. And it will be up to the translator to decide about the time and place of use of each option. But in any case, the translation produced should be face-saving and 'polite' for both the speaker and the hearer taking their cultural heritage into account.

¹⁷ K. Linfoot-Ham. *The Linguistics of Euphemism: A Diachronic Study of Euphemism Formation*. Journal of Language and Linguistics. Vol.4 No.2 2005

¹⁸ D. G. Nyakoe, P. M. Matu and D. O. Ongorora. Op.cit, P.1452.

¹⁹ K. Burridge. *Euphemism and Language Change: the Sixth and Seventh Ages*. Lexis. E-Journal in English Lexicology, 2012.

²⁰ M. Bakhtiar. *Communicative Functions of Euphemisms in Persian*. In: *The Journal of International Social Research*. Volume 5, Issue 20, 2012.

²¹ A. M. Khanfar, *Euphemism in Arabic: Typology and Formation*. Journal of the College of Arts, University of Basrah, No. (61) 2012.

²² S. Karam. *Truths and Euphemisms*. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies – Vol 17 (1)*, 2011, p.5.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

The African sociolinguistic arena looks like a virgin land for research. Studies conducted about African languages are scanty; and very few have been carried out on euphemism. Malian languages are no exception. As far as the Songhai language is concerned, it seems that no research has been conducted about the topic. Therefore, there is a gap that needs to be filled in. This study aims at exploring the use of euphemism in Standard Songhai. The study aims at answering two basic questions: What are the typologies of euphemism in Songhai? And What function(s) does euphemism fulfill in the language? This research is a contribution to the Malian sociolinguistic study.

II. Theoretical Framework

The present study is carried out in the light of the Face Work Theory developed by Erving Goffman (1972) and the Politeness Theory as expounded by P. Brown and S. C. Levinson (1978, 1987). The Face Work Theory is based on the concept of 'face' as used in the phrases 'to lose face' and 'to save face'. Goffman (1972:5) defines 'face' "as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes"²⁵. Brown and Levinson (1978:66) consider 'face' as something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interactions²⁶.

The concept of 'face work' is perceived by Goffman (1972:13) as the actions conducted by an individual to make everything s/he is doing in line with face. As a result, "poise is one important type of face-work, for through poise the person controls his embarrassment and hence the embarrassment that he and others might have over his embarrassment"²⁷. Knowledge and use of face-work pertains to skill, know-how and diplomacy in language use. The basic idea underlying Goffman's theory is that in society, participants involved in a communicative interaction often attempt not only to save their own face, but also to save others' face.

Face may be positive or negative. Positive face relates to an individual's need to be confirmed and liked by the other members of his community, the feeling that one's social group shares common goals; For Brown and Attardo (2005:83) negative face is the desire to be left alone, to be unimpeded, not to be imposed upon, and to be able to act as we please²⁸.

Research on politeness has flourished over the recent years. In the view of Vilkki (2006), politeness has been conceptualized especially as strategic conflict-avoidance or as strategic construction of cooperative social interaction²⁹. Fraser (1990) identifies four 'politeness' views: the social-norm view, the conversation-maxim view, the face-saving view and the conversational-contract view³⁰. Politeness therefore helps fight off conflicts between sides, ensures smooth interaction, social balance and friendliness.

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, based on Goffman's (1967) Face Work Theory, represents Fraser's face-saving view (L. Vilkki 2006:323). Politeness appears as an attempt on the part of a speaker to mitigate the threats to the face of a hearer. B. S. Pour (2010:3) explains that basically, minimizing the hearers' negative face and maximizing their positive face are the main considerations of politeness³¹. Given the link between face-saving and politeness, M. A. Locher and R. J. Watt

²⁵ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual, Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour*, Penguin Books, 1972, P.5

²⁶ Brown and Levinson, In: B. S. Pour, *A Study of Euphemisms from the Perspectives of Cultural Translation and Linguistics*, Translation Journal, Volume 14, No.4, October 2010, P2.

²⁷ Erving Goffman, 1972. Op. cit. p13.

²⁸ Brown and Attardo. (2005:83). In: B. S. Pour. Op. cit. Pp.2-3.

²⁹ L. Vilkki. Politeness, Face and Facework: Current Issues. SKY Journal of Linguistics, 2006. Linguistics.fi. p.323.

³⁰ Fraser (1990). In: L. Vilkki. Ibid.

³¹ B. S. Pour, 2010. Op. cit. p.3

(2005:10) find that Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory is not in fact a theory of politeness, but rather a theory of face-work, dealing only with the mitigation of face-threatening acts³². Locher and Watt also argue that the theory does not account for contexts where face-saving is not a priority. In this sense politeness is equated with face-saving.

Politeness may be seen as either positive or negative. Positive politeness aims at preserving the positive face of hearers. That is achieved through the use of language that shows the speaker's solidarity with the hearer. Negative politeness is used to keep the negative face of speakers; linguistic strategies that show deference to the listener are adopted.

In this paper, euphemism is presented and analyzed as both a face-saving and a linguistic politeness strategies used in communication to avoid losing face and to save the face of interactants.

III. Methodology

The data for the study were extracted from *Faraw! Mother of the Dunes* (1997), a movie by the Malian film maker, Abdoulaye Ascofare. The language of the movie is standard Songhai, basically spoken in the region of Gao. It is a variety less influenced by the neighboring languages, namely Tamasheq, Fulfulde, Bamanankan and Hasaniya. The movie was viewed and all the euphemisms were collected, analyzed and classified, and their communicative functions highlighted.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Euphemisms in Songhai: Types and Functions

The data analysis has released a number of euphemisms:

4.1.1. Marriage (and Sex) related Euphemisms: The Songhai culture, like many sub-Saharan African cultures is highly euphemized when it comes to talking about marriage (related) issues. While a husband calls his wife and children by their names, the opposite is not always true. That is why a saying in Songhai posits that *zanka ga nga baaba maajoo bay da a ga nee a se abba!* (a child knows his father's name, yet calls him dad!). That saying applies not just to children but also to the elderly: a wife knows her husband's name, yet does not call him by his real name. That is why the term 'my husband' has become distasteful for wives and polite euphemistic substitutes such as 'arubeeroo' or 'agay arubeeroo' (a man of a certain age, to designate the husband) or 'beeroo' (elder brother), a shortened form for 'ay beeroo' (my elder brother), 'hugoo koyoo' (the owner of the house), 'iri baaba' (our father) or 'baaba' (father), 'X baaba' (X's father), 'hasoo' or 'hasay' (uncle), etc. are preferred. A close look at these concepts unveils that these euphemisms all carry the idea of protector, the (be-)loved one and the cherished. For the phrase 'Ay hasoo' (my maternal uncle) is used in the movie as a euphemistic substitute for 'my husband': 'ay hasoo' may suppose that there is a real uncle - niece family relationship between the two people outside marriage, and that has been adopted and transferred to this context of marriage; it may also be a term adopted because of its strong positive emotional weight. The word 'husband' cannot be used; otherwise, there will a loss of face, while face-saving is recommended. In fact, in the Songhai culture, maternal uncles are people who are very much cherished and are said to be present and ready to help, and by association, the term is used here as a euphemism for husband. A similar euphemism is when the main character addressing her children used the phrase 'wara baaba' (your father), not 'ay kurjoo' (my husband) which has become distasteful in this particular context. In fact, a wife, whatever her age, cannot tell her children that their father is her husband, even though it is a fact known to even the children. Likewise, the phrase 'ay wandoo' (my wife) will become distasteful for a husband addressing his children and referring to his wife; rather, the phrase 'wara naa' (your mother) will be the acceptable term. More, a husband would call his wife by her real name as he would do with any other person, but would not make reference to

³² M. A. Locher and R. J. Watts, Politeness theory and relational work, *Journal of Politeness Research* 1, 2005, p10.

her as 'ay wandoo', 'ay woyoo' (my wife), etc. In front of other people, he would rather refer to her with euphemisms like 'ay hugu koyoo' (my house owner), 'agay alayanoo' (my dependency), 'ay zankey nna' (the mother of my children), etc. for decorum observance.

Another term used in the movie to make reference to the husband is 'Aru filaana' (the husband as aru filaana) that could be classified in the previous category (still in the context of marriage) but has some specific features that need to be highlighted. Above all, 'filaana' is a loanword (one of the euphemism formation devices proposed by Warren, 1992) from Arabic. The Arabic word it derived from is 'fulaan' (someone or somebody). In Songhai, it is often preceded by either 'aru' (man) or 'woy' (woman) and tends, in this case, to have a negative meaning. In this sense, the phrase is used to designate a person whose name a speaker does not want to mention, just because s/he wants to talk about him/her without drawing his/her attention. The term has acquired connotative meaning in the movie: the husband as 'aru filaana' whose name and marriage ties with the speaker cannot be utterly expressed in front of a former suitor. The user of the term seems to be torn between the desire to respect euphemism observance and respect and kindness to the former lover. 'Aru filaana' appears in this particular context as a polite term, a shield to face-save and is adopted by the loved one for protection and for the avoidance of communication breakdown. Additionally, 'aru filaana' is at times used by wives as a euphemism to make reference to their husbands.

4.1.2. Non-Syntactic Euphemistic Constructions: Euphemism in the form of special constructions is commonplace in the Songhai language. A good example is when workers stopped the water seller in the movie to buy expectedly 'fresh' water. After one person has bought and drunk water, another worker in distance asked him: 'A ga yay?' (Is it fresh?). The answer was 'A ga hañ' (literally, it drinks). 'It' is used for water which is not an animate being that can drink. The expected normal grammatical construction should have been 'A ga hañandi' (It can be drunk) which seems less strong in emphasis than 'A ga hañ'. It appears that the use of this construction is euphemistic emphasis. In front of the water seller, this construction ('A ga hañ' instead of 'A ga hañandi') was preferred to convey the message 'we do not want to face-threaten'; 'we rather want to be polite and face-save so as to carry on the conversation.

A grammatical analysis of this construction shows that 'a' that appears as the subject of the verb 'hañ' is not the real subject since 'water' replaced by 'a' cannot carry out an action (inanimate). In other words, 'water', the object represented by 'a', has replaced the subject, absent from the construction. Similar constructions are: 'a ga bisa' (it passes for food, to imply that even though it is not good, it can be swallowed), 'a ga nna' (it eats for food, to convey that even though it does not taste good, it can be eaten) and 'a ga gona' (for food, to signal that even though it is not good, it can be swallowed). In all these examples, the subject [a] is fake; the true subjects are absent from the sentence.

4.1.3. Fear related Euphemisms: This category of euphemisms has two components:

4.1.3.1. Euphemism for Dreadful Beings and Things (including Death): The Songhai culture does not allow the use of the names of certain fearful animals, people and things. 'Gandakarfu' (snake) and 'carkaw' (witch) are good illustrations. The words 'salaamun' and 'gondi' (a snake) have become distasteful in Songhai as they refer to that dreadful animal; so they have been euphemized through the use of 'gandakarfu' (literally, a rope of the ground). Another word of the same category is 'carkaw' (a witch) that should not be pronounced especially at night; it has then been euphemized through the use of the term 'cijin boro' (literally, a person of night).

4.1.3.2. Euphemisms for (Mental) Diseases: Mental illnesses are strongly euphemized as people dread them very much. In this case, euphemism becomes a true protective shield against what other people might think. Nyakoe (referring to Trinch, 2001) perceives sexuality, physical and mental illness, diseases, personal finances, death and criminality³³ among linguistic taboos which are

³³ Damaris G. Nyakoe, Peter M Matu and David O Ongarora. Op. cit. p.1453

commonly euphemized in several cultures around the world. A typical instance is when the main character in the movie says that her husband has (instead of suffers from) 'binahasaraw' (literally, 'heart spoilage') to avoid the distasteful word, 'madness'; she intends to protect herself and her family against some negative image that her community might have about them. 'Hollay' (madness) is the taboo that cannot be used as it might prevent people from visiting it; and the bearer of 'hollay' becomes 'hollokom'. 'Binahasaraw' is just one of the different euphemisms for 'hollay', a disease that cannot blatantly be divulged to anybody. In plain words, the term 'hollay' is euphemized as 'binahasaraw', and what is more, a patient does not suffer from 'hollay', but rather has 'binahasaraw', a polite face-saving strategy used to mitigate the strong emotional weight that the word 'hollay' carries. Other euphemisms for 'hollay' are 'lakkal waasay' (literally, spirit away), 'bina ciinay' (literally, talking in the heart), etc. Consequently, a person is not said to be mad, rather people will kindly say that 'a si nga boj may' (s/he does not belong to him/herself).

Still in the same context (especially in criminality), a similar euphemism was used by the main actress of the movie when she claimed that her husband was made dirty by the government. The verb 'ka ziband'i' (to make somebody/something dirty) is to be distinguished from the verb 'ka ziibi' (to be dirty). 'Ka ziband'i' is a euphemism for different linguistic taboos pertaining to charges of robbery, corruption, plundering, embezzlement, and the likes. The husband was accused by the authorities of some 'wrongdoing', was jailed for that, freed and is now (mentally)-ill; and since telling people about those charges from the public administration becomes unavoidable, a euphemism, 'ka ziband'i' instead of 'ka zay' (to steal, to embezzle, etc.) has been preferred to face-save. In plain words, the husband 'si ziibi' (is not dirty), but was 'ziband'i' (was made dirty) in the sense that he was accused of being dirty.

4.1.4. Religious Euphemisms: Religion is often used by man as a protection against other people. Islam having heavily influenced the Songhai language, a lot of Arabic words (the language of Islam) have entered the language. And religious terms appear as very good protective euphemisms. 'Laali albiliishi' (literally, 'curse the devil!' to mean 'may the devil be cursed!') as used by the main character with the shopkeeper is an illustration: this verbal phrase is another loan from Arabic. It is a euphemism used to ask a person to listen to what people tell him, not what the 'devil' tells him through his heart. As a religious term, it is used as a shield protecting the user from what the listener might think about him/her. In other words, the speaker is telling the listener that even though these words come from his/her mouth, religion preaches and recommends what s/he says. So the speaker and sometimes even the hearer hide themselves behind religion and the language of that religion to politely express and defend their views. In short, the language of religion is adopted as a euphemism to face-save.

4.1.5. Proverbs as Euphemisms: All cultures make use of proverbs employed not only to embellish, but also to gallantly say what cannot be explicitly said. The Songhai culture is full of proverbs. 'Zañay ga ganjihayla tee gandakarfu' (prolonged illness can transform a lion into a snake) is a polite euphemistic description of the state of the husband in the movie. The husband as 'ganjihayla' (a lion), affected by 'zañay' (prolonged illness) has become 'gandakarfu' (literally, a rope of the ground). Of course, 'gandakarfu' is not seen in this proverb as a dreadful snake that can kill, but as just a small reptile that cannot harm anyone.

Proverbs are sometimes used for their soft emotions. A euphemistic proverb like 'Hari kañ mun si kuuna' (do not cry over spilled milk) appears as a softer and polite way of saying 'Ay sii' (I refuse, it is all over), a roundabout way of telling the former suitor that as far as love is concerned, it is all over between them. Likewise, 'Kokor ka ñimsi se zoji baa fayyañ' (if we do not want to regret later, better be angry than divorce) is a further cover up language, a polite way to tell the suitor that he adopted the wrong strategy to give up the fight to get her as his wife. The message is that the suitor should have kept on fighting; and since he did not do so, and somebody else won the fight, it is all over. There is a psychological message lying behind the use of proverbs (and the likes). Users of proverbs imply that they are not the only ones to preach the way they do, that society also preaches and defends what they preach.

Conclusion

Euphemism is a linguistic device characteristic of most world languages. The Songhai language makes use of the strategy to show modesty, respect and politeness in communication and to face-save. The findings of this investigation have disclosed the existence of a variety of euphemisms in Songhai pertaining to marriage (and sex), fear, religion, and include special non-syntactic constructions and proverbs. One point bringing all these types of euphemisms together is the speaker-hearers' attempt to avoid face-threatening and to maintain face, and their desire to pursue communication. As a result, the use of euphemisms truly appears as an implicit communicative strategy adopted by speakers and hearers to smoothly carry out conversation on distasteful and unpleasant issues.

Undeniably, the use of euphemisms is a linguistic device the cultural contours of which dictate its significance. Euphemistic language use is guided by cultural perceptions about the world. What is linguistic taboo in one culture and consequently is euphemized may not be taboo in another culture and will therefore not be euphemized. Time, speaker-hearers and topics of discussion are the principal acting factors behind euphemism.

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"Yèrèdon" (self-knowledge) as an alternative to alien-indoctrination

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Résumé

Ceci est un bref aperçu de la problématique de l'acculturation au sein de l'Intelligentsia malienne, la crème de la crème des années soixante à nos jours. Cet article montre la responsabilité de la France dans sa détermination à maintenir l'« Assimilation » comme système de coopération, plutôt que le « Indirect Rule » britannique. Son but est d'endoctriner les leaders africains, à tel point que plaire à la France suzeraine est leur premier devoir au prix de sacrifier les intérêts de leur propre peuple. Une telle aliénation intellectuelle mérite d'être dénoncée pour que la seconde moitié du centenaire après les indépendances soit une période de récupération. Le franc CFA reste le symbole le plus frappant de l'emprise de la France sur ses anciennes colonies : l'Afrique francophone reste toujours piégée dans les dédales d'une monnaie soi-disant commune, synonyme de dénomination commune de soumission au Trésor Français. La plupart des jeunes - étudiants et diplômés - sont victimes de dilemme culturel dans la convergence entre tradition et modernité. Dans sa tentative de trouver une solution à cet égarement que Jacques Chevrier appelle « bâtardise culturelle », cet article pose comme hypothèse : si l'étudiant s'approprie les valeurs de sa culture, il sera inaccessible aux idées impérialistes préconçues. Dans l'accomplissement de cet objectif, l'article suggère une attitude positive des parents envers leurs us et coutumes, afin de la léguer à leurs enfants. Les valeurs traditionnelles doivent intégrer le programme scolaire en termes de contes, proverbes et chants. Les autorités maliennes doivent jouer un grand rôle de censure dans la dissémination de l'information. Les universitaires maliens doivent s'impliquer dans la préservation de l'identité nationale, en faisant la promotion de la culture malienne : « le morceau de bois a beau séjourner dans le fleuve, il flottera peut-être, mais il ne sera jamais caïman. »

Abstract

This is a brief outline of the issue of cultural disintegration among Malian intelligentsia, the crème de la crème of the 1960's to nowadays. It starts with the origins of French stranglehold which is based on "Assimilation" rather than the British "Indirect Rule". This is to indoctrinate new African leaders to the extent that their only aim is to please the coloniser to the extent to sacrifice their own people. Such an intellectual depression is worthy of denunciation so that the second half of the century after independences might emerge in a mood of real consciousness of African decision makers. The most striking evidence of the supremacy of France is the CFA franc: Francophone Africa is still entrapped in a so-called common currency, synonymous with subordination to the French Treasury. Most of Malian young administrators are taken in the trap of hybridism in converging tradition and modernity. In the attempt to find a solution to such cultural loss among African youth, this article suggests: If students are taught the values of their tradition, it will help them to avoid being indoctrinated by preconceived ideas. In the achievement of this objective, parents should have a positive behaviour towards their regional habits and customs, in order to hand it down to their children. Traditional values should integrate in school curricula in terms of stories, proverbs, and songs. Malian authorities should play an important role in the dissemination of information through mass media: in fact, most of Malian national TV programmes convey the image of the coloniser. Malian scholars are involved in the preservation of national identity by making it their duty to promote Malian culture. This task is a preliminary step to the nationalisation of Malian Education and the enhancement of the University curriculum designers' consciousness.