

Argumentative Euphemisms, Political Correctness and Relevance

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Abstract

The account presented in the thesis combines insights from relevance-theoretic (Sperber and Wilson 1995) and neo-Gricean (Levinson 2000) pragmatics in arguing that a specific euphemistic effect is derived whenever it is mutually manifest to participants of a communicative exchange that a speaker is trying to be indirect by avoiding some dispreferred saliently unexpressed alternative lexical unit(s). This effect is derived when the indirectness is not conventionally associated with the particular linguistic form-trigger relative to some context of use and, therefore, stands out as marked in discourse.

The central theoretical claim of the thesis is that the cognitive processing of utterances containing novel euphemistic/politically correct locutions involves meta-representations of saliently unexpressed dispreferred alternatives, as part of relevance-driven recognition of speaker intentions. It is argued that hearers are “invited” to infer the salient dispreferred alternatives in the process of deriving explicatures of utterances containing lexical units triggering euphemistic/politically correct interpretations.

In the course of time, such invited inferences can lead to semantic change by becoming routinized relative to some context of use and reanalyzed as the defeasible default meanings of these locutions, presumed in the absence of contextual assumptions to the contrary. This conventionalization process is responsible for euphemisms becoming “contaminated” with negative connotations associated with taboos, which leads to their recycling in the vernacular or ‘euphemism treadmill’. It also explains why political correctness is effective only when it is novel and still capable of bringing people’s unconscious biases to consciousness. The biases are, arguably, brought to consciousness by metarepresenting the salient dispreferred alternatives as part of comprehension of utterances containing PC locutions perceived to be marked in the given context.

It is suggested that the likelihood of the euphemism treadmill taking place is increased in cases of narrowing the lexicalized meaning of a concept to its taboo meaning, while it is less likely to happen in cases of conceptual broadening.

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Introduction

The thesis is intended as a contribution to the ongoing semantics/pragmatics interface debate. It pursues the general goal of attempting to ascertain what predictions pragmatic theories of communication can make in terms of the cognitive procedures brought to bear on the online processing of utterances containing lexical units, which trigger euphemistic/politically correct interpretations.

The **introductory** chapter presents arguments for choosing euphemisms and political correctness as the object of the thesis, explains the relevance of the topic in the general context of pragmatics research and stresses the importance of undertaking a pragmatic approach to its investigation.

Chapter 1 of the thesis reviews and critically assesses the main tenets of Gricean, relevance-theoretic and neo-Gricean pragmatics. It also reviews how various pragmatic theories deal with figurative language processing and what suggestions they make regarding the stages along which comprehension of what people intend to communicate when they speak figuratively takes place.

Chapter 2 dwells on such semiotic notions as synonymy, ancient fear-based and contemporary taboos, connotations and markedness as relevant for the analysis of euphemisms. It reviews the issue of how concepts are represented in human cognitive systems and examines various definitions and ways of formation of euphemisms presented in extant research literature on the topic.

Chapter 3 introduces the notion of political correctness (PC), reviews the history of the term and discusses various linguistic manifestations of this phenomenon. It analyzes why certain practices associated with political correctness are sometimes perceived negatively. I also look at instance of “mock-PC” and attempt to provide theoretical explanation of the principles along which they are coined.

Chapter 4 discusses functions of euphemisms/PC in various types of discourse. It considers the nature and types of speaker-hearer cooperation and, following Abrantes (2005), draws a distinction between conventionalized and transparent cooperative euphemisms, which are listed as such in dictionaries, and non-cooperative argumentative euphemisms.

Chapter 5 addresses the role of intentionality in assessing the x-phemistic value of utterances. It dwells on derogatory and appropriated uses of slurs and explains the notions of euphemistic dysphemisms and dysphemistic euphemisms. It also considers the

methodological issue of the possibility of distinguishing euphemisms from PC-inspired vocabulary.

Chapter 6 presents a discussion of some of the most influential theories of politeness and analyzes whether euphemisms and political correctness can be subsumed under a broader category of linguistic politeness.

Chapter 7 situates the PC-debate within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis and dwells on the ideological aspects as well as the manipulative potential of euphemistic/PC language.

Chapter 8 analyzes how utterances containing euphemisms/PC expressions are processed online from the Gricean, neo-Gricean and post-Gricean points of view. I examine the possibility of combining relevance-theoretic and GCI-theoretic inferential mechanics in an account of conventionalization of meaning.

Chapter 9 presents an account of semantic change, namely of the process known as ‘euphemism treadmill’ from the relevance-theoretic lexical-pragmatic perspective.

General conclusions and implications of this research are discussed in **the concluding chapter** of the thesis.

In a broad sense, the subject of this investigation is the lexical semantic relation of synonymy, which is the paradigmatic relation between linguistic units defined in terms of having the “sameness of sense” by Lyons (Lyons 2002: 469) or “sameness of meaning” by Palmer (1981: 88) and Cruse (Cruse 2004: 154). More specifically, the thesis focuses on how choices people make in using synonymous lexical units give rise to indirectness in discourse, a (slightly exaggerated) instantiation of which is illustrated by the following exchange from the TV show “The Big Bang Theory” (Season 5 Episode 10):

(1)

*Sheldon: **I believe I would like** to alter the paradigm of our relationship.*

Amy: I’m listening.

*Sheldon: With the understanding that nothing changes whatsoever, physical or otherwise, **I would not object to us no longer characterizing you as “not my girlfriend”**.*

Amy: Interesting, now try it without the quadruple negative.

*Sheldon: You’re being impossible (Amy leans over to another guy). Fine! Amy, **will you be my girlfriend?***

Amy: Yes.

As seen from the use of the indirect ‘hedged’ *I believe I would like to* and the multiple negatives in Sheldon’s second statement, which he resorts to for indirectness purposes in order to avoid uttering the straightforward *Will you be my girlfriend?*, in the course of communication speakers can face cognitive dissonance¹-inducing situations in which there is a need to choose between referring to something directly or relieving oneself of some responsibility by resorting to ‘off-record²’ communicative strategies and thereby sacrificing semantic clarity while counting on the hearers to draw inferences regarding the intended true meaning behind one’s words.

Speakers may resort to indirectness for argumentative purposes in various types of discourse and it is certainly no stranger to political speeches, as illustrated, for instance, by the following excerpt from the annual State of the Union address delivered in 2012 by the US President Barack Obama in which he declared:

(2)

*America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will **take no options off the table** to achieve that goal³.*

Compared to the blunt *we will consider declaring war on Iran*, the vague and very general expression *take no options off the table* is an example of how politicians resort to off-record communicative strategies in order to be able to plausibly deny having some definite informative intention and leave it up to their audience to guess or ‘*infer*’ the meaning behind the words uttered. Depending on the manner in which the informative intention made manifest by the very act of ostension is recognized and fulfilled (inferred), the interpretation of *take no options off the table* can be broadened to include such contextually relevant assumptions concerning possible actions against Iran as peaceful political talks, economic sanctions, UN resolutions *and* a military intervention/war by some addressees of the speech,

¹ According to Festinger (1957), “cognitive dissonance” is a state of tension that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, opinions) that are psychologically inconsistent. It produces mental discomfort, ranging from minor pangs to deep anguish; people don’t rest easy until they find a way to reduce it.

² Following (Gibbs 1999), an ‘off-record’ message is one where it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to what the speaker says. A speaker conveys a message ‘off-record’ when he or she can plausibly deny having that intention and can articulate a different intention that still reasonably fits with what was said.

³ Attested: www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2012/01/25/2012-state-union-address-enhanced-version#transcript

as well as narrowed to a carefully worded threat, by not explicitly ruling out that war is a possibility.

Example (2) illustrates how indirectness can be used intentionally and strategically with the purpose of inviting inferences based on what seems most relevant given the context of the produced utterances. According to Gibbs (1999: 167-168), the mechanism of inviting inferences lies at the core of a broad array of indirectness strategies, including giving hints, using innuendos, giving association cues, presupposing, resorting to understatements, overstatements or hyperboles, using tautologies, contradictions, being ironic, using metaphors, rhetorical questions, being vague and relying on listeners to infer different aspects of their communicative intentions, even in cases where speakers wish to avoid responsibility for the meanings that listeners understand.

The thesis focuses on an instantiation of such indirectness strategies, namely lexical units interpreted as ‘euphemistic’ (from Greek *eu*: ‘good’ or ‘auspicious’ and *pheme*: ‘speech’⁴) and politically correct. Speakers resort to such strategies driven by heterogeneous motivational factors ranging from superstitious belief in “word magic”, which proscribes mentioning direct nominations related to supernatural powers lest they be angered/summoned, to mitigation of acts, which can threaten hearer’s, speaker’s or some third party’s public (self)-image or ‘face’.

In the process of communication, speakers choose words and expressions from paradigmatic sets of available synonymous alternatives. Giving preference to some lexical units over the others serves as evidence of the desire to represent some state of affairs in a certain way. To illustrate this, let’s consider the following exchange from the “The Big Bang Theory” (Season 3 Episode 20) in which Sheldon is talking to Penny, who lives across the hall from him and who has just broken up with Sheldon’s roommate and best friend Leonard:

(3)

Sheldon: I was going to get my mail.

Penny: Okay. Are, are you hoping to get it telepathically?

*Sheldon: I think you mean ‘telekinetically’. And no, I just wasn’t sure of the proper protocol now that you and Leonard are no longer having **coitus**.*

*Penny: God, can we please just say **no longer seeing each other**?*

*Sheldon: Well, we could if it were true. But as you live in the same building, you see each other all the time. The variable which has changed is the **coitus**.*

⁴ For more on the etymology of the word euphemism see McArthur (1992: 387).

*Penny: Okay, here's the protocol, you and I are still friends, and you stop saying **coitus**.*

Sheldon: Good, good. I'm glad we're still friends.

Penny: Really?

Sheldon: Oh, yes. It was a lot of work to accommodate you in my life. I'd hate for that effort to have been in vain.

Penny: Right.

*Sheldon: Just to be clear do I have to stop saying **coitus** with everyone or just you?*

Penny: Everyone.

*Sheldon: Harsh terms. But all right, I'll just substitute **intercourse**.*

Penny: Great.

*Sheldon: Or **fornication**. Yeah. But that has judgmental overtones, so I'll hold that in reserve.*

Penny: So, how you been?

Sheldon: Well, my existence is a continuum, so I've been what I am at each point in the implied time period.

*Penny: You're just **coitusing** with me, aren't you?*

Sheldon: Bazinga.

In this dialogue the participants are each trying to communicate their preference of some synonymous lexical units over others *coitus* vs. *intercourse* vs. *fornication* and these preferences happen to be very individual. Penny suggests that Sheldon substitute the specific *coitus* with the more general *no longer seeing each other* but that, according to Sheldon, is not the truthful representation of the underlying reality as Penny and Leonard are neighbors and will indeed continue seeing each other. Sheldon insists that the sexual relationship part, namely the fact that two people engage in *coitus*, is the most important characteristic and salient feature of the dating 'scenario' rather than the other part of this scenario, i.e. *going out*, *meeting*, *seeing each other* or even *sleeping together*. Sheldon objects to the euphemistic strategy of metonymically replacing the most important characteristic or part of the dating scenario with the less important ones to represent the state of affairs as not truthful, while also considering that the more direct *fornication* might trigger axiologically unfavorable judgmental overtones. The use of *coitusing* instead of *fucking* in the last remark by Penny shows that such euphemisms themselves can be immediately 'appropriated' to assume all functions of the underlying dispreferred expression (with which it now shares all logical and

contextual implications) as well as to give rise to a humorous effect (Sheldon uses the word *bazinga* as an explicit reformulation marker indicating that the utterance preceding it is to be taken as a joke).

Speakers can attempt to replace the more straightforward representation of some state of affairs with some alternative indirect one for argumentative purposes in various types of discourse. In the following fictional example from the show “24” (Season 9 Episode 5), the White House Chief of Staff is (implicitly) insisting that the indirect *collateral damage* should be used instead of the straightforward ‘we had killed civilians’ in his conversation with the President of the United States, in an attempt to strategically distort the underlying reality. He subsequently realizes that the attempted manipulation has failed as his interlocutor is already fully aware of the true state of affairs, and replaces the indirect linguistic form (locution) with the more direct *civilian casualties*.

(4)

*President Heller: You didn't think that you could trust me with the truth? That if I knew that **we had killed civilians**, somehow I wouldn't lobby as hard as you thought!*

*Chief of Staff: I was protecting you. That's why you hired me. No military action is purely surgical! When a fight begins **collateral damage** is always a factor. But our US drone program lets us hit our enemies with the fewest **civilian casualties**.*

Outside of the sphere of politics, interlocutors often engage in negotiations regarding what the true representation of some state of affairs ought to be like in legal discourse, as illustrated by the following fictional courtroom exchange (from the show “Desperate Housewives” Season 2 Episode 19):

(5)

*Defense counsel: ...and that's when Mr. and Mrs. Solis, fearing for the welfare of this helpless child, **fled** the hospital.*

*Judge: You mean they **kidnapped** her.*

*Defense counsel: Well, technically, that's true, but, given the situation that led up to the **rescue**...*

*Judge: **Kidnapping**...*

Defense counsel: Your honor, yes

The importance of studying such off-record strategies and lexical units associated with their use stems from the fact that from the semiotic point of view the availability of multiple ways of referring to the same topic in discourse is indicative of potentially problematic,

conflictual or sensitive areas or as the author of “A Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk” H. Rawson puts it, they are “outward and visible signs of our inward anxieties, conflicts, fears, and shames. They are like radioactive isotopes. By tracing them, it is possible to see what has been (and is) going on in our language, our minds, and our culture” (Rawson 1981: 1). In similar claims Scott (1990) notes that euphemistic phrasing is “a nearly infallible sign that one has stumbled on a delicate subject” (Scott 1990: 53) and Murphy (1996: 16) compares euphemisms to white blood cells, in that their presence in discourse “might well be a sign of mild or serious pathology but it is also a sign that a natural defense mechanism has kicked in”.

Despite the ubiquity of euphemisms in everyday communication, which are “embedded so deeply in our language that few of us, even those who pride themselves on being plainspoken, ever get through a day without using them” (Rawson 1981: 1), relatively few inquiries have been made into their domain, compared to other areas of figurative use of language. Previous research includes accounts providing classifications of the ways in which euphemisms are formed (Warren 1992), tracing motivational factors for euphemistic use (Liszka 1990), diachronic inquiries into their history (Coleman 1992, Linfoot-Ham 2005), highlighting social and linguistic aspects of euphemisms (Katsev 1988), analyzing trends and stages of the development of euphemistic vocabulary (Enright 1985, Allan and Burridge 1991, Holder 2003, Allan and Burridge 2006) as well as studying euphemisms within the cognitive linguistics framework (Pfaff, Gibbs and Johnson 1997, Crespo Fernandez 2006a, 2006b, 2011).

Attempts of determining what constitutes euphemistic/politically correct communication in terms of analyzing semantic features of lexical units, representative of these constraints on verbal behavior, undertaken in previous studies on the topic, have led to proliferation of taxonomies aiming to provide an exhaustive picture of all possible ways in which the linguistic units underlying this type of communication are formed. Moreover, the semantic accounts fail to explain what happens in cognitive systems of addressees of such utterances in the process of their interpretation and how certain lexical units come to be labeled as euphemistic and politically correct.

The goal of this study is to show that pragmatics provides the tools necessary for a sub-personal-level explanatory account of how certain linguistic forms receive euphemistic and politically correct interpretation. I see the main advantage of undertaking such an analysis in that pragmatic research regards language-users as "rational actors who must behave in

certain ways if communication is to be possible at all [and considers] that the most basic principles of human communication hold at a high level of generality where they are unaffected by social and cultural differences” (Cameron 1998: 445).

The thesis focuses on lexical strategies, which reflect the choices individual speakers make rather than discursive indirectness. In addition to the lexical level, speakers may resort to such discursive indirectness strategies as speaking off-record, being vague, ambiguous, withholding information etc., which may not necessarily include euphemistic/PC *lexical* choices. For example, Trask and Stockwell (2007) quote Chilton in arguing that “the linguistic strategies that effect euphemism include not only lexical replacements but also omission, passivization and nominalization.” (Trask and Stockwell 2007: 89) An example of such non-lexically-based indirectness strategies is the use of agentless passive in *Mistakes have been made*, which speakers resort to in an attempt to diminish the level of their personal involvement/responsibility instead of using the direct *I made a mistake*. Indirectness can also be achieved by (manipulatively) constraining the effort/effect ratio of the cognitive contextual selection (see Maillat and Oswald 2011), for instance, when a parent, faced with the need to communicate the ‘bad news’ about the pet’s demise to a child, attempts to ‘cushion the blow’ by uttering: *Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time, a car ran over your dog this morning*, in the hope that it will be ‘shallow-processed’ (see section 7.3 of the thesis) by the child.

Most of the examples of euphemistic and politically correct lexical units analyzed in the thesis were selected from the current English-speaking media discourse. Some are construed and introspective, following the tradition adopted in pragmatics research. In analyzing the language, which gives rise to euphemistic and politically correct interpretations, I often turn to political discourse in which such lexical replacements are ubiquitous, as illustrated, for instance, by a memo from the US office of management and budget to the Pentagon instructing the speech writers there that “this administration prefers to avoid using the term *Long War* or *Global War on Terror*. Please use *Overseas Contingency Operation*”⁵, with a subsequent transformation of *war spending* into *overseas contingencies operations budget* at Pentagon press-conferences.

I begin by presenting a general overview of how research in the field of pragmatics addresses the fact that the semantic meaning encoded in sentences underdetermines what speakers uttering these sentence on particular occasions communicate.

⁵Attested example from the Daily Show with Jon Stewart 31.03.09

Chapter 1. Pragmatics of verbal communication

This chapter introduces theoretical ideas from the field of pragmatics⁶ in order to lay the groundwork for the ensuing discussion of the pragmatics of indirectness, namely, the language interpreted as euphemistic and politically correct, in subsequent chapters. It reviews and critically assesses the main tenets of Gricean, post-Gricean and neo-Gricean theories of communication and shows how these frameworks treat the fundamental issue of pragmatics: bridging the gap between the meaning encoded in sentences by semantics and the meaning actually communicated by speakers uttering these sentences on particular occasions, known as “the underdeterminacy thesis”.

1.1 The code model and Gricean pragmatics

This section introduces the groundbreaking ideas of H.P. Grice, which gave an impetus to the until then insignificant research agenda of pragmatics.

Prior to Grice’s ([1967] 1989) work, the communication process was regarded as consisting in a speaker encoding a thought into a sentence of a language (seen as a code that pairs phonetic and semantic representations of sentences) and a hearer decoding the uttered sentence into an identical ‘reduplicated’ thought (see Shannon and Weaver 1949; Peirce 1955; Jakobson 1960; Saussure 1974). This code-model view of communication was based on the so-called “conduit metaphor”, as illustrated by such notions as “putting one’s thoughts into words”, “getting one’s ideas across”, “putting one’s thoughts down on paper” (see Sperber and Wilson 1995: 1).

On the code-model view of the process of linguistic communication, individuals who share a linguistic code will communicate successfully provided there are no external distortions in the transmission of the message. Such a view may have accurately represented some physical aspect of communication processes, however, it was unable to explain its psychological dimensions, namely, the importance of inference at all levels of comprehension, whereby what is communicated is something other than what is encoded in the message.

⁶ In the parlance of the so-called “continental” tradition the term ‘pragmatics’ is used broadly to refer to social aspects of language studied by sociolinguists and discourse analysts. In this thesis, following the Anglo-American tradition (see Levinson 1983: ix), by ‘pragmatic approach’ I mean the study of language in use and more specifically research paradigms that deal with the processes, principles and constraints of online utterance interpretation.

It was Grice's approach to communication that departed from the code-based view in suggesting that intentional communicative behavior should be regarded as producing an 'effect', which the audience infers following a reasoning process, which involves hypothesis formation and evaluation in search for the speaker-intended meaning. In his discussion of non-natural aspects of meaning (meaning-nn) Grice ([1967] 1989) drew a distinction between *what is said* by a speaker in uttering something and what he/she thereby *implicates* (its 'implicature'). He viewed what is said by a sentence as intended by the speaker and determined by the conventional linguistic meaning along with such contextual factors as reference assignment, resolutions of indexicals and disambiguation (Grice 1989: 89).

Grice distinguished between conventional and conversational (particularized and generalized) implicatures. Regarding conventional implicatures, Grice argued that in some cases the conventional meaning of the words used (e.g. 'but', 'therefore') will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said (see Grice [1967] 1989). Unlike conventional implicatures, automatically triggered by the conventional meaning of a specific word, conversational implicatures are triggered by "certain general features of discourse" (Grice [1967] 1989). These features include the assumption of speaker's rationality and that of linguistic exchanges being governed by the Cooperative Principle of conversation. Particularized conversational implicatures (PCIs) require special features of the context to be derived, while generalized conversational implicatures (GCIs) are triggered in the Gricean framework by the use of a certain form of words in an utterance in the absence of special circumstances. Both types of conversational implicatures (PCIs and GCIs) are characterized by some degree of indeterminateness, because a conversational implicature is, by definition, defeasible, non-detachable, calculable and nonconventional (see Bach 2006; Levinson 1983).

The Cooperative Principle (CP) is formulated as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1967/1989: 26). Conversational (sub)maxims of the CP were designed to explain what makes a particular hypothesis about the intended interpretation the best candidate by imposing particular constraints on the interpretation process:

Maxims of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxims of Quality: Try to make your contribution on that is true.

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxims of Relation: Be relevant.

Maxims of Manner: Be perspicuous.

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Be orderly.

(Grice 1967/1989: 26-27).

According to Grice, a speaker S conversationally implicates that Q by saying that P only if:

(i) S is presumed to be following the conversational maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle;

(ii) the supposition that S is aware that (or thinks that) Q is required to make S's saying or making as if to say P consistent with this presumption;

(iii) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (ii) is required. (Grice 1989: 30-31)

In attempting to communicate something indirectly, speakers may fail to observe the CP and its maxims in several ways:

- by opting out of the CP and its maxims, thereby indicating their unwillingness to cooperate;
- by intentionally violating a maxim;
- by flouting or exploiting a maxim while being presumed to be cooperating by hearers;

Such non-observance of the CP and its maxim is, according to Grice (1967/1989), responsible for the generation of conversational implicatures.

Gricean assumption of the cooperative nature of communication is shared by Searle, who noted that even human conflict, in most of its forms, requires cooperation, and even in a quarrel there is a common purpose of exchanging information (Searle 1998:120). The cooperative nature of communication advocated by Grice and Searle, is disputed, however, in other pragmatics research paradigms. Relevance-theorists (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 162), for instance, argue that cooperation is not automatically expected of communicators (see

section 1.2 of the thesis). Similarly, Taillard (2004) dismisses the Gricean approach to cooperation by arguing that "... as communicators, we behave in a way that is most advantageous to ourselves and, at times, this goal is not accomplished by providing truthful testimony, but rather by affecting the audience's attitudes to our own benefit. (This, by the way, is the main reason why a theory of communication cannot be based on a principle of cooperation)" Taillard (2004: 254-255).

In Grice's seminal works on inferential communication, properly inferential pragmatic processes were seen as only responsible for the derivation of implicatures. In recent years, however, there has been a growing consensus among 'post-Gricean' theorists that in addition to implicit meanings, the sentence meaning also underdetermines the *explicit* content of an utterance or 'what is said' (Sperber and Wilson 1995; Récanati 2004; Carston 2002a). According to this view, the meaning of an utterance remains underdetermined even after such processes, as reference assignment, resolution of indexicals and disambiguation, regarded in Gricean framework as contributing to what is said, have taken place, and often hearers need to enrich an utterance further in order to get to the level of a complete truth-evaluable proposition that can be assumed to be communicated (see Récanati 1989; Sperber and Wilson 1995; Carston 2002a).

I now turn to presenting the main tenets and key notions of such a post-Gricean theory, namely, the cognitive-pragmatic theory of communication, known as Relevance Theory.

1.2 Relevance-theoretic pragmatics

1.2.1 Theory of mind and mutual manifestness

The cognitive pragmatic account of ostensive communication known as Relevance Theory (RT) (Sperber and Wilson 1995), considers search for relevance to be the mechanism responsible for pragmatic enrichment of semantically underspecified content. According to RT, hearers arrive at the speaker-intended meanings guided by the relevance-seeking nature of human cognition and the subconscious knowledge that every act of ostensive communication conveys the presumption of its optimal relevance.

Sperber and Wilson (1996) base their theory on an observation that at any given moment in one's cognitive life, there is a wide range of new information being monitored in the environment, and there is an even wider range of information in memory, bits of which might be activated and would provide a context in which to process the information from the environment or other pieces of information from memory. Code-based approaches to communication fail to account for the gap between sentence meaning and speaker meaning and cannot explain how the hearer selects the intended context in the process of interpretation. Relevance Theory sheds light on the mechanisms underlying the selection of information during online processing of utterances where the principle of relevance serves as a constraint on the selection of subsets of information to be used for the interpretation on a particular occasion and indicate when such processing is to stop.

Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1995) develops one of Grice's central claims, that an essential feature of human communication is the expression and recognition of intentions, while rejecting Gricean view of the process of communication as cooperative and governed by maxims. Instead RT proposes that hearers always interpret utterances in terms of relevance, which is a property carried by ostensively produced utterances.

Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue that during the course of evolution people started allocating their cognitive processing capabilities only to optimally relevant information which was most likely to improve their knowledge of the world. Having evolved towards increasing cognitive efficiency, human cognition is now geared to the maximization of relevance, i.e. to striking the best balance between costs and effects and so to achieving the greatest cognitive effects for the least processing effort:

“As a result of constant selection pressure towards increasing efficiency, the human cognitive system has developed in such a way that our perceptual mechanisms tend

automatically to pick out potentially relevant stimuli, our memory retrieval mechanisms tend automatically to activate potentially relevant assumptions, and our inferential mechanisms tend spontaneously to process them in the most productive way” (Wilson and Sperber 2002a: 254).

Sperber and Wilson (1995) have argued that, given that language contains context-sensitive elements such as indexicals and ambiguity, for the code model of communication to work, the context used by the hearer in understanding an utterance should always be identical to the one envisaged by the speaker. In other words, on the code model view of communication there must be some mutual knowledge or common ground between interlocutors for communication to succeed. On the RT view, the mutual knowledge hypothesis is intuitively incorrect, given our everyday experience with communication, and leads to infinite regress (I know that you know that I know that you know, *ad infinitum*, which Sperber and Wilson find psychologically implausible (see Sperber and Wilson 1995).

The ‘mutual knowledge paradox’ was first discussed by Lewis (2002 [1969]) and Schiffer (1972), and various solutions have been proposed to it, in particular by Bach and Harnish (1979), and Clark (1992, 1996). RT replaces the traditional pragmatic notion of mutual knowledge with a weaker notion of ‘*mutual manifestness*⁷’ where a fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39). Unlike knowledge, which is binary in the sense that one either knows something or one does not, the degree of manifestness of an assumption can vary from being weakly manifest to being strongly manifest. Sperber and Wilson explain the notion of weak manifestness by showing that it includes those facts which can be deduced from existing knowledge, but which have never come to our level of conscious awareness, e.g. we know in a weak sense that Noam Chomsky and Julius Caesar never had breakfast together (see Sperber and Wilson 1995: 40).

A set of facts manifest to an individual at a given time is known as a *cognitive environment* (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39). In general, within the cognitive framework of RT, the goal of communication is not seen as a direct modification of thoughts, but rather as increasing the mutual manifestness of cognitive environments. The shared sets of contextually

⁷ An assumption is mutually manifest if not only this assumption is manifest to the individual, but also if it is manifest to this individual that the assumption is manifest to another individual as well (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 41-42).

available assumptions that the speaker and the hearer are capable of sharing and using in the process of interpretation to achieve an optimal balance between cognitive effects and processing effort, are referred to in RT as a *mutual cognitive environment* (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Blakemore 1992).

The construction of assumptions about someone else's cognitive environments is referred to in psychology as *theory of mind* or *mind-reading*⁸. Inferential communication draws on this biologically-evolved ability of humans to generate hypotheses based on the evidence provided regarding the mental state of the speaker. The ability to attribute underlying beliefs, intentions and desires to others in terms of conceptual representations that humans are capable of forming is referred to as forming '*metarepresentations*' by Sperber (1994, 2000). It is regarded as a key notion in identifying the content of speaker meaning and constitutes the basis of a specialized pragmatics module (for discussion, see Maruenda Bataller 2002).

⁸ Issue 17(1-2) of "Mind and Language" provides developmental and neuropsychological evidence to support the existence of a link between mind-reading and communication.

1.2.2 The relevance-seeking processing model

In Relevance Theory, human communication is regarded, contrary to the view stemming from the code model of communication, as bearing merely some degree of resemblance between the communicator's and the audience's thoughts (Sperber 1996: 83). While acknowledging the proper place of decoding as carried out by a cognitive faculty known as the 'linguistic module', RT highlights the important role played by inferential processes that take place during the derivation of meaning from linguistic structures, considering such variables as context and intentionality.

RT regards the speaker as a sender of ostensive stimuli, which serve as evidence of her *informative intention*: to 'make manifest' (or more manifest) to the audience a set of assumptions **I** by sending the stimuli (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 63), and, in so doing, intend the audience to arrive at certain conclusions. This set of assumptions can be communicated explicitly or implicitly as well as strongly and weakly depending on the degree of indeterminacy introduced by the inferential aspect of comprehension (see Wilson and Sperber 2002b). The manner in which the assumptions are communicated (weakly or strongly) demonstrates the extent to which the speaker is committed to having the hearer recognize these meanings. The speaker's intention to communicate to the audience that she has the informative intention is referred to in RT as the *communicative intention* (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 61). In addition to the two basic intentions, there are various other intentions, which, according to Taillard (2002: 192), are part of a highly organized structure of plans and intentions that constitutes much more than just the general context in which communication is produced and understood.

At the core of RT lies a definition of relevance as a property of inputs to cognitive processes and two principles, which guide hearers towards the speaker-intended interpretation:

(1) the *Cognitive Principle of Relevance*, according to which, human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance and

(2) the *Communicative Principle of Relevance*, according to which every act of ostensive communication automatically carries a presumption of its own optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260).

Regarding the nature of these principles, Sperber and Wilson explain that they apply both to explicit and implicit communication. Sperber and Wilson (1987) explain that hearers do not need to know of relevance or the two principles of relevance to communicate "any

more than they need to know the principles of genetics to reproduce” (Sperber & Wilson 1987: 704).

The *presumption of optimal relevance*, which guides hearers in their search for the possible relevant interpretation of the speaker-intended meaning, runs as follows:

(a) the ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee’s effort⁹ to process it and

(b) the ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator’s abilities and preferences (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 270).

RT views ostensive utterances as achieving relevance by means of conveying information, which produces contextual effects¹⁰ in cognitive systems of their addressees. These effects may be of three kinds: strengthening of previously held assumptions, contradiction and elimination of previously held assumptions and contextual implications, which arise only as a result of combining new information with previously held assumptions. The relevance of an input is not only proportional to the number and quality of the *cognitive effects* that can be derived from the interaction of the input and some context. In addition to cognitive effects relevance is defined in terms of the *cognitive effort* it takes to process the input. The relevance of incurred cognitive effects is inversely proportionate to the amount of cognitive effort applied to the processing of the stimulus – the more cognitive effort the processing requires, the less relevant the stimulus will be to the addressee.

According to Wilson and Sperber (2002a), the Communicative Principle of Relevance and the definition of optimal relevance suggest a practical procedure for constructing a hypothesis about the speaker’s meaning. The hearer should take the linguistically encoded sentence meaning; following a path of least effort, he should enrich it at the explicit level and complement it at the implicit level until the resulting interpretation meets his expectation of relevance:

Relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure

⁹ Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue that what controls processing effort is not the striving toward the preferred goal, but reaching an acceptable goal while avoiding a dispreferred one.

¹⁰ Relevance varies between different persons and not just between different contexts. In the postface of Sperber and Wilson (1995) the following adjustment of terminology is suggested: “Contextual effects in an individual are *cognitive effects* ... They are changes in the individual’s beliefs ... Let us first define a *cognitive effect* as a contextual effect occurring in a cognitive system (e.g. an individual), and a *positive cognitive effect* as a cognitive effect that contributes positively to the fulfilment of cognitive functions or goals” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 265).

- a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.
- b. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied

The relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure applies in the same way at both explicit and implicit levels and the overall task is broken down into a number of sub-tasks:

Sub-tasks in the overall comprehension process

- a. Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content (in relevance-theoretic terms, EXPLICATURES) via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes.
- b. Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions (in relevance-theoretic terms, IMPLICATED PREMISES).
- c. Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications (in relevance-theoretic terms, IMPLICATED CONCLUSIONS)

These sub-tasks are not sequentially ordered but take place in parallel (see Wilson and Sperber 2002a: 261). The Gricean assumption that all pragmatically-derived (maxim-dependent) meaning constitutes a conversational implicature is dropped in RT, since one and the same pragmatic principle is responsible for both all cases of conversational implicature and all pragmatic contributions to truth-conditional content.

The Gricean assumption that ‘what is said’ is determined prior to the derivation of conversational implicatures, is also relaxed and the two levels of communicated content are taken to be derived in parallel via a mechanism of ‘mutual adjustment’ in search for relevance, so that, for instance, an interpretive hypothesis about an implicature might lead, through a step of backwards inference, to a particular adjustment of explicit content (see Carston 2002a for a discussion).

A comprehension procedure based on the maximization of cognitive efficiency allows for such mutual adjustment of the explicit and the implicit. The procedure is divided into several stages. During the initial stage (*semantic decoding*) an abstract sub-propositional logical form¹¹ of the utterance is derived as an output of linguistic processing that takes place in the language module. This logical form or ‘blueprint’ is subsequently developed via

¹¹ The logical form (LF) consists of the logical properties of a representation: “a well-formed formula, a structured set of constituents which undergoes formal logical operations determined by its structure” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 73).

inferential enrichment (*pragmatics*) into a complete propositional form, which is capable of being evaluated as true or false. Analogously to the term *implicature* coined by Grice, Sperber and Wilson call a fully propositional form an *explicature* if it is mutually manifestly intended to be conveyed by the speaker and if it is a development of the linguistically encoded logical form of the utterance (Carston 2002a: 124). Unlike implicatures, which are wholly inferred by identifying implicit premises and conclusions, which yield an overall interpretation that is relevant in the expected occasion-specific way, in RT, explicatures are the product of two different processes taking place in utterance interpretation: semantic decoding and pragmatic inferencing, which come from two different sources, respectively the linguistic forms used and the context. The reliance on the two sources distinguishes the RT explicatures from the Gricean notion of semantically determined ‘what is said’.

A hypothesis about an implicature can both precede and shape a hypothesis about an explicature:

“<...> comprehension is an online process, and hypotheses about explicatures, implicated premises, and implicated conclusions are developed in parallel against a background of expectations which may be revised or elaborated as the utterance unfolds” Wilson and Sperber (2004: 615).

Saussure (2007a) points out that research literature tends to reject more and more the classical idea that the separation between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implicated’ entails a timeline staging:

“In fact, it may well be the case that we start betting on implicatures as soon as i) we have available information on the propositional content at the level of explicatures, and ii) an implicit meaning is more obviously intended <...> When all necessary representations (logical-syntactic, semantic, pragmatic) make sense together, that is, conform or are congruent with one another, then the hearer considers that the intended meaning is found – provided there is some relevance in that meaning, that is, provided that the effort of processing information was compensated by sufficient cognitive effect (such as new information, changes in the presupposed assumptions, etc.).” (Saussure 2007a: 186).

In addition to the pragmatic processes, which Grice envisaged as responsible for the derivation of what is said, i.e. disambiguation, reference assignment and resolution of the indexicals etc., the RT notion of explicature includes other types of pragmatic enrichment,

notably lexical-pragmatic processes of broadening and narrowing, to the discussion of which I return in chapter 9 of the thesis.

Sperber and Wilson have extended the notion of explicit content to include the so-called *higher-level explicatures* or assumptions derived by developing the semantic representation of an utterance so that an explicature is recovered by (optionally) embedding it under a propositional attitude, speech act description or in general, any assumption schema typically expressing an attitude toward it (Sperber and Wilson 1993; 1995). Unlike explicatures, which are “the proposition expressed”, higher-level explicatures are linguistically communicated (i.e. they are a further development of the logical form of an utterance) but “are not normally seen as contributing to the truth conditions of the associated utterance” (Wilson and Sperber 1993: 6).

1.2.3 The RT notion of context

The dynamic cognitive view of context assumed by RT views it not as simply the preceding linguistic text, or the static environment in which the utterance takes place, but as a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world:

“It is these assumptions, of course rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances; expectations about the future, scientific hypothesis, or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 15-16).

The subsets of information in the form of mental representations/assumptions constituting the cognitive context are often viewed as stored in an organized way, for example, as cultural information or cultural *metarepresentations* (Sperber 1996), or grouped in different types of *frames* (alternatively referred to as scenarios, schemata, scripts, Idealized Cognitive Models in other research paradigms¹²), which capture different aspects of reality, experience, relations etc., and are used for interpretation of utterances in a contextually relevant manner as *the search for the interpretation on which an utterance will be most relevant involves a search for the context which will make this interpretation possible* (Sperber and Wilson 1982: 76).

Since selection of context can only be made out of the set of assumptions manifest to the speaker/hearer, the RT notion of context is much more dynamic and fluid than views, which treat context as external and equal to physical environment plus social setting, in the sense that assumptions become more or less manifest with every utterance in an exchange. Constitutive elements of cognitive context in a relevance-theoretic frame of reference are mental representations, propositions, contextual assumptions, which may vary in strength.

The processing of new information therefore relies on “old information” in an inferential model of communication in the following ways: “As a discourse proceeds, the

¹² Working within the RT framework, in his analysis of jokes, Yus (2013) proposes that a unifying term ‘make-sense frame’ be used to refer to the organized sets of assumptions used as a cognitive context for interpretation of utterances. This is suggested, as Padilla Cruz (2012) notes, with the purpose of overcoming the existing overlapping between terms like ‘frame’, ‘schema’ and ‘script, as the term ‘make-sense frame’ includes all sorts of encyclopedic information, e.g. related to specific terms (word-associated schemas), actions (sequence-associated scripts) and situations (situation-associated frames) (see Padilla Cruz 2012).

hearer retrieves or constructs and then processes a number of assumptions. These form a gradually changing background against which new information is processed” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 118). This activation of old information reinforces its salience on hearers’ minds, makes it more accessible in a more direct, less effort requiring manner. Selection of a context will be affected by the twin aims of minimizing processing effort and maximizing contextual effect (see Blass 1990: 53).

Speakers can deliberately or accidentally design their utterance so that sufficient relevance is not immediately achieved. In such cases, the hearer has to extend the context by accessing memories of earlier discourse or preceding deductions, by accessing encyclopedic information attached to concepts or by incorporating information received from sense perception (Sperber and Wilson 1995). The type of discourse or genre information may influence a hearer’s willingness to extend the context.

1.2.4 Descriptive and interpretive use

Sperber and Wilson (1995) claim that the relationship between an utterance and a speaker's thought is always one of interpretive resemblance between the propositional forms of the utterance and the thought. Consequently, in interpreting an utterance the hearer makes interpretive assumptions about the speaker's informative intention. In line with the nowadays uncontroversial rejection of a maxim of truthfulness, an utterance (including its possible implicatures) need not be completely identical with the speaker's thought (see Wilson and Sperber 2004) as hearers don't assume that the speaker's utterance is literal, they only assume that it is optimally relevant.

Relevance Theory draws a distinction between representations with propositional form (e.g. utterances) used *descriptively* to represent some state of affairs in virtue of the propositional form being true of that state of affairs and representations used to represent some other representation, which also has a propositional form — a thought, for instance — in virtue of a resemblance between the two propositional forms. In other words, in the latter case, the first representation can be used *interpretively* as an interpretation of the second one (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 228–229). If an utterance is used interpretively it doesn't describe a state of affairs in the world but rather represents another representation with a similar content.

Since RT views utterances as bearing interpretive resemblance to thoughts they are used to express, on RT view any utterance involves two levels of representation: it interpretively resembles a thought of the speaker, which itself descriptively represents some state of affairs, or interpretively represents some further representation (Sperber and Wilson 1987: 707). The interpretive resemblance of thoughts is a *first-order interpretation*, which does not amount to the RT notion of interpretive use. Metarepresentational use involves actually a *second-order interpretation* where the speaker's thought is itself used to metarepresent another thought or utterance which it resembles in content (interpretive use) (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 224–31) or in form (metalinguistic use) (see Noh 2000: 74).

The presence of metarepresentational use can be indicated overtly, e.g. by the use of metalinguistic negation or covertly when the objection is stated without the explicit use of negation as in the following example:

(6)

Russia has elected its first black official. Shame on you Russia, they prefer to be called 'African-Americans' (from "The Colbert Report" 26.07.2010).

Metalinguistic use standardly involves the 'contradiction' intonation contour (a final rise within the negative clause), followed by a correction clause, and contrastive stress on the offending item and its replacement (Horn 1989: 374). Among other properties of metalinguistic use Carston names their use as a rejoinder to an utterance of the corresponding affirmative; they are garden-path utterances, requiring double processing (pragmatic reanalysis) in order to be correctly understood (Carston 1996).

An utterance or part of an utterance can be used to metarepresent another representation, public, mental/private (unspoken thoughts, assumptions, hopes, etc.) or abstract. When a representation reports what someone else has said or thought and expresses an attitude to it, Sperber and Wilson (1995) refer to it as '*echoic*'. Echoic utterances achieve relevance mainly by *conveying the speaker's attitude to an attributed utterance or thought* (Wilson 2000: 432). The thought being echoed may not have been expressed in an utterance; it may not be attributable to any specific person, but merely to a type of person, or people in general; it may be merely a cultural aspiration or norm (Wilson and Sperber 1992: 60) as well as a thought or an utterance speaker attributes to herself at a time different from the time of utterance (Curcó 2000: 261-262).

In echoic utterances, attitudinal content has priority over the informative one. Here, the recognition of the speaker's attitude is necessary for the recovery of the intended effect. Standards or rules of behavior, for instance, are culturally defined, commonly known and frequently invoked. They are thus always available for echoic mention. It's always worth mentioning when something has fallen short of the norm (Sperber and Wilson 1981).

Wilson and Sperber (2012) highlight the fact that: "Norms, in the sense of socially shared ideas about how things should be, are always available to be ironically echoed when they are not satisfied. People should be polite, smart, handsome, actions should achieve their goal, the weather should be good, the prices should be low, and so on. So, when these norms are not satisfied, utterances such as 'She is so polite!', 'That was smart!', 'What a handsome man!', 'Well done!', 'Nice weather!' 'This is cheap!' and so on are readily understood as ironical because they echo a norm-based expectation that should have been met" Wilson and Sperber (2012: 142).

When it is a case of echoing an utterance there is a range of properties in addition to semantic or conceptual content that might be the target of the echo: linguistic factors such as phonetic, grammatical or lexical properties, aspects of dialect, register or style, and paralinguistic features such as tone of voice, pitch or other gestures, audible or visible.

Carston (1996) illustrates the echoic use with the following example:

(7)

We didn't see the hippopotamuses.

a. We saw the rhinoceroses.

b. We saw the hippopotami.

Carston (1996: 321) explains that in the example an objection is communicated to some property of the representation falling within the scope of the negation, some property other than its truth-conditional semantic content, in this case the particular manifestation of the plural morphology of the word 'hippopotamus'. The pronunciation of a word can also be objected to by the use of negation as in: "We don't eat tom[a:t{uz}] here, we eat tom[eiD{uz}]" (Carston 1996: 322).

Interpretive uses of language require a higher order of metarepresentational ability than descriptive uses. The speaker gives some indication of his/her attitude to the attributed utterance, thought or the opinion being echoed and his/her utterance achieves part of its relevance thereby. The metarepresentational ability allows hearers to identify the source of the opinion echoed, either an utterance or thought, and to recognize the speaker's attitude, which can be expressed overtly or left for the hearer to infer. Thus the relevance of interpretively used utterances depends to a large extent on the identification of the type of speaker's attitude (e.g. endorsing, questioning, dissociative etc.) to the original thought or utterance being metarepresented (see Noh 2000: 92).

1.2.5 The limitations of RT analysis

RT has often been accused by alternative pragmatic theories of human communication of being an entirely hearer-oriented account which does not address the question of how and why the speaker, given what she wants to convey, utters what she utters (cf. Horn 2005: 194 and other ‘neo-Gricean’ researchers e.g. Saul 2002).

One of the most serious charges against the adequacy of RT as an explanatory theory of communication has been the claim that RT is asocial. For example, Mey and Talbott (Mey 1993, Mey and Talbot 1988, Talbot 1993) argue that a cognitively grounded theory of utterance interpretation is “disconnected from everyday communication and its problems” as people are “social beings” who interact in “pre-existing [socially determined] conditions” (Mey 1993: 82).

Mey (1993) has argued that Relevance Theory pays no attention to the sociocultural dimensions of language use. However, researchers working within the framework of RT have shown that the theory pays as much attention to sociocultural dimensions as speakers and hearers do, since communication participants notice and store any and all relevant information about others as all sorts of assumptions, which will be brought to bear on the process of communication in the form of cognitive context in which to process utterances, as discussed in section 1.2.3.

RT does not treat the three tasks, which the mind had to accomplish in the process of communication, listed by Brown and Yule (1983: 225), quoted in LoCastro (2003): computing the communicative function of the utterance, incorporating sociocultural knowledge and determining inferences, as being different from each other in terms of information processing. Therefore, sociocultural information is not regarded in RT as different from any other type of cognitively processed information.

While early discussions of RT indeed tended to focus on the informational aspects over the social aspects of communication to the extent that some critics accused Sperber and Wilson of only seeing humans as information processors and not as social beings (Talbot 1993), subsequent research has found the theory to be compatible with such sociologically motivated aspects of language as phatic communication (Nicolle and Clark 1998, Žegarac 1998, Padilla Cruz 2005a, 2007b), politeness (Escandell Vidal 1998, Jary 1998, Padilla Cruz 2007a), insults (Mateo and Yus 2000, 2013) and compliments (Padilla Cruz 2005b). The work of these researchers provided interesting insights into how the ostensive inferential mechanisms and the principle of relevance account for the non-explicit communication of

knowledge about social relationships and the negotiation of social issues such as power and/or politeness.

Escandell-Vidal (1998), for instance, approaches communication of social information within the RT from the perspective of expected levels of politeness where impolite verbal behavior is inferred as abnormal, while the polite behavior is anticipated and hence not processed. Escandell-Vidal's insight that certain expressions "will contain a characterization both of the expression and of the conditions under which it will be appropriate" paves the way for an account of how information about appropriate social conditions is handled within RT with regard to the notion of 'markedness' to the discussion of which I will turn in chapter 8.

Generally speaking, RT regards the nature of linguistic underdeterminacy to be a matter of effort-saving convenience for the speaker (Carston 2002a), where a speaker, in order to save herself the effort of having to express a long, complex sentence, can choose to use a sentence which does not fully encode her intended meaning, and rely on the hearer using his pragmatic inferential capacity to turn it into a fully propositional representation. This view converges with Levinson's (2000) observation that human speech encoding is relatively slow, the actual process of phonetic articulation is a bottleneck in a system that can otherwise run about four times faster, and speakers are constantly trying to find economical ways for conveying large chunks of information – invoking specific ideas in the hearer, knowing that the hearer has exactly this expectation.

Apart from treating the production of utterances in terms of effort-saving convenience, RT does not specify what principles guide speakers in choosing the right linguistic form to suggest a specific interpretation to the hearer, and treats interpretation of all utterances as entirely context- and speaker intention-specific. Taking such a radical contextualist stance to meaning renders accounting for the conventionalization of meanings, which come to be associated with lexical units, rather problematic. In order to rectify this situation, the thesis attempts to combine tools offered by Levinson's neo-Gricean theory with relevance-theoretic pragmatics in an account of the conventionalization of lexical units interpreted as euphemistic/PC.

Unlike RT, in his theory of Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCIs), Levinson (2000) pays special attention to the fact that both the content of the utterance and its metalinguistic properties (its form) can be and are used to carry the message. In his framework, an overview of which is presented in the following section, the metalinguistic

scrutiny by the addressee of utterance form, including the consideration of salient alternatives, is used to amplify the content of utterances.

1.3 Presumptive vs. speaker-intended meanings

In order to be able to account for the fact that sometimes meanings are presumed to be the ‘default’ meanings of certain linguistic forms, Levinson (2000) argues for the need of distinguishing among the following layers of meaning: sentence-meaning, utterance-type meaning and utterance-token meaning:

“According to the standard line (more often presupposed than justified) there are just two levels to a theory of communication: a level of sentence-meaning (to be explicated by the theory of grammar in the large sense) and a level of speaker-meaning (to be explicated by a theory of pragmatics, perhaps centrally employing Grice’s notion of meaningnn)... Speaker-meaning, or utterance-token-meaning, will be a matter of the actual nonce or once-off inferences made in actual contexts by actual recipients with all of their rich particularities. This view, although parsimonious, is surely inadequate, indeed potentially pernicious, because it underestimates the regularity, recurrence, and systematicity of many kinds of pragmatic inferences. What it omits is a third layer <...> of systematic pragmatic inference based not on direct computations about speaker-intentions but rather on general expectations about how language is normally used” (Levinson 2000 : 22).

The third layer of ‘utterance-token’ meanings involves conventions of use, in virtue of which certain linguistic forms come to be defeasibly associated with certain meanings.

Levinson (2000) argues for the existence of three (Q, I, M) principles or inferential heuristics which have developed as “ways of overcoming the constraints of the narrow bandwidth of human speech” (Levinson 2000: 169), responsible for the generation of such utterance-token meanings or ‘Generalized Conversational Implicatures’. The GCI-inducing principles, which bear relationship with three of Grice’s maxims of conversation, are:

The Q(uality) Heuristic – “For the relevant salient alternates, what isn’t said, is not the case”, corresponding to Grice’s first Maxim of Quantity - Make your contribution as informative as is required.

The standard Q-implicature is that uttering the weaker term implicates that the stronger term does not apply, e.g. *some* implicates *not all*.

The I(nformativeness) Heuristic – “What is expressed simply is stereotypically exemplified”, related to Grice’s second Maxim of Quantity - Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Informativeness implicatures refer to the tendency to construct maximally informative, often stereotypical interpretations (e.g. *a road* is taken to refer to the standard hard-surface type of road, as long as no information to the contrary is provided).

The M(anner) Heuristic – “What is said in an abnormal way isn’t normal”, related directly to Grice’s maxim of Manner - Be perspicuous: avoid obscurity of expression and avoid prolixity.

Levinson’s M-implicatures (classified as *R-implicatures* in Horn’s neo-Gricean framework¹³) capture all kinds of suggestions produced by unusual and less economic ways of saying things (e.g. *cause to die* is heard as referring to a non-standard way of killing).

Levinson suggests that the distinction between the Q- and the M- inferences is based primarily on linguistic alternates, while the I-inferences are based primarily on stereotypical presumptions about the world. The notion of ‘stereotype’ is fundamental to Levinson’s views of the heuristics/principles and how they are applied. It involves a cluster of concepts linking sets of assumptions that language-users bring to bear on the topic at hand and the form of the expression selected. For Levinson, stereotypes are “connotations associated with meaning, but not part of them, which nevertheless play a role in interpretation” (Levinson 2000: 115). Stereotypes are “complex mental constructs” (Levinson 2000: 329) that range from very specific social constructs which needn’t have a close relation to reality or statistical tendency (Levinson 2000: 115), to very broad concepts. Stereotypical meaning is said to be ‘unmarked’ (U), that is, it is assumed to be semantically more general and formally shorter than the marked member of the pair (Levinson 2000: 115).

There is an implicit opposition or parasitic relationship between the I and the M heuristics: what is said simply, briefly, in an unmarked way picks up the stereotypical interpretation; if in contrast a marked expression is used, the stereotypical interpretation should be avoided.

M-implicatures take priority over the I-implicatures that would have arisen from the use of a corresponding unmarked expression (Levinson 2000: 157). The I-principle induces

¹³ Horn (2004) put forward a set of neo-Gricean pragmatic heuristics, which speakers may exploit in leading the hearer to draw certain inferences. Horn’s framework distinguishes between two principles: Q – a speaker should say enough to achieve her communicative goals and R – a speaker should say no more than is necessary to achieve her goals, where the Q-principle invites upper-bounding inferences (e.g. the use of *some* to mean ‘some and not all’) while the R-principle invites lower-bounding inferences (e.g. the use of *if* to mean ‘if and only if’ and more generally the use of vague expressions as euphemisms for what one would prefer to leave unsaid) (see Israel 2006).

stereotypical interpretations, unless: a marked expression has been used where an unmarked one could have been employed instead, in which case the M-implicature defeats the relevant I-implicature, by inducing the inference to the complement of the I-implicature that would have arisen from the unmarked expression (Levinson 2000: 157).

Thus Q and M heuristics differ in the kind of metalinguistic contrast that they rely on – Q relies on sets of alternates of essentially similar form with contrastive semantic content, whereas M relies on sets of alternates that contrast in form but not in inherent semantic content, in other words, synonyms differing in markedness. These heuristics can only be recovered by reference to what else might have been said but was not. Levinson regards both as metalinguistic in that they imply something negative, specifically that “the speaker is avoiding some stronger (Q) or some simpler (M) expression” (Levinson 2000: 40) and thus indicates that he or she is not in a position to use those other expressions.

Because they are metalinguistic, the implicatures they generate can be denied by using metalinguistic denial with special stress, as in *You didn't eat SOME of the cookies, you ate ALL of them* (Levinson 2000: 41), and, presumably, by *You didn't mean Jane CAUSED Bill TO DIE, she KILLED him*. The major difference is that within the metalinguistic domain there is a further subdivision of labor. Q is constructed as restricted to so-called “Horn scales” of the type <all, some>, while M is construed as restricted to “synonyms differing in markedness” (Levinson 2000: 41), e.g. *cause to die, kill*.

Generalized Conversational Implicatures contribute to ‘utterance-type’ meaning, which is distinct from both sentence meaning and speaker meaning. Carston (2004c) discusses that it is pragmatic in that it involves an element of meaning, which is ultimately communicatively based, that is, dependent on certain principles of appropriate communicative behavior. However, it has become established as the preferred or default interpretation of a linguistic expression so that it bypasses Gricean processes of pragmatic reasoning, and considerations of the speaker’s intended meaning, and arises through the automatic activation of default inference rules which are attached to particular expression types. These are defeasible rules, so that if their results are inconsistent with some particular salient contextual assumption, then are cancelled (see Carston 2004c).

Similarly to Relevance Theory, Levinson’s (2000) theory of Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCIs) treats the linguistic encoding not as definitive content, but more like interpretive clues, guiding hearers to the speaker-intended interpretation. As noted above in section 1.1, Grice viewed GCIs as inferences that appear to go through in the

absence of information to the contrary; but additional information (addition of further premises) to the contrary may be quite sufficient to cancel them. This view is shared by Horn (2004), who notes that whatever the theoretical status of the distinction between generalized and particularized conversational implicatures, it is apparent that “some implicatures are induced *only* in a special context (...), while others go through *unless* a special context is present (...)”Horn (2004: 4-5).

Levinson provides the following definition of PCIs and GCIs:

a. An implicature *i* from utterance *U* is *particularized* iff *U* implicates *i* only by virtue of specific contextual assumptions that would not invariably or even normally obtain.

b. An implicature *i* is *generalized* iff *U* implicates *i* *unless* there are unusual specific contextual assumptions that defeat it (Levinson 2000: 16; italics in the original).

Récanati (2010: 260) points out that Grice’s generalized conversational implicatures are different from Levinson’s (2000) default implicatures in that the former cannot arise at the local sub-sentential level (they are derived through a global inference generated by the fact that the speaker has said that *P*), while the latter are conventionally associated and are automatically triggered by certain expressions during the online processing of the utterance containing them. Hence, the GCI theory can explain the processes that happen at the ‘local’ sub-sentential level of lexical pragmatics.

Unlike the GCI-theoretic pragmatics, the original version of the relevance-theoretic pragmatics accounted for explicatures and implicatures derived only at the global level of the logical form of the utterance (for discussion see Carston 2002a; Reboul 2004; Capone 2011). Research in relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatics (e.g. Carston 2002a; Wilson and Carston 2007), however, showed that semantic underdeterminacy is resolved by an interaction between decoding and inference not only at the level of what is explicitly communicated by uttering a whole sentence, but also at the level of individual lexemes and phrases. Carston’s revised definition of explicatures, for instance, has been expanded to include such local sub-sentential meaning relations as, for instance, entailment: “An assumption (proposition) communicated by an utterance is an ‘explicature’ of the utterance if and only if it is a development of (a) a linguistically encoded logical form of the utterance, or of (b) a sentential subpart of a logical form” (Carston 2002a: 124). The RT account of lexical-pragmatics is detailed in chapter 9 of the thesis.

Relevance Theory makes no distinction of any theoretical import between GCIs and PCIs. It regards implicatures as varying in their generality along the continuum - some being

very general, others less so, and some being essentially one-off (nonce). According to Carston (2004c: 8), no implicatures are a matter of default inference; rather all must be warranted by contextual relevance. From the relevance-theoretic standpoint, derivation of both explicatures and implicatures requires inference, however, while in explicatures the pragmatic element is to fill in and adjust the semantic scaffolding provided by the linguistic expression used, the derivation of implicatures is purely pragmatic (Carston 1995, 2002a).

In an analysis of the way neo-Griceans treat scalar implicature, Moeschler (2007: 12) argues that their view of this phenomenon needs to be replaced with a truth-conditional pragmatic theory of “generalized explicatures”. According to Moeschler (2007: 10), the processes, which neo-Griceans call generalized implicatures are viewed by Relevance Theory as explicatures of logical form, i.e. propositional/truth-conditional pragmatic enrichments¹⁴.

Burton-Roberts (2010) argues against Carston’s (2002a) view that explicatures can be cancelled. He claims, rather, that cancellation of explicatures dependent on the recognition of speaker’s intention is impossible, since “what was intended was intended” (Burton-Roberts 2010: 138) and suggests that cancellation is only possible without contradiction of intention. In other words, Burton-Roberts suggests that GCIs are cancellable, since they are derived irrespective of recognition of speaker’s intention, while the intention-specific contextually derived PCIs are not.

The distinction between explicatures and implicatures (which are always particularized in RT) is captured in derivational terms: the processes involved in deriving an explicated assumption take the schematic, truth-conditionally incomplete, output of linguistic decoding and supply it with inferred material, as required to fix variables and to enrich content, in accordance with the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance.

Regarding explicatures being syntactical restricted to the development of the logical form of the utterance, Jaszczolt (2010) argues that the representation of what is said, which in her model of Default Semantics is referred to, following Récanati (2004) distinction, as ‘primary meaning’, need not be isomorphic with any development of the syntactic form and hence need not constitute an enrichment or modulation of the proposition expressed in the sentence. Jaszczolt and Allan (2011) show that in recent years, relevance theorists seem to be

¹⁴ I stop short of equating neo-Gricean generalized conversation implicatures with ‘generalized explicatures’, since according to Carston (2002a: 148-150), unlike Levinson’s (2000: 183) view of GCIs as contributing to the proposition expressed (what is said), in RT, it is not an explicature that enriches or ‘embellishes’ a logical form, pragmatic inferences do that; rather an explicature is a kind of representation that results from the pragmatic embellishment of a logical form (it IS what is said).

tacitly weakening the logical-form-based distinction between the explicit and the implicit content, recognizing the powerful role of ad hoc concept-adjustment (Carston, e.g. 2002, 2010) and construing the logical entry as inference rules rather than propositional representations.

Some implicatures are less salient, than others; for example, from an utterance like *I don't like fancy cars* as an answer to a proposal to rent a Mercedes, the hearer may well gather that the speaker doesn't like expensive things or luxury in general, but this is not the primary aim of the communication. Such contents are indeed implicated but, so to speak, 'weakly'; they are *weak implicatures*.

Similar to the way PCIs are derived in the relevance-driven manner in RT, Carston (2004d) sees Levinson's (2000) PCIs as depending on a **maxim of relevance** which is responsive to particular contextual assumptions. Relevance Theory does not, however, recognize context-free default meanings.

According to the communicative principle of relevance, the hearer of an utterance is entitled to expect that the speaker has aimed for a level of optimal relevance. This, according to Blakemore (2002: 64), means that the hearer is entitled to expect that the speaker has aimed to produce an utterance whose processing requires the lowest amount of effort that is compatible with his interests and abilities. In other words, according to the communicative principle of relevance, the hearer is entitled to expect that the interpretation of an utterance does not call for any unnecessary processing effort. A speaker who produced an utterance whose interpretation required contextual assumptions, which were not accessible to the hearer at all or who could have achieved the same effects by producing an utterance whose interpretation required more easily accessed assumptions would, of course, fail to meet the level of optimal relevance communicated by his utterance. According to Blakemore (2002): "speakers whose desire to show off their extensive vocabulary, technical knowledge or their political correctness outweighs their desire to communicate the informational content of their utterance may spring to mind here" Blakemore (2002: 65). Equally, the presumption of optimal relevance would be false in cases where the speaker causes unnecessary processing by requiring the hearer to process concepts which are already highly accessible. Such speakers run the risk of being classed as patronizing or even of not being listened to.

Popa (2009: 85) notes that Levinson (2000) argues against Grice's reliance on an unavoidable interdependency between what is said and what is implicated, since hearers draw on more pragmatic information when deriving what is said, than Grice's account suggested.

Levinson (2000) proposes a solution to “Grice’s circle”¹⁵ by “abandoning Grice’s view that saying and implicating are mutually exclusive, and, modifies the assumption that implicatures arise from application of the maxims to ‘the saying of what is said’, such that for what is implicated to be figured out, what is said/asserted does not need to be determined first” (Papa 2009: 85).

Unlike the GCI-theoretic view, which recognizes two different kinds of inference (GCIs and PCIs) and one kind of context, in RT, there is one kind of inference and two kinds of context, the default context (a default scenario in which inference takes place) and the fully particular nonce context (amounting to a reduction of GCIs to PCIs) (see Levinson 2000:26). Therefore, the first step in attempting to combining GCI-theoretic and relevance-theoretic views of utterance interpretation, is to allow for two kinds of inference and two kinds of context, where the seeming lack of economy is offset by a potential to account for a wide(r) range of phenomena (see Terkourafi 2001: 152).

Žegarac (1998) suggests, from the relevance-theoretic standpoint, that it is not the inferences that become conventionalized, but particular linguistic expressions can become associated not with implicatures but with contextual assumptions (e.g. Allan and Burridge’s ‘middle class politeness criterion’ discussed in section 5.2). The contextual assumptions required to arrive at a euphemistic interpretation can become instantly accessible as background or ‘encyclopedic’ information about the expression. Žegarac (1998) claims that standardized expressions such as ‘*how are you?*’ make available encyclopedic knowledge about how such expressions are usually understood, in the form of assumptions about the typical contexts in which particular strings are usually processed for relevance. When an expression becomes conventionalized, any linguistically encoded meaning becomes suppressed leaving just encyclopedic knowledge about the type of context in which the conventionalized expression is typically used. The meaning of the expression becomes ‘transparent’ and a true referent behind it starts to shine through. This point is consonant with Terkourafi’s (2001) GCI theory-based view that lexical units can be regarded as conventionalized only relative to some context of use.

¹⁵ The problem Levinson refers to as Grice’s circle is the following: “Grice’s account makes implicatures dependent on a prior determination of ‘the said’. The said in turn depends on disambiguation, indexical resolution, reference fixing, not to mention ellipsis unpacking and generality narrowing. But each of these processes, which are prerequisites to determining the proposition expressed, may themselves depend crucially on processes that look indistinguishable from implicatures. Thus what is said seems both to determine and to be determined by implicature” (Levinson 2000: 186).

Vega Moreno (2007) points out that from the relevance-theoretic standpoint, in interpreting any utterance, hearers' expectations of relevance direct them towards a certain combination of assumptions and a certain inferential route yielding a range of implications which the speaker might have intended to convey. In the case of creative figurative language use,

“the responsibility for considering those assumptions, following that inferential route and deriving the range of implications is largely left to the hearer/reader. Different readers, or the same reader at different times, may therefore consider different sets of weakly manifest assumptions and derive different implications <...> Another way of guiding the hearer is to set up strong expectations of relevance by using relatively standardized forms. The more familiar a hearer is with a certain metaphorical expression, the more precise are his expectations of relevance and the more salient are the set of intended assumptions and inferential route to follow in processing it” (Vega Moreno 2007: 114-115).

The combination of contextual assumptions with a certain inferential route serves in RT merely as a template for comprehension, which is fine-tuned contextually on every occasion of actual utterance in an ‘ad hoc’ manner to satisfy certain expectations of relevance generated by the particular utterance. This results in the construction of concepts differing in nuances of meaning on each such occasion (more on such ‘ad hoc’ concept construction in chapter 9).

In her discussion of processing of figurative speech, Vega Moreno (2007) provides a Relevance Theory-based description, which echoes the manner in which Levinson's (2000) *I*- and *M*-principles operate, without explicitly stating that, with frequent use, some linguistic forms create certain expectations regarding the way language is normally used. An extended quote is in order here:

“The responsibility for constructing the intended interpretation of relatively familiar metaphors in everyday conversation is thus not just down to the hearer; the speaker also shares a lot of the responsibility. A speaker aiming at optimal relevance should have some idea about which sort of assumptions will be most accessible to the hearer at the time, and which sort of implications he will be likely to derive, and should **formulate the utterance accordingly** <...> Has she intended him to consider a different range of assumptions, computations and derive a different range of implications than those **normally derived** in processing the familiar metaphor in

stereotypical circumstances, she should have produced **another linguistic stimulus**” (Vega Moreno 2007: 115, emphasis mine – A.S.).

The author does, however, acknowledge (ibid: 117) that such a development of what she refers to as a ‘pragmatic routine’ – a cognitive procedure that is expected to develop given the Cognitive Principle of Relevance and is encouraged by the Communicative Principle of Relevance, bears close resemblance with Bach’s (1996) neo-Gricean notion of ‘short-circuited implicature’ with which a particular linguistic form can become associated due to being frequently used in a particular way.

Considering the difference in cognitive processing of language used literally and figuratively, Wearin (2002: 62) argues that despite the fact that conversational participants are strongly disposed to infer the communicative intentions of others and in the typical case, an implicature follows from what is said (the proposition expressed) for reasons that depend entirely on the specific context of utterance, in cases of figurative language, by contrast, the non-literal interpretation does not appear to depend as greatly on features of the particular context of utterance for its generation but rather on semantic features and more general world-knowledge about the elements of what is said. This is consonant with Levinson’s (2000) idea regarding the existence of the layer of systematic pragmatic inference based not on direct computations about speaker-intentions but rather on general expectations about how language is normally used (Levinson 2000 : 22).

The following section considers whether the traditional literal/figurative language distinction bears any theoretical significance in terms of cognitive online processing of utterances.

1.4 Processing figurative language

The aim of this section is to present and critically assess how various pragmatic theories deal with figurative language processing and what suggestions they make regarding the stages along which comprehension of what people intend to communicate when they speak figuratively takes place.

1.4.1 The priority of literal meaning

According to Gibbs (1999: 148), people speak figuratively to be polite, to be humorous, to avoid responsibility for the import of what is communicated, to express ideas that are difficult to communicate using literal language, and to express thoughts in a compact and vivid manner. The most typical way for people to express their communicative intentions indirectly is to employ figurative language assuming that listeners will be capable of inferring what they intended to communicate from what they say.

There exist several views regarding the stages along which comprehension of what people intend to communicate when they speak figuratively takes place. One-stage processing theories are advocated by Sperber and Wilson (1995), Gibbs (1994, 2002), while the origin of the two-stage processing view can be traced to the works of Grice (1975) and is further advocated by Récanati (1995; 2004) and Giora (2003).

In his theory of conversational implicature Grice (1967/1989) assumed that figurative language requires additional cognitive effort to be understood because such utterances violate one of the conversational maxims thereby triggering a related true implicature: in the case of metaphor, this would be a simile or comparison based on the literal meaning, in the case of verbal irony it would be the contradictory or contrary of the literal meaning, and in the case of understatement it would be something stronger than the literal meaning (see Wilson 2006).

This view, which came to be known as the Standard Pragmatic Model of processing (Grice 1967/1989, Searle 1979a), predicts greater cognitive effort for the processing of figurative language than for the processing of literal language. The reason is that after computing the literal meaning of the utterance, the hearer, allegedly, must make a decision about its appropriateness, and after a potential rejection of the literal meaning, the hearer is supposed to compute a second figurative meaning of the utterance.

The interpretation of non-literal utterances within the Standard Pragmatic Model is viewed as serial and proceeding in two stages:

- (1) the hearer computes the proposition literally expressed by the utterance;

(2) on the basis of this proposition and general conversational principles, he or she infers what the speaker really means by speaking figuratively.

Recent claims found in the psycholinguistic literature, however, emphasize that figurative language does not require more processing effort than literal language, and that furthermore it is not generally necessary to process the literal meaning of a figuratively intended utterance. Studies by Coulson and van Petten (2002), Gibbs (1994; 1999; 2002) and Glucksberg (2001; 2003), Gibbs and Tendahl (2006), for instance, are quite damaging to the claim that people understand figurative language in a series of steps, because it always violates conversational maxims. Similar psychological mechanisms appear to drive the understanding of both literal and figurative speech, at least insofar as very early cognitive processes are concerned. The fact that people may, on occasion, consciously focus on figurative meanings does not mean that such language is “special” or “deviant” in any way (see Gibbs 1999).

Gibbs (1999) cites experimental psycholinguistic evidence indicating that from the earliest moments of processing, figurative language comprehension does not differ in kind from the understanding of literal language and concludes that from such a vantage point, there is no need to postulate any special cognitive mechanism to explain how people understand metaphor, irony or euphemisms. Figurative language can, in many cases, be understood effortlessly without conscious reflection and without necessarily having to analyze the literal meaning of utterances.

According to Gibbs (1999: 150), the Gricean view follows the centuries-old belief that literal language is a veridical reflection of thought and the external world while figurative language distorts reality and only serves special rhetorical purposes. Gibbs (1999) points out that one of the weaknesses of Grice’s account of tropes is that it does not explain why a rational speaker should decide to utter a blatant falsehood in order to convey a related true implicature which could just as well have been expressed literally. The *reasons* for uttering figurative utterances thus have to be solved otherwise.

According to Sperber and Wilson, Grice tended to take for granted and Searle explicitly argued that when someone uses language to communicate she is presumed to express her meaning literally (Sperber and Wilson 2008: 87). By contrast, RT claims that verbal comprehension involves no presumption of literalness. Relevance Theory does not treat metaphors and figurative language as a violation of any communicative maxim, but as ‘merely alternative routes to achieving optimal relevance’ (Wilson and Sperber 2004).

In RT there is no suggestion that the literal meaning must be tested first and the encoded concept is considered as merely a clue to the intended interpretation or a point of access to an ordered array of encyclopedic assumptions from which the hearer is expected to choose in constructing an overall interpretation that satisfies his expectations of relevance:

“The widely accepted view that language use is governed by a norm of literalness (which is violated by metaphor and other figurative uses – hence their distinctiveness) follows straightforwardly from the even more widely accepted view that the function of language in communication is to allow the speaker to encode her meaning and the hearer to decode it” (Sperber and Wilson 2008: 85).

Gibbs (2002) points out that literal speech (however one defines it) is clearly not the norm in ordinary talk:

“Listeners readily infer what people intend to communicate when they speak indirectly and do not merely focus on the meanings of the words or utterances themselves. More importantly, people even appear to infer what speakers intend to communicate by their indirect messages without necessarily having to analyze what speakers literally say. Speakers do not always want to make explicit what they think, and so say things in such a way that listeners must infer their true beliefs. People frequently use deception, tease one another, speak ironically or sarcastically, use understatement, and equivocate in ways that are not meant to be understood literally” Gibbs (2002: 142-147).

From the relevance-theoretic standpoint, a hearer interpreting any figurative utterance, is entitled to employ the usual interpretation strategies in just the same way as he does with other, non-figurative utterances. He should stop processing when every further implication he could get is not worth the effort it takes to obtain these additional cognitive effects. The implicatures hearers derive may be *strong* (the speaker ostensibly intends the addressee to recover them in order to make the utterance relevant in the intended way) and *weak* (those implicatures which the addressee does not have to recover in order to confirm the relevance of the utterance). Weak implicatures may be recovered and may also contribute to the overall relevance of the utterance, but their recovery leaves a great share of responsibility to the addressee. The addressee may feel encouraged to recover these weak implicatures, but the relevance of the utterance does not depend on any single weak implicature. If a value were to be put on the degree of figurativeness of an utterance, it could be seen, according to Gibbs and Colston (2012), as being roughly proportional to its number of weak implicatures.

Relevance theorists propose that conventional metaphors communicate at least one strong implicature and in addition to that several weak implicatures. Very creative language metaphors do not communicate a strong implicature, but only a whole array of weak implicatures. The relevance of the utterance depends solely on the recovery of at least some of these weakly communicated implicatures and the utterance thereby achieves a *poetic effect*. A poetic effect is “the peculiar effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 222).

Carston (2002a) notes that some kinds of metaphors, most notably conventional metaphors, may be processed rapidly while acknowledging the possibility that novel and creative metaphors may require more time and, therefore, processing effort. She notes, however, that such a conclusion does not stem from the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure:

“<...> according to the relevance-theoretic account, the interpretation of literal and of loose (including metaphorical) utterances proceeds in the same way (implications are considered in their order of accessibility and the process stops once the expectation of relevance is fulfilled), so the account does not predict that loose (including metaphorical) uses will generally require more processing effort than literal uses. Indeed, it is to be expected on this account that, in appropriate contexts, a metaphorical interpretation of an utterance may be more easily derived than a literal one” (Carston 2002a: 373).

Tendahl (2009: 90) argues that the additional time required for processing creative metaphors may not be the result of people analyzing and rejecting the literal meanings of metaphorical utterances, as claimed by the standard pragmatic view, but could be due to all sorts of hidden cognitive processes, such as the effort needed to integrate an easily understood metaphorical meaning with the context at hand, as well as the effort needed to infer complex metaphorical meanings.

Relevance Theory does not suggest that it is possible to quantify the notion of relevance or its constituent notions of cognitive effects or effort. Wilson and Sperber (2004: 626), for example, claim that there cannot be any absolute measure for either mental effort or cognitive effects, given the difficulties with quantifying ‘the spontaneous workings of the mind’. Instead, Relevance Theory assumes that the “actual or expected relevance of two inputs can quite often be compared” (Wilson and Sperber 2004: 626). The general RT idea is that investing more cognitive effort necessarily results in more cognitive benefit. A study by

Gibbs and Tendahl (2006) is in agreement with relevance theorists that in cases in which optimal relevance can be achieved, more processing effort usually leads to more cognitive effects. At the same time Tendahl (2009: 98) notes that extra processing effort may decrease relevance, if the extra effort is too high for the additional cognitive effects.

Sperber and Wilson (1995: 76–77) and Unger (2001) make the important point that the genre determines to a large extent how much processing effort hearers will be ready to invest. On this view, metaphors, both novel and creative ones, appearing in ordinary conversations do not necessarily require more processing effort than literal language, and hearers will stop processing them once they have derived enough cognitive effects. Thus in a usual conversation the duration of the actual utterance limits the processing time, whereas readers of a sacred text devote much more time and processing effort.

The importance of considering genre-related information is also noted by Tendahl (2009: 103), who considers that a fuller processing of poetic metaphors may be the case when reading a poem, because this genre comes with the promise that investing a lot of processing effort will result in an appropriate number of cognitive effects. He explains that in such cases, the threshold for hearers might be higher before they stop processing, because the expectations of cognitive effects are higher.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995:231), by uttering a metaphor the speaker intends to communicate a complex thought. Instead of trying to convey it literally, thus causing the hearer increased processing effort, the speaker chooses to communicate a more easily expressed assumption, which shares with the thought some logical and contextual implications. The exact subset of implications of the utterance that will be taken to be shared by the speaker's thought is yielded each time by the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance. Metaphor is thus considered to be a variety of loose use of language, where what matters is not the truthfulness/literalness of a proposition but its degree of faithfulness to the content of a thought: "There is a range of apparent counterexamples to the claim that speakers try to tell the truth. These include lies, jokes, fictions, metaphors and ironies" (Wilson and Sperber 2002b).

In her PhD thesis investigating the pragmatic routes to the non-literal, Popa (2009) observes that the assumption that there are two neatly distinct forms of communication: literal and non-literal is entrenched in pragmatic theories, which make no real distinction among various figures of speech and treat all figurative speech as inducing an indirect communication. Such theories view indirectness associated with figurative language as

recovered via conversational implicature. She notes that recently, relevance-theorists and philosophers of language have started to question this traditional assumption by suggesting to view figurative meanings on a continuum with literal/loose uses and arguing that the difference is one in degree and not in kind.

Sperber and Wilson (1998) argue that the occurrence of a word in an utterance provides a piece of evidence, a pointer to a concept involved in the speaker's meaning and any interpretation, whether literal or not, results from mutual adjustment of the explicit and implicit content of utterances. This adjustment process stabilizes when the hypothesized implicit content is warranted by the hypothesized explicit content together with the context, and when the overall interpretation is warranted by (the particular instantiation of) the communicative principle of relevance.

Grice considered tropes as “overt floutings” of the maxim of truthfulness, while RT proposes to consider them as well as most other “non-literal” uses of language as general cases of loose use of language, such as approximations and sense extensions, since

“most of our serious declarative utterances are not strictly and literally true, either because they are figurative, or simply because we express ourselves loosely... Loose uses of language present few problems for speakers and hearers, who are rarely even aware of their occurrence; but they do raise a serious issue for any philosophy of language based on a maxim or convention of truthfulness... It is not just approximations but all utterances – literal, loose or figurative – that are approached with expectations of relevance rather than truthfulness. Sometimes, the only way of satisfying these expectations is to understand the utterance as literally true. But just as an utterance can be understood as an approximation without being recognized and categorized as such, so it can be literally understood without being recognized and categorized as such... Literal, loose, and figurative interpretations are arrived at in the same way, by constructing an interpretation which satisfies the hearer's expectations of relevance” (Wilson and Sperber 2002b)¹⁶.

Thus the RT account (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 2008) characterizes figurative language in terms of such notions as *loose use* and *weak implicatures* while not viewing figurativeness as a separate category requiring specialized processing procedure.

¹⁶ For instance, some figurative ironical utterances are not literally false, such as “it is raining a few drops” said during a heavy rain.

Despite the fact that some of the psycholinguistic studies show that given sufficient context people understand nonliteral meanings without first analyzing the complete literal meaning of an expression, the following section shows that there are several lines of theoretical and experimental research, which demonstrate that people still analyze aspects of literal meaning when understanding figurative language.

1.4.2 The salience of primary meanings

Récanati's (2004) view of literal and non-literal meaning distinguishes between primary pragmatic processes that apply to certain phenomena at the lexical level and secondary pragmatic processes responsible for the determination of speaker's intention and derivation of implicatures. Primary pragmatic meanings go by different names within various pragmatic theories. Thus in Relevance Theory they are 'explicatures', which are part of 'what is said' by the utterances. They are derived partially by decoding and partially by inference. For Bach (1994) these are 'implicitures' (meanings 'implicit in what is said' rather than implied by saying it). For Levinson (2000) they are 'generalized conversational implicatures'.

Récanati postulates that primary pragmatic processes, responsible for the determination of truth-conditional content of utterances are local¹⁷ associative processes, which need not involve inferences from premises concerning what the speaker can possibly intend by his utterance (see Récanati 2010: 251-252), i.e. they do not require prior computation of the proposition literally expressed. These processes are governed by a dynamics of accessibility constrained by structured patterns of information stored in the long-term memory in a contextually relevant manner. This dynamics is part of the general cognitive ability to detect and store regularities of any kind (see Mazzone 2011: 2149).

Récanati argues that normally we do not have to reason to understand what the others are saying: "the judgment that the speaker has said that p is made directly upon hearing the utterance, without being inferentially grounded in some prior judgment to the effect that the speaker has uttered sentence S" (Récanati 2004: 70). Only when the unreflective, normal processes of interpretation yield weird results, does a genuine inference process take place whereby we use evidence concerning the speaker's beliefs and intention to work out what he means (Récanati 2004: 34).

The secondary pragmatic processes (responsible for the generation of nonce context-specific particularized conversational implicatures), are inferential in the narrow sense because they satisfy the following availability condition:

¹⁷ Experimental work by Rubio-Fernández (2012: 17), has demonstrated that "inferential processes are fully integrated in the processing system, operating not only at the global level of the utterance but also at the local level".

“In deciding whether a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning is part of what is said, that is, in making a decision concerning what is said, we should always try to preserve our pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter” (Récanati 1993, p. 248).

The debate on the associative vs. inferential nature of pragmatic processes is a relatively new development in the research literature (Carston 2007, Récanati 2004, Mazzone 2011, Wilson and Carston 2007, Rubio-Fernández 2012, Mazzarella 2013a). And while most researchers unanimously agree that pragmatic processes responsible for derivation of implicatures/recognition of speaker’s intention are genuinely inferential, they part views regarding the nature of processes responsible for the recovery of the explicit content of utterances (what is said).

Récanati (2004) argues against the view that the processing of figurative language begins by paying attention to literal semantic values, and turns to derived values only after the literal semantic value of the whole (the proposition literally expressed) has been computed and found pragmatically deficient. On his view, derived meanings proceed (associatively) *from* literal meanings, which they presuppose; but, although generated serially, they are processed in parallel. The literal meaning has no compositional privilege over derived meanings; they compete and it is possible for some derived meaning to be retained while the literal interpretation is suppressed.

As I will attempt to show throughout the thesis, the issue of whether literal meaning of figurative utterances is mentally represented during their processing has to do with how salient this meaning is on people’s minds. The extent to which some meaning is salient on people’s minds need not coincide with being literal, but instead does coincide with familiarity and frequency of use (for discussion see Jaszczolt and Allan 2011).

In her experimental work, Giora (e.g., 2003, 2008) proposes a *salient/non-salient* distinction and presents evidence from experimental studies that show that it is relative salience, rather than whether an expression is literal or figurative, which determines whether a particular meaning is processed more quickly. At the core of Giora’s Graded Salience Hypothesis (GSH) (1997, 2003) is the claim that “salient meanings are processed before less salient meanings are activated” (Giora and Fein 1999: 1601).

She argues that during the processing of familiar metaphors both the literal meaning of the expression and the figurative meaning are salient and are therefore simultaneously activated. However, when non-familiar metaphors are processed only the literal meaning is salient and will be activated before a potentially intended metaphoric meaning gets activated.

According to the GSH, familiar metaphors have a salient figurative meaning that hearers can retrieve directly from their mental lexicon. It claims that even in supportive contexts, novel, unfamiliar metaphors always activate a salient literal meanings first.

According to Giora (2003), Giora et al. (2004), for a meaning to be salient¹⁸, it should be foremost on our mind due to factors such as experiential familiarity, frequency, conventionality, or prototypicality. Responses low on these dimensions would be less salient. Responses not coded in the mental lexicon are nonsalient. Salient and less salient responses get activated automatically upon encounter of a familiar stimulus, regardless of context fit, but are ordered; salient responses are activated faster.

As a consequence, salient meanings of lexical units (e.g., conventional, frequent, familiar, or prototypical meanings) are processed automatically, i.e. they are accessed faster than and reach sufficient levels of activation before less salient ones, regardless of contextual information or speaker's intention (Giora 2003: 11). Access of salient meanings is hard to prevent, even when context is highly supportive of the less or nonsalient meaning, irrespective of whether they are literal or nonliteral (Giora 2003: 103). Although context effects may be fast, they run in parallel with lexical processes and initially do not interact with them (Giora 2003: 24). In her framework, context is viewed as producing final interpretations but not affecting the lexicon itself. The claim to the effect that salient information may not be filtered out even when it is contextually inappropriate is in stark contrast with the context-dependency view advocated by Relevance Theory.

Having reviewed the principal contributions of pragmatic theories of verbal communication to the complex issue of figurative language processing, I maintain that the RT explicature/implicature based model in which all figurative language is processed along the same line as the language used 'literally', makes drawing the distinction between figurative

¹⁸ In a recent study, Kecskes (2013) distinguishes three theoretically significant categories of salience: inherent salience, collective salience, and emergent situational salience. Inherent salience is largely equivalent to cognitive status. It is characterized as a natural built-in preference in the general conceptual and linguistic knowledge of the speaker, which has developed as a result of prior experience with the use of lexical items and situations, and changes both diachronically and synchronically. Inherent salience is affected by collective salience and emergent situational salience. Collective salience is shared with the members of a speech community, and changes diachronically. Emergent situational salience that changes synchronically refers to the salience of specific objects or linguistic elements in the context of language production and comprehension, and may accrue through such determinants as vividness, speaker motivation and recency of mention. In an actual situational context, inherent, individual salience is affected and shaped both by collective and situational salience.

and literal language rather problematic as speakers do not aim for and hearers do not expect literalness but relevance in discourse.

The existence of constant turnover of vocabulary used to refer to taboo topics indirectly, commonly known as the “euphemism treadmill” (e.g. Pinker 1994a; Allan and Burridge 2006), resulting from euphemisms and PC expressions becoming ‘contaminated’ with taboo meanings, serves as evidence of the fact that salient dispreferred meanings, which are ‘literal’ meanings of euphemisms/PC expressions are inevitably ‘metarepresented’ by addressees during cognitive online processing of these lexical units in discourse, along the lines suggested by Giora’s (2003) Graded Salience Hypothesis. The phenomenon of euphemism treadmill will be discussed at length in chapter 9.

I now turn to presenting the state of the art of extant research in the areas of euphemisms and linguistic practices associated with political correctness.

Chapter 2. Semiotics of x-phemisms

This chapter dwells on such semiotic issues as ancient fear-based and contemporary taboos, connotations, synonymy, arbitrariness, iconicity and markedness as relevant to the analysis of euphemisms. I review the issue of how concepts are represented in human cognitive systems and examine various definitions and ways of formation of euphemisms presented in extant research literature on the topic.

2.1 Taboo

2.1.1 Ancient fear-based taboos

Throughout history people have attributed supernatural powers to names as a special case of fear-based need to avoid mentioning supernatural beings, diseases, dangerous things and animals or replace them with alternative nominations. This folk belief in the magical power of language runs contrary to the scientific claim made by one of the founding fathers of modern linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Cours* (Saussure 1916: 67) to the effect that the relation between the linguistic form (the signifier) and meaning (the signified) is mostly arbitrary¹⁹. The linguistic sign arbitrariness thesis, however, does leave unanswered the question of why it is that some linguistic forms are mentionable and desirable while others referring to the same concept are unmentionable and forbidden or ‘tabooed’.

Allan (1986) sees an explanation of this dilemma in the so-called ‘naturalist’ hypothesis, according to which, the proscription against uttering certain lexical forms stems from an ancient belief that words possess the capacity of influencing and altering reality and the form of an expression somehow communicates the essential nature of whatever it denotes. One of the earliest manifestations of such fear-based proscriptions of verbalizations came in the form of banning of the use of the Lord’s name in vain found in the Bible: “And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 24: 16, quoted in Allan and Burridge 2006: 15).

Similarly to lexical units, concepts themselves can be subject to proscription. The proscribed status of a concept has been found capable of causing the loss of a word, as in the classical Indo-European case of the word for the concept BEAR (Malmkjær 2010: 241). Avoidance of the term is thought to have occurred in the northern Indo-European regions,

¹⁹ There is a certain degree of iconicity in language, e.g. onomatopoeia where the sign somehow does communicate the “essential nature of whatever it denotes” (Allan 1986) by resembling its object.

where the bear was prevalent, and another name (employed, perhaps, not to offend it or as part of a hunting taboo against speaking the name of the prey) was substituted in the form of Proto-Germanic *ber- ‘brown’, that is, ‘the brown one’. Attempts by researchers to discover the original “true” name for BEAR in Russian have so far been unsuccessful as the obviously periphrastic substitute *медведь* (*medved’* – honey-eater) had been established as the only acceptable way to refer to this sacred and feared by the ancient Russians animal.

In addition to the alleged capacity to alter external reality, researchers have argued that the phonological form of the word can be directly associated with an affective psychological response. Thus in their version of linguistic relativity, Bowers and Pleydell-Pearce (2011) argue that due to the fact that words become directly associated with emotional centers in the brain, taboo words can evoke strong emotions even when they are uttered without any desire to offend.

Fear-based taboos still persist and in some languages and even extend to words triggering the negative affective psychological response by virtue of being homophonous with those that designate or connote something dangerous, feared or inappropriate. There can be instances in which offense is caused by the so-called ‘incidental’ use of tabooed vocabulary (see Anderson and Lepore 2013a) where the mere phonetic and/or orthographic resemblance with a prohibited word can cause lexical material, which bears no semantic or etymological tie with the tabooed one, to be perceived as offensive.

Thus according to Merlan (2006), in Chinese the word for number four, *si*, is often avoided because it sounds like the word *si* – *to die* while the number eight is highly preferred (in advertisements, business names, etc.) because it is a near homophone with the phrase *get rich*. Merlan (2006) also observes that in Japanese, word avoidance is triggered by the dissonance of certain word meanings with occasions: hence at a wedding speakers tend to avoid words meaning *leave*, *exit*, *send back*, *sever*, and *suffer*. Avoidance of these words is paralleled by practices of verbal preference: a word may be used because it sounds like another that has positive connotations.

Today, the naturalist hypothesis can certainly be disregarded as unscientific since, the speech-act theoretic (Austin 1962) claim that one can do things with words aside, one cannot expect reality to change as a result of one’s invocation of certain names. The same informational material can, nevertheless, be ‘packaged’ into different linguistic means for argumentation purposes as speakers continuously make attempts to alter hearers’ perception

of certain aspects of reality by ‘framing’ it through linguistic means. I will return to this issue in section 7.2.

Chamizo Domínguez (2009) observes that the phenomenon of linguistic interdiction can be documented in any society and in any historic time, although the objects and the terms considered taboo change from one age to another and/or from one society to another: “<...> even within one given time and society, taboo objects and terms change from one social group to another. Every historical period develops and cultivates its own taboos and euphemisms, which can be considered as symptoms of the customs, censorships and bad habits of its society” Chamizo Domínguez (2009: 433). Thus even though taboos are present in every human society, it is probably safe to assume that there is no such thing as an absolute taboo (one that holds for all cultures, times, and contexts) as “every taboo must be specified for a particular community of people for a specified context at a given place and time” Allan and Burridge (2006: 6).

Chamizo Domínguez (2009) notes that the need to refer to the objects themselves, no matter how much they are forbidden, and consequently cannot be named, using the terms which literally name them, prompted humans to adopt some linguistic stratagems so they could continue naming or alluding to taboo objects without running the risk of being censored. Considering the social implication of having to resort to taboo topics, the researcher concludes that since tabooed objects and terms have always existed in every human group, some linguistic mechanisms were needed in order to allow speakers to refer to what is tabooed without suffering social rejection.

Historically, the existence of strict taboos and sensitive topics²⁰ prompted the need to find ways of talking about them without triggering negative associations. As a result, speakers started using linguistic “fig leaves” – words or phrases used as an alternative to dispreferred expressions, which help to avoid direct reference to an axiologically disfavorable or sensitive topic thereby avoiding “possible loss of face: either one’s own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or of some third party” (Allan and Burridge 1991:11). Resorting to euphemisms has also enabled speakers to replace the trigger (the offending word form) by another word form that expresses a similar concept but that is not itself associated with a conditioned response.

²⁰ Throughout the thesis I will refer to the entire continuum – from mildly sensitive topics to strongly tabooed ones as ‘taboo’ for brevity and convenience.

Euphemisms can thus be regarded as socially motivated by considerations of avoiding negative associations of words and expressions related to both cross-culturally common stigmatized strongly forbidden as well as merely sensitive topics, such as religion and supernatural powers, death, sexual relations, crime, political and military facts, drug and alcohol abuse, food, human anatomy, physiology, diseases, physical and mental disabilities, pregnancy, professions, race, immigration, environment, social status, wealth and poverty etc., as well as other topics considered impolite, inappropriate or shameful in a certain society at a certain time (for discussion see Warren 1992; Allan and Burridge 2006).

By choosing to resort to euphemisms speakers can aim at shielding hearers from communicative discomfort. When discussing death, for example, people often avoid mentioning the word *death* itself altogether and instead speak of those who have *passed away* to communicate their compassionate attitude. Similarly, the expression *ritual services* (translation from Ukrainian *ритуальні послуги* – *rytual'ni posluhy*) is used instead of the more direct *funeral services* to avoid mentioning the word *funeral* and sparing the hearing of emotional distress associated with it. In such cases the use of euphemisms produces the not-saying-it-all effect of a ‘cushioned blow’, thereby distancing conversational participants from the reality of human mortality. In this respect, Cameron (1995) notes that even if the use of *collateral damage* obscures neither the fact of civilian deaths nor the intention to minimize their impact, it still enables people to keep a certain emotional distance from those deaths.

Apart from the “increased emotional distance”, replacing *death* with *pass away* also aims at achieving the effect of inviting hearers to focus on the ‘changed state’ aspect of dying by representing death as a sort of transition into the unknown, rather than a finite ‘end of everything’ associated with the use of the lexeme *death* itself. The alternative euphemistic expression attempts to ‘frame’ reality by construing it in a different way.

The mechanism underlying the use of all euphemisms can variously be described as part of more general linguistic phenomena, i.e. the communicative strategies of indirectness, mitigation, attenuation (semantic weakening) or hedging²¹. Burridge (2005) considers that the more vague and indirect the euphemism is, the more successful it can be at implementing its ‘hedging’ function. She writes: “Vagueness, of course, is what you want in a euphemism, and

²¹ The terms ‘mitigation’, ‘hedging’ along with the synonymous ‘downgrading’, ‘weakening’ and ‘attenuation’ have been used in research literature (see Clemen 1997; Fraser 2008) to refer to the communicative strategy of softening the ‘impact’ or ‘face threat’ associated with uttering a discourse string.

many euphemistic substitutions involve expressions that refer indirectly to something risqué. The most successful euphemisms are those where this association lacks any sort of precision” Burridge (2005: 41).

If concepts are marked with hedges (also called ‘understaters’ by House/Kasper’s 1981 and ‘shields’ by Prince’s et al. 1982), their referents are not prototypical representatives of the class, but non-prototypical ones²². Therefore a sentence like ‘A penguin is a sort of a bird’ is acceptable but ‘A raven is sort of a bird’ is absurd. Similarly, the hedged *pass away* appears to be construing some non-prototypical form of dying by inviting hearers to conceptualize death as a journey to some different unknown world. According to Allan and Burridge (2006: 277), the **image** such euphemisms offer is one of consolation.

Since euphemisms are used to communicate an attitude to what is said and/or the hearer or some third party, the euphemistic effect can be considered as a sort of evaluative attitude evoked by certain linguistic behavior and expressions that come to be associated with such behavior can, with frequent use, become conventionalized or ‘entrenched’ (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 49) as capable of triggering such an effect to varying degrees. From the relevance-theoretic standpoint, frequent processing of certain linguistic forms in stereotypical contexts results in certain encyclopedic assumptions from the encoded concepts getting a higher degree of activation (see Vega Moreno 2007). They become ‘salient’ in Giora’s (2003) sense (see section 1.4.2). The hearer thereby fine-tunes the speaker-intended ‘ad hoc’ meaning of the encoded concept in a particular way, transforming these highly activated assumptions into salient meanings associated with the use of the linguistic form in the specific context.

²² Rosch (1978) provided psychological evidence for prototype effects in categorization: statements about central members of a category are processed far more quickly than statements about marginal members, and reasoning about any category is based on what is known about good examples of the category.

2.1.2 Modern-day taboos

Burridge (2006) notes that since the 1980s, English speakers have shown a growing apprehensiveness of how to talk to and about others, particularly those perceived to be disadvantaged or oppressed: “The new taboos are sexism, racism, ageism, and religionism, so that sexist, racist, ageist, and religionist language is not only contextually inappropriate (dysphemistic), but also legally so” (Burridge (2006b: 983). In this respect, Hughes (2006: x) points out the existence of a double standard: *fuck* and *cunt* are designated as ‘taboo’, but are commonly used, as any data on currency show. He concludes that such lexemes are not exactly taboos anymore and in modern reality the strictest taboos are represented by a new category of racist, ethnic, sexist etc. slurs.

This view is shared by McWhorter (2014), who in a recent New York Times articles writes:

“Today, the “four letter” words traditionally termed profanity in American English are more properly just salty. As late as 1920, the lowlier word for excrement rarely appeared in print; its use has increased a hundredfold since. The uses of “damn” and “hell” in print are higher than ever in written history. No anthropologist observing our society would recognize words used so freely in public language as profanity.

At the same time, consider the words we now consider truly taboo, that we enshroud with a near-religious air of sinfulness. They are, overwhelmingly, epithets aimed at groups.

Gone are the days when our main lexical taboos concerned religion — with “egad” as a way to evade saying “Ye Gods!” — or sex and the body, as when Americans started saying white and dark meat to avoid mentioning breasts and limbs.

Instead, today the abusive use of the N-word, the word beginning with F that refers to homosexual men and a four-letter word for a body part that can be used to refer to women are considered beyond the pale even in casual discourse, to an extent that would baffle a time traveler from as recently as 50 years ago”.

The practice of avoiding the modern-day interdictions regarding references to stigmatized population groups and replacing them with new vocabulary units came to be known as ‘being politically correct’ and ‘political correctness’ (PC). Researchers point out that political correctness refers entirely to human beings (and derivable terms) and represents the modern form of taboo (Grzega 2002: 1036). The PC-related practices are viewed as an endeavor to “<...> make taboo many areas which previously involved prejudicial attitudes

and stigmatizing language” (Hughes 2010: 46). Among such areas Hughes (2010: 48) lists demeaning terms for women, homosexuals, foreigners, minorities, as well as mentally and physically handicapped people.

Various opinions on the essence of euphemisms have been expressed in research literature. Wałaszewska (2010), for instance, names association with some taboo as an essential feature of euphemistic expressions while Warren (1992: 135) does not see association with a taboo as a necessary feature of euphemisms and instead suggest a weaker criterion for recognizing euphemisms in discourse: “we have a euphemism if the interpreter perceives the use of some word or expression as evidence of a wish on the part of the speaker to denote some sensitive phenomenon in a tactful and/or veiled manner” (Warren 1992: 135).

The two points of view may in fact be quite consonant since the notion of taboo has changed over time and today the term is used differently from its original sense. Today ‘taboo’ has come to mean “highly inappropriate” rather than the traditional sense of “strictly forbidden” (cf. Hughes 2009: 46). In modern societies, the taboos are usually avoided not out of fear of supernatural beings and death, but rather out of concern for not harming the sensibilities of any parties involved. The contemporary taboo topics are avoided because they are felt to be embarrassing, offensive, impolite, xenophobic or otherwise inappropriate under certain social circumstances.

In the following sections I discuss how the need to refer to a topic in an indirect manner necessitates finding new substitutes and leads to proliferation of synonymous expressions, which share the same descriptive content but differ in expressive or ‘connotative’ aspects of meaning.

2.2 Synonymy and concepts

2.2.1 Absolute and near-synonymy

As an area of linguistics research, synonymy, i.e. the semantic relations between linguistic units that influence the structure of the lexicon, has often been neglected and thought of as a non-problem: “[...] either there are synonyms, but they are completely identical in meaning and hence easy to deal with, or there are no synonyms, in which case each word can be handled like any other” (Edmond and Hirst 2001: 106). Research of synonymy by Edmond and Hirst (2001) shows that it is just as complex a phenomenon as, for instance, polysemy and that it inherently affects the structure of lexical knowledge, since synonyms can express a myriad of implications, connotations, and attitudes in addition to their basic dictionary meaning.

Despite the fact that research within the field of lexical pragmatics (e.g. Récanati 1995, 2004; Carston 1997, 2002a, 2010; Blutner 1998, 2002; Wilson and Carston 2006, 2007) has a direct bearing on the semasiological and onomasiological relations, a search query through the Relevance Theory Online Bibliographic Service (<http://www.ua.es/personal/francisco.yus/rt.html>) yielded no entries dedicated to synonyms or synonymy, while polysemy has only recently become the subject of the PhD thesis “The Semantics and Pragmatics of Polysemy: A Relevance-Theoretic Account” (Falkum 2011).

Synonymy is traditionally understood as several lexical or syntactic forms sharing a similar or identical meaning and analyzed in terms of the degree of overlap of their semantic features. In her research Falkum (2011: 10) observes that the fact that several words may have the same meaning was addressed at least as early as the writings of Aristotle who in the opening of his “Categories” distinguished between *synonymy* (‘univocity’) and *homonymy* (‘multivocity’). In a quote from Shields (2009) she describes Aristotelian view of synonymy and homonymy thus:

“Two things, *a* and *b*, are synonymous or univocal if they are both called by the same name *F*, and the definition of *F* is the same for both of them, whereas *a* and *b* are homonymous if they are called by the same name *F*, but the definition of *F* for *a* does not completely overlap with the definition of *F* for *b*. An example of synonymy is the occurrences of *human* in ‘Socrates is a *human*’ and ‘Plato is a *human*’, where the things named by the word *human* are the same in both cases.”

Pinker (1994b) makes an observation to the effect that though most common words have many meanings, few meanings have more than one word. That is homonyms are plentiful while synonyms are rare and virtually all supposed synonyms have some difference in meaning, however small. The rare candidates for absolute synonymy tend to be technical terms. There are, however, cases where even the most seemingly perfect technical candidates for absolute synonyms can nevertheless differ in expressive and attitudinal aspects in certain contexts of use.

Synonyms are traditionally viewed in research literature as units sharing not only the same reference, as the Aristotelian view would suggest, but also having the same sense (see Lyons 1997: 199). Thus on the Fregean view ‘This dog howled the whole night’ and ‘This cur howled the whole night’ would be considered synonymous since they express the same thought (the same sense). They differ in that only the latter conveys an attitude of contempt for the dog on the part of the speaker (see Williamson 2009 for discussion).

According to Murphy (2010) languages generally resist synonymy and it is very rare to find pairs that are perfectly synonymous, even for just one of their sense. Clark (1988) employs the principle of contrast “every two forms contrast in meaning” to show that languages work to eliminate absolute synonyms, i.e., either an absolute synonym would fall into disuse or it would take on a new nuance of meaning. Cruse (1986) echoes the thought that natural languages abhor absolute synonyms just as nature abhors a vacuum, because the meanings of words are constantly changing. Murphy (2010: 112) suggests that people usually assume that different linguistic forms are associated with different meanings and illustrates this point by quoting Clark and Clark (1979) who provide examples of when an established verb *to cook* is contrasted with a new verb *to chef* that denotes the same activity as *to cook*. Under such circumstances hearers can presume that the new coinage must mean something different than *cook* (e.g. as connoting more professionalism).

Modern Ukrainian language, for example, has three different words for *helicopter* in the same neutral register (none of them are slang terms similar to the English word *chopper*). The availability of the three different terms, which coexist in the language to refer to this seemingly affectless and unemotional subject might appear rather odd at the first glance. However, when the extra-linguistic factors and motivations underlying the use of these terms are taken into account, it becomes clear that they reflect Ukraine’s complicated (linguistic) geopolitical situation. Of the three lexical units, *вертоліт* (*vertolit*) is likely to be used by people who are probably fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian as it sounds almost exactly the

same as its Russian language counterpart *вертолет* (*vertolet*), *гвинтокрил* (*hvyntokryl*) is likely to be used by people who pride themselves on speaking pure Ukrainian as it sounds nothing like its Russian counterpart, while the third term *гелікоптер* (*helicopter*) is likely to be used by speakers who declare their pro-Western stance, as this word happens to be a Cyrillic transliteration of the English word *helicopter*.

Clark puts forward a principle, according to which for certain meanings, there is a conventional form that speakers expect to be used in the language community (Clark 1988, 1990). The pragmatic implications of this principle are that it captures the fact that whenever there is a conventional form to express a certain meaning and a speaker uses a novel form instead, the hearer is entitled to make an inference to the effect that the speaker has a different, **contrasting** meaning in mind (provided the alternative expression is salient or ‘manifest’, in relevance-theoretic terms, to the hearer).

M.A.K. Halliday (1978: 165) was among the first researchers to observe that an existing problematic area in a society is often marked by its over-lexicalization in language. To illustrate that a problem area in language is often indicated by the availability of many alternative variations of a concept which lacks a single unmarked form, Harvey and Shalom (1997) list a range of categories which refer to sexual intercourse, including: the technical (*sexual intercourse, fornication, carnal knowledge*); the mild and inoffensive (*go to bed with, sleep with, have sex with*) and the crude and vulgar or dysphemistic (*fuck, shag, screw, shaft, bonk, bang*).

Crespo Fernández (2008: 95–110) notes the tremendously high degree of synonymy in the English vocabulary for genitalia and copulation, while Allan and Burridge (1991: 96) report that English has accumulated more than 1000 synonyms for *penis*, 1200 for *vagina*, 800 for *copulation*, and over 2000 for *prostitute*. The lack of a single unmarked form and the abundance of euphemisms for sex and sex-related terms, death, disease, substance abuse and other “problematic areas” points to the importance of being able to refer to such topics in an indirect circumlocutionary way.

Murphy (2010:110) suggests a substitutability test to determine whether two words are synonyms: “words are substitutable if there is no change in the meaning of a sentence when one word is substituted for the other” (2010: 110). In her example the truth of “A person is standing beside me” entails the truth of “A human is standing beside me”, and vice versa and hence *person* and *human* are synonyms. At the same time on her account *man* and *person* are

not synonyms since there are things that can be referred to as *person* that cannot be called *man* – namely, *women, girls, boys*.

With regards to euphemistic language use, we can see that, for instance the euphemistic, *passed away* appears to be fully synonymous with *died*, however fails the intersubstitutability test in *The flowers have passed away* vs. *The flowers have died* due to the difference in attitudes communicated by the two sentences. The euphemistic *pass away* is inappropriate in reference to flowers, or any other non-sentient being for that matter, because one cannot be expected to seriously express the kind of attitude in relations to flowers that he/she expresses towards people. Therefore uttering *The flowers have passed away* will most likely be interpreted as a kind of an ironic statement or as a sort of poetic language echoing attitudes speakers show towards other human beings.

McGlone et al. (2006) argue that when technological or scientific advancements alter the way society conceives of a topic, conceptual innovation is the engine of euphemism production. The authors regard conceptual innovation as the driving force behind terminological turnover in social, cultural, and political domains as well. Their view is contrasted with that of Pinker (1994a, 1994b), who attributes the appearance of new euphemistic synonyms in the vernacular to the power of concepts over words. This power, according to Pinker (1994a, 1994b), is what drove the succession from *colored people* to *Negro* to *black* to *African-American* to *people of color*.

McGlone et al. (2006) argue that, Pinker's (1994a, 1994b) assertion to the contrary notwithstanding, the terms *negro*, *black*, *African-American*, and *person of color* are not synonyms: "At different times in recent history, the same individual might have been identified (and perhaps also identified herself) using each of these terms. However, common reference is distinct from synonymy <...> [T]he terms *African-American* and *people of color* are motivated by different sociopolitical agendas. The former communicates respect by emphasizing ethnicity over race and the latter was intended to replace the negatively framed racial label nonwhite with a positive <...>" McGlone et al. (2006: 278).

Murphy (2010) points out that synonyms that are denotationally identical may still be different in non-denotational ways – for example, by belonging to different dialects, registers, or by having different connotations (Murphy 2010: 111). Thus the synonyms for *toilet facilities* are not strictly substitutable because the sentences: "*Where is the john?*", "*Where is the lavatory?*" and "*Where is the powder room?*" would not be equally appropriate in all

social contexts (see Murphy 2010: 112 for discussion) as the attitudes to what is said expressed by speakers would be different in each case.

Modern research on synonymy tends to agree that that there exist few words in well-studied natural languages that are absolutely synonymous in that they can be used interchangeably in some range of contexts without any difference of affective, emotive or socio-expressive meaning (for discussion see Lyons 2002: 469). According to Murphy's (2010) definition, words are said to be absolute synonyms if they are substitutable in any possible context with no changes in denotation or other aspects of meaning including *connotations*, i.e. the emotional responses and associations which can be triggered, for instance, by the above-mentioned tabooed and sensitive topics, a detailed discussion of which is presented in the following section.

2.2.2 Connotations and perspectivization

Pinker (2007: 18) illustrates connotational aspects of meaning by the formula devised by Bertrand Russell in a 1950s radio interview: *I am firm; you are obstinate; he is pigheaded*. In this triplet the words denote very similar concepts, but the attitudinal meanings communicated by them range from attractive to neutral to offensive or in Allan and Burridge's (2006) parlance: from euphemism to orthophemism to dysphemism – a continuum of co-referential cross-varietal synonyms which share the denotation but differ in connotations. Similarly to Russell's triplet, the nomination *religious organization*, is a euphemism clearly representing the point of view of someone whose attitude to it is positive, while referring to the same religious group as a *sect* is dysphemistic as in most cases the connotations communicated by the use of this word will be negative enough to provide evidence of the negative stance assumed by the speaker.

Rigotti and Rocci (2006) show that the terminological opposition *denotation* and *connotation* has been variously used in philosophy, linguistics, semiotics and stylistics to indicate a number of diverse distinctions in the realm of meaning. Their meta-analysis of the two notions has discovered that it is customary to distinguish two broad uses of *denotation* and *connotation* as technical terms in semantics: a philosophical use and a semiotic-stylistic use.

Allan (2006) traces the history of the term *connotation* to the distinction made by medieval researchers such as Duns Scotus (c 1266 – 1308) and William Ockham (c 1285 – 1349) between *connotatum* and *significatum*. Allan (2006) shows that Mill (1843) contrasts connotation with denotation much as Frege (1892) contrasts *Sinn* with *Bedeutung* and later writers *sense* with *reference* and *intension* with *extension*. There is, however, another use of *connote* that distinguishes it from *sense* and *intension*.

In this thesis I use the term 'connotation' in the sense that is different from the idiosyncratic notion of J.S. Mill who in "A system of logic" (1895) writes: "The word 'white' denotes all white things, as snow, paper, the foam of the sea, and so forth, and, implies, or as it was termed by the schoolmen, connotes, the attribute whiteness" and is closer to what Frege (1892) meant by 'fragrance', 'coloring' and 'tone'.

Rigotti and Rocci (2006) note that in some of the broad interpretations, the opposition denotation vs. connotation tends to overlap with a series of distinctions that have occupied the center stage in the recent debates on the relationship between semantics and pragmatics in the linguistic and philosophical literature: "distinctions such as propositional (or truth-

conditional) meaning vs. nonpropositional (non-truth-conditional) meaning, literal²³ vs. nonliteral meaning, coded vs. inferred meaning” (Rigotti and Rocci 2006: 437).

Rigotti and Rocci (2006) argue that connoted meanings are not part of the truth conditions of the proposition directly associated with the meaning of the sentence in which they appear, in other words, that they belong to nonpropositional meaning, since phenomena habitually associated with connotation exhibit the basic properties shared by all nonpropositional semantic components (e.g., they are not part of the asserted content and cannot be negated).

This view echoes the distinction, which Kaplan (2005) between two different kinds of semantic content, **descriptive**, representing the world as being a certain way and hence capable of being evaluated as true or false and **expressive**, representing speaker’s attitude and not capable of being evaluated as true or false²⁴.

Allan (2006) quotes Leech (1981) as saying that connotations are **semantic** effects that arise from encyclopedic knowledge about its denotation (or referent) and also from experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about the contexts in which the expression is typically used (Allan 2006: 41). In a later article on the pragmatics of connotation, Allan (2007: 1047) indicates that connotations are **pragmatic** effects, intimately involved with notions of appropriateness in language use.

To illustrate that connotations of a word are not exclusively properties of the truth-conditional semantics but can be regarded as pragmatic effects connected to the use of a word in a particular context, let’s consider the following example from “The Big Bang Theory” (Season 4 Episode 12).

(8)

*Howard: Why am I listed as your **executive assistant**?*

*Sheldon: Cause the word **secretary** has fallen into disrepute. Oh fyi, my mother’s birthday is coming up and I’m gonna need you to pick up a present.*

It is often the case that people doing secretarial work in the office are referred to as *executive assistants* with the purpose of elevating the status of this occupation. Meanwhile, when the word *secretary* appears as part of the word-combination *Secretary of defense*, it is

²³ Following Frege (1952), the literal meaning of any sentence is traditionally thought to be its compositional meaning (i.e., the combined meaning of the individual words apart from context).

²⁴ Hedger (2012; 2013) points out that Kaplan considers expressive content truth-apt just in case the attitude expressed is one which is genuinely held by the speaker. Kaplan’s idea is that an expression is “expressively correct” just in case it displays what is the case, which is usually an attitude of the speaker.

considered a respectable term that does not require any dignifying substitute to ameliorate its meaning²⁵. The different associations the word *secretary* invokes in various contexts point to the fact that connotation is a thoroughly pragmatic aspect of meaning – a kind of meaning, which Leech (1981) refers to as ‘affective meaning’. From the pragmatic point of view, the use of the polysemous word *secretary* in discourse is constantly contextually adjusted: *secretary1* used to refer to a job that welcomes an exonerating euphemistic substitute and *secretary2* that does not require euphemization.

As we can see from example (8), “occupational euphemisms” can be used with the purpose of elevating prestige of certain occupations and professions. Thus *sanitation engineer* sounds more exalted than *garbage collector*, as does *vermin control officer* or *rodent extermination officer* for *rat catcher*. In this respect Chamizo Domínguez (2009: 442) points out that it is a fact of experience that the prestige of a given social group often depends on the kind of euphemisms it uses in order to refer to its own activity in contrast with the terms that the out-groupers use in order to refer to the same activity. He also notes that this not only happens with regard to professions of doubtful reputé, but also with regard to many other professions whose reputé is not, in principle, called into question. For example, women who look after the passengers on a ship or aircraft do not call themselves *stewardesses*, but prefer to be called *flight assistants/attendants* or *cabin assistants/attendants*.

Considering that what counts as synonymous from a pragmatic point of view is constrained not by some contextually independent semantic meanings of lexical units but rather by the fact that some units become co-referential in certain context, lexicalizations of similar concepts cannot simply be viewed as synonyms by virtue of their semantics, but they might have the potential to be used in similar ways in certain contexts.

To illustrate this point, let’s take an example from the show “Seinfeld” quoted in Steven Pinker’s book “The stuff of thought” (2007) in which ‘*come up for coffee*’ is used synonymously²⁶ with (it’s meaning is ‘broadened’ to include) ‘*have sexual intercourse*’:

(9)

²⁵ The joke-generating potential of such a substitution can be observed in the following example from “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” (06-01-09): *Hilary Clinton is going to become one of Obama’s secretaries [Secretary of State – A.S.J.]. Well, first of all, I think they are called ‘executive assistants’.*

²⁶ Cruse points out that a synonym is often employed as an explanation, or clarification, of the meaning of another word. (Cruse 1986: 267). Thus, in this example *coffee* (unidirectionally) means *sex*.

George is asked by his date if he would like to come up for coffee. He declines, explaining that caffeine keeps him up at night. Later he slaps his forehead and realizes, “‘Coffee’ doesn’t mean coffee! ‘Coffee’ means sex!”

In this example, the utterer of “Would you like to come up for coffee?” is directly or ‘explicitly’ suggesting a drink while may be indirectly or ‘implicitly’ suggesting a follow-up in the form of a sexual intercourse with a high degree of plausible deniability made possible by the cancellable nature of conversational implicatures.

Among the central problems in synonymy research Edmond and Hirst (2001) name the issue of contextual appropriateness: “<...> in order to find the right word to use in any particular situation – the one that precisely conveys the desired meaning and yet avoids unwanted implications – one must carefully consider the differences between all of the options.” (Edmond and Hirst 2001: 105) This is tantamount to saying that **in the process of communication, speakers constantly (carefully) select their words from paradigmatic sets of available synonymous alternatives, if they want their utterances to produce the desired effect upon the hearers.** Such paradigmatic sets of synonyms to choose from are not set and static, but are dynamically evolving and are constantly updated as a result of language use. For instance, in the context of social network statuses, the neutral *not married* becomes a sort of a euphemisms – an attenuated expression weaker and vaguer than the alternative straightforward *single, dating, in a relationship, actively searching* etc.

While the degree of “carefulness” or cognitive effort speakers are willing to invest into producing the most contextually appropriate synonym relative to their communicative goals will vary considerably from speaker to speaker and from situation to situation, we can imagine that there are instances when doctors, faced with the need of having to communicate the “bad news” to their patients, try (are obliged to) to find the most efficient euphemistic substitutes for the direct nomination in an attempt to exercise utmost tact and caution. This can be illustrated by the following example from the Commencement address delivered by Steve Jobs on June 12, 2005 at Stanford University:

(10)

*“About a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I had a scan at 7:30 in the morning, and it clearly showed a tumor on my pancreas. I didn't even know what a pancreas was. The doctors told me this was almost certainly a type of cancer that is incurable, and that I should expect to live no longer than three to six months. My doctor advised me to **go home and get my affairs in order**, which is doctor's code*

for **prepare to die**. It means to try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 10 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. **It means to say your goodbyes**".²⁷

Languages offer alternative synonymous or 'co-referential' expressions for seemingly truth-functionally equivalent expressions – *dad/father*, *spend/waste*, etc., because it often turns out that there are some situations that so favor one conceptualization over another that the other expression is contextually inappropriate and so the two expressions are not always judged as truth-functionally equivalent.

Looking at the set of synonyms *crippled*, *handicapped*, *disabled*, and *physically challenged*, one can argue that connotations of *disabled* are more 'benevolent' than those conveyed by *crippled* and *handicapped*. This is reflected in lexicographical sources by marking *crippled*, for example, as 'somewhat offensive' and 'sometimes offensive' (Battistella 2005: 98), as the meaning of this lexeme emphasizes the debilitating effect of an affliction on one's body. Battistella (2005) points out that the term *crippled* is also inaccurate in that afflictions that were once crippling are, in light of medical and social advances, often less debilitating today. The author considers the term *physically challenged* to be less than optimal since it is both long and somewhat euphemistic, representing disability almost as an opportunity to test oneself: "Euphemisms call attention to a speaker's connotation and so the term singles out the disabled in the same way that disparaging usage might." (Battistella 2005: 98)

The source of connotational nuances in meaning can be regarded as assuming a certain perspective or looking at something from different angles: from in front, from the sides, from behind, from on top, etc. In this respect Cruse (2004: 115) notes that all these different views are perceptually distinct, but the mind unifies them into a single conceptual unity during construction of meaning.

Powell (2010) points out that for Frege, one of the key facts about meaning is that linguistic expressions present what they refer to in a particular way. This is tantamount to postulating that we cannot think of something or someone other than as the satisfier of certain properties:

"I can't entertain a bare thought about the desk I'm working at, for instance; I must instead think of it as that which is presented to me in such-and-such a way. Given this

²⁷ Attested: <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html>

epistemological slant there can be, for Frege, no non-connotative names: if a name were non-connotative, it would seem that to grasp the meaning of that name would be simply to think of its referent, without thinking of that referent in any particular way. All singular expressions must therefore have descriptive meaning, that is, sense. Not only does this view tie in with the fundamental tenets of Frege's epistemology, it also offers a way out of a puzzle that has dominated the philosophy of reference for a century, a puzzle that has come to be known as Frege's puzzle." Powell (2010: 5)

Indeed, whenever people speak they express some point of view from which their discourse is represented. It is not possible to represent something, without representing it from some point. Sometimes the vantage point is expressed more explicitly and sometimes it is implicit and will take longer to recognize, however "no sentence (or rather utterance of a sentence on a particular occasion, A.S.) in any discourse is free from a certain degree of perspectivization." (Sanders and Redeker 1996: 290) Thus if discourse perspective is broadly defined as a particular vantage point, then no utterance in any discourse is free from a certain degree of perspectivization or activation of some background, 'encyclopedic' properties associated with the concepts²⁸ in particular contexts of use.

Such 'perspectivization' can be achieved in discourse strategically through 'framing', which Hart (forthcoming) describes as the process whereby "particular concepts invoked in discourse provide access to associated knowledge structures giving rise to connotative and affective meaning as well as making available particular inferences". Hart (forthcoming) makes a very important point for this research to the effect that strategic framing may potentially exploit the relevance-driven nature of human cognition (see section 1.2) so as to make certain inferences likely to be entertained whilst potentially closing down others (as suggested by O'Halloran 2003 and Maillat and Oswald 2011).

The same event or phenomenon can be framed in rather different terms, depending, for example, on the political stance/country of origin of the media sources covering it. Alternative categorization evoke, according to Hart (forthcoming), alternative organized sets of knowledge or 'frames', which trigger different emotions and entailments in their addressees and result in alternative conceptualizations of events etc. (see also Hart 2013).

To illustrate the role of connotations in conveying a certain perspective, Potapova (2008) gives the following examples: a person can be *dismissed* or *fired*, but can also be

²⁸ As shown in the next sub-section, in Relevance Theory a concept is considered as providing access to lexical, logical and encyclopedic information in memory (Sperber and Wilson 1995).

released as a result of *downsizing*, *streamlining* or *rightsizing* of a company. Here *downsizing* is used to invite hearers to look at this event from a different point of view and to distance management from assuming responsibility for the mass dismissals associated with organizational restructuring. *Downsizing* and *redundancy* now tend to be invoked as synonymous linguistic alternatives.

The word *independent* is another example of ‘perspectivizing’²⁹ at work. It may activate a different sets of encyclopedic properties associated with the concept depending on the context of use. According to O’Sullivan et al. (1994: 148) *independent* has been made to describe funding sources; the term is a euphemism for ‘capitalist’ or ‘commercial’ in the British broadcasting scene, where the main commercial channels in both television and radio (ITV and ILR) and their regulatory bodies (the ITC and Radio Authority) are dubbed independent – presumably of state ownership. At the same time the ‘independent film sector’ uses the term to help secure public funds from bodies like the Arts Council, British Film Institute and local councils for low-budget non-commercial production. Hence the same term has been found useful at the opposite extremes of the film world.

The notions of connotation and perspectivization are central to drawing the distinction between euphemisms and dysphemisms in that euphemisms aim at ameliorating negative aspects associated with referents of expressions by ascribing them positive connotations and focusing hearers’ attention on the more positive aspect(s) while presenting them as salient features of the referent, while dysphemisms aim at denigrating referents by focusing on and exaggerating some negative aspect(s) of the referent.

At the core of any theorizing about synonymy lies the issue of how concepts are represented in human cognitive systems to the discussion of which I turn in the following section.

²⁹ See also Allott (2005) on the misuse of concept DEMOCRACY.

2.2.3 Mental representation of concepts

2.2.3.1 Imagistic and propositional mental representations

Conceiving of understanding utterances in terms of mental images they produce in people's cognitive systems is quite common in research literature. R. Lakoff, for instance, argues that whenever a speaker utters 'desk', hearers will form in their minds an image of a particular sort of piece of furniture. Uttering 'table', will produce another image, with some similarities to and some differences from 'desk'. According to Lakoff, in such cases reference is all we need to worry about as most of us don't attach positive or negative connotations to these words (Lakoff 2000: 86-87).

In analyzing the frequent use of euphemistic language in technostrategic discourse, Cohn (1987: 1) writes:

“<...> certain nuclear devices are labeled as *clean bombs*, directing perception away from the dreadful results of their high-energy blasts. *Counter value attacks* obscure the destruction of cities, and *collateral damage* neatly hides the resultant human corpses”.

She notes that there is an explicit element of sanitization in some aspects of representation: *clean bombs* are employed in *surgically clean strikes* where an opponent's weapons or command centres can be *taken out*, meaning that they are accurately destroyed without significant damage to anything else. Cohn (ibid.: 2) finds such a “surgical metaphor” inappropriate and states that **the image** is unspeakably ludicrous when the surgical tool is not a delicately controlled scalpel but a nuclear warhead.

Employment of such metaphors as *surgical strike* with the purpose of argumentatively perspectivizing or focusing on certain aspects of reality while backgrounding others, in this case to justify the ethics of drone attacks US carries out around the world, is mocked extensively in the media. For instance, Stephen Colbert quotes a statement by the director of the CIA John Brennan to the effect that the US has made it clear that these drone attacks are done with surgical precision, and notes sarcastically, that the best way for a surgeon to remove one's appendix, is by Hellfire missile: “We may have vaporized your liver, kidney and spleen, but your appendix is on the run.” (“The Colbert Report” 13.11.2013)

Research by Gallese and Lakoff (2005) has found that the same neural substrate used in imagining is used in understanding: “Consider a simple sentence, like ‘Harry picked up the glass.’ If you can't imagine picking up a glass or seeing someone picking up a glass, then you

can't understand that sentence". On this view, understanding is imagination, and *that what one understands of a sentence in a context is the meaning of that sentence in that context*.³⁰

It is indeed tempting to think of euphemistic language in terms of images it produces, metaphorically ascribing it the capability of covering up facts and blurring reality. In "Politics and the English Language" Orwell, for instance, appears to be assuming this type of imagistic view of comprehension process in describing how euphemism and academic language are used to *blur* the meaning of facts and *cover up* details: "*Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things **without calling up mental pictures of them**.*" (my emphasis, A.S.)." (Orwell 1946)

According to Carston (2010: 3), the primary exponent of an image theory is Davidson (1978/84), according to whom there is no such thing as a metaphorical meaning and what a metaphor does is bring to our attention aspects of the topic that we might not otherwise notice, by provoking us or nudging us to 'see' the topic in a new or unusual way. On Davidson's view, rather than communicating a cognitive content, a metaphor evokes certain responses, including mental images.

In proposing a hybrid theory of metaphor, Tendahl (2009) discusses Carston's (2002a) observation that many metaphors have a strikingly imagistic quality and that an account of metaphor that only focuses on conceptual representations might leave out an important feature of metaphor. Carston suggests that figurative language processing should encompass aspects of both the proposition theory and the image theory since full understanding of any metaphor involves both a propositional/conceptual component and an imagistic component, though the relative weight and strength of each of these varies greatly from case to case. The distinction between two modes of processing focuses on the way in which the propositional component may vary across different metaphors, both with regard to how it is derived and to its strength or determinacy: "Images are not only non-propositional *effects* of metaphor comprehension but also, at least in some instances, *vehicles* used in the recovery of propositional effects." (Carston 2010)

As an instance of figurative language, euphemisms also have to do with images. For example, if the expression *collateral damage*, used instead of *accidental killing of civilians*

³⁰ Wittgenstein (1961) called the 'pictures of reality as we imagine it *propositions* in "The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus" (Paragraph 4.01.). They are bearers of truth and falsity and the contents of these mental pictures or mental states, such as belief, knowledge, doubt, supposition, memory, desire, intention, and so on were called *propositional attitudes* by Russel (1903).

during military operations, succeeds in ‘masking’ the fact that innocent people died then the reality has been distorted. Thus in cognitive terms, euphemisms can be viewed as used when one wants to name things without conjuring up a mental image of them. The aim of using euphemisms can be regarded as striking at a person’s imagination.

This suggestion is in line with Gambino’s (1973) discussion of how through the power of sanitized palliative hygienic language, even killing a human being loses much of its repugnancy. Soldiers *waste* people rather than kill them. Bombing missions are described as *servicing the target*, in the likeness of a public utility. The attacks become *clean, surgical strikes*, arousing imagery of curative activities. Similarly, calling the slaughterhouse with a foreign borrowing *abattoir* may stop steak-loving animal-right activists from conjuring dissonant images in their cognitive environments. *Aviary* sounds and somehow “looks” better than *bird-cage*.

Considering this, it becomes problematic to assume that euphemisms are resorted to whenever there is a need to name things without calling up a mental image of them. The motivational goal of using euphemisms and politically correct expressions can thus be assumed to be something else. I will later argue for regarding it to be the expression of certain attitudes to the proposition expressed by utterances containing euphemisms/PC expressions, and therefore as having more to do with considerations of speaker’s, hearer’s or some third party’s positive or negative self-image or ‘face’, rather than with shielding the hearer from communicative discomfort through not calling up unfavorable mental images.

Contrary to advocates of the mental-image view of concepts, Pinker (2002) argues that there are convincing reasons why images cannot constitute the contents of our thoughts. His explanation is that images, like words, are inherently ambiguous:

“An image of Lassie could stand for Lassie, collies, dogs, animals, television stars, or family values. Some other, more abstract form of information must pick out the concept that an image is taken to exemplify. Or consider the sentence ‘Yesterday my uncle fired his lawyer’ (an example suggested by Dan Dennett). When understanding the sentence, Brad might visualize his own ordeals of the day before and glimpse the ‘uncle’ slot in a family tree, then picture courthouse steps and an angry man. Irene might have no image for ‘yesterday’ but might visualize her uncle Bob’s face, a slamming door, and a power-suited woman. Yet despite these very different image sequences, both people have understood the sentence in the same way, as we could see by questioning them or asking them to paraphrase the sentence. Imagery couldn’t be

the key to comprehension, Dennett points out, because you can't draw a picture of an uncle, or of yesterday, or firing, or a lawyer. Uncles, unlike clowns and firemen, don't look different in any characteristic way that can be visually represented, and yesterdays don't look like anything at all <...> People are not helplessly programmed with images; they can evaluate and interpret what they see using everything else they know, such as the credibility and motives of the source.” (Pinker 2002: 193)

Carston (2010: 318) suggests that the evocation of imagery through language use may fall in with other psychological responses or ‘perlocutionary’ effects (see Austin 1962) such as being scared, amused, comforted, moved etc., which, although not communicated as such, can be (intentionally) triggered by uttering something.

If images are the sole medium of comprehension, it is hard to imagine (pun intended) what (prototypical) images uttering lexemes like *education*, *trust*, *married*, etc. are supposed to conjure. Even if they were produced, the resulting mental imagery would be so individual-specific that it would render understanding each other next to impossible. There is absolutely no guarantee that the images associated with the thoughts speakers intend to communicate, which they see with their ‘mind’s eye’, will be in any way similar to the ones hearers entertain in their own cognitive systems. It appears that the situation with comprehension Davidson referred to as “<...> a picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture” (Davidson 1978/1984: 263), works both ways and pictures are also the wrong currency to exchange for words.

Discarding the purely imagistic view of cognitive representation of concepts, from the so-called atomistic point of view advocated, among others, by Fodor (1998), Fodor and Lepore (1992), and contrasted with meaning holism adopted in structuralism (cf. discussion in Jaszczolt 2002), such synonymous doublets as *water* and *H₂O*, *lie detector* and *polygraph* cannot be said to be identical representations: they are co-referential, but differ in **the mode of presentation**. This problem is central to this research since its focus is the lexical choices speakers make in discourse: what motivates communicators to create and resort to the “cross-varietal synonyms” (Allan and Burridge 2006) or co-referential (public and private) representations, which share the denotation but differ in modes of presentation of the referent, and how utterances containing them are represented and understood in the cognitive systems of their addressees during their online processing.

Mental pictures associated with the use of, for example, *Native Americans* and *Indians*, *mentally retarded* and *cognitively challenged* will, arguably, be identical as these

expressions refer to the same fragments of reality or in other words have the same truth-conditional value or content (Kaplan's '*descriptive meaning*'), but, at the same time, the different connotations associated with the use of different synonymous linguistic forms, serve as evidence of speaker's intention to convey a certain attitude to that content (Kaplan's '*expressive meaning*').

Relevance Theory generally assumes the propositionalist view of concept representation and adopts the non-decompositional Fodorian atomistic view of the nature of conceptual representations (but see the discussion of the "periphrastic" nature of 'ad hoc' concepts in chapter 9) on which the lexical form *rabbit* encodes ('maps to') the unstructured concept RABBIT. In a recent study, however, working within the framework of Relevance Theory, Pilkington (2010) convincingly argues that mental imagery does play a role in accounting for the so-called emergent properties in metaphor comprehension and that imagery is a distinctive type of mental category which is not reducible to conceptual. Similarly, Carston (2010) believes that future work within RT on the pragmatics of figurative language use needs to look more closely at the role of imagistic representation.

According to Fodor's theory of cognitive concept representation, also known as the Language of Thought Hypothesis (Fodor 1975), a mentally represented concept, a constituent of the 'language of thought' (Fodor 1975, 2008), is seen as an address (or entry) in memory that may provide access to three types of information: the *logical* properties of the concept (e.g. one-way meaning postulates, such as $\text{RABBIT} \rightarrow \text{KIND OF ANIMAL}$); a set of assumptions, or *encyclopedic* information, about the denotation of the concept, that is, conceptually represented assumptions and beliefs, including stereotypes and culture-specific information about the denotation as well as personal idiosyncratic observations and experiences, scenarios, scripts, and also, in many cases, imagistic and/or sensory-perceptual representations (e.g. RABBITS HAVE FUR , $\text{RABBITS ARE EDIBLE}$, $\text{RABBITS HAVE FOUR LEGS}$, $\text{RABBITS LOOK LIKE THIS: [MENTAL IMAGE]}$, etc.).

Following Fodor, RT (Sperber and Wilson 1998: 94) regards concepts as atomic entities consisting of addresses in memory which make available three kinds of information: logical, lexical and encyclopedic. Thus every concept consists of information about deductive rules in which the concept may be involved or entailment relations. In addition, there is information about linguistic signs connected to that concept, for example words, phrases and their collocations. Last but not least, there is information about the denotation and

connotations of that concept, for example, typical objects or ideas instantiating the concept plus potential attitudes and feelings towards them.

There exist two major approaches to the issue of concept stability: *internalism* and *externalism*. According to the internalist approach, we can account for their stability, and their contents, by looking only at cognitive information represented inside the mind (Vega Moreno: 2007: 19). The internalist view holds that concepts are different when people form different mental representations even if the represented category remains the same. From an externalist point of view proposed by Fodor (1998) and which Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Carston 2002a) holds, although two conceptual representations that pick out different things in the world are necessarily different concepts, picking out the same thing in the world, does not make two conceptual representations identical. To be identical they must also share the mode of presentation (see Vega Moreno 2007: 20). These opposing views have numerous consequences not only for what should count as a concept, but for what should count, or not, as a pairing between a linguistic form and a concept.

2.2.3.2 Conceptual representation of cross-varietal synonyms

A recent state of the art regarding the issue of how concepts are represented in the so-called “mental lexicon” is provided by Falkum (2011: 28ff.) who in her PhD thesis discusses two main research paradigms, which try to answer the question of what word meanings are and what kind of mental representations are encoded by lexical forms. The author refers to a fundamental debate in lexical semantics of whether word meanings decompose into smaller units of meaning held by lexical decomposition approaches, according to which in order to capture meaning relations between words (e.g. synonymy, entailment) word meanings must consist of complex representations (e.g. ‘the sense enumeration lexicon’ advocated by Katz 1972). Thus on the decompositionalist view, the euphemistic synonym for *die* ‘*pass away*’ would mean (translated into the mental lexicon) DIE. Falkum (2011: 74) points to a range of problems associated with decompositional accounts in general: the incompleteness of many decompositions, the vagueness of many concepts, the fact that we may be ignorant or mistaken about the properties we take the instances of a concept to have, etc. (e.g. does *pass away* simply mean DIE or DIE IN A PEACEFUL/NON-VIOLENT MANNER?)

The view that takes concepts to have their components (definitions, prototype structures, etc.) as proper parts is opposed by the non-decompositional approaches, which hold that word meanings do not arise from definitions, but are (innate) primitive unstructured atoms and that most lexical concepts have no internal structure or proper parts (see Fodor 1975; 2008). On this view, *pass away* means PASS AWAY. The specific sets of meaning distinctions or ways of expressing an attitude to someone’s death can be lexicalized by such sets of cross-varietal synonyms as *passing away* (associated with a compassionate attitude) and *kicking the bucket* (associated with flippant attitude) in English, while they can involve a more descriptive way of explicitly expressing one’s attitude involving the use of *die* plus some propositional attitude marker in a different language³¹.

In Fodor’s Representational Theory of Mind, concepts are considered to be mental representations, which are the constituents of propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires and thinking is considered to take place in the language of thought or ‘mentalese’

³¹ Such synonymous expressions can be viewed as belonging to or being part of some lexical semantic network, field or “frame” (cf. Lakoff 1987) with the more and less prototypical ways of dying DIE1 DIE2 DIE3 etc.

(Fodor 1975, 1998). Mentalese is conceived of as a system of representations, which has a language-like syntax and a compositional semantics.

Among the first advocates of the Language of Thought hypothesis was Chomsky who argued in 1957 that thought had to be translated into language in the process of linguistic expression, and translated out of language into a language of thought in the process of linguistic comprehension. Fodor (1975) subsequently proposed that words and sentences come by their meaning through being paired with internally represented formulae in ‘mentalese’. On his view, mentalese is not a public language. It has expressive power equal to or surpassing that of public language. Pinker (1994b) develops Fodor’s (1975) hypothesis that the language of thought probably looks like all the languages; presumably it has symbols for concepts, and arrangements of symbols. Following Chomsky, Pinker (1994b) claims that language understanding involves the translation of regular language into the language of thought.

Carston (2006: 559) explains that the idea that there is a language of thought amounts to the following: “having a thought with a particular content is a matter of being related in a certain way to a sentence in an innately given mental language”. According to Carston, a thought is an intentional state of mind, where intentional mental states are those that have the property of being representational, that is, of being about the world. Beliefs, desires, intentions, hopes, and fears, commonly referred to as ‘propositional attitudes’, are different types of intentional mental states (Carston 2006: 559), since they involve the having of an attitude to a content or proposition, i.e., to believe or fear something is to bear a relation to an inner sentence token that means the content of that belief is fear.

Despite viewing most words as encoding atomic concepts, which are constituents of thought, Relevance Theory regards natural language sentences not as encoding sentences in the language of thought but rather as providing a blueprint, which must be inferentially enriched in order to construct such language of thought sentences. Carston (2002a) argues that natural language sentences cannot be assigned a ‘real’ truth-conditional semantics, since they drastically underdetermine propositional content. She notes, however, that words that encode concepts may inherit a referential semantics from the concepts (CAT, SING, OPEN, RAW, HAPPY, etc.) which they encode (and so activate in an addressee’s mind when uttered) (Carston 2002b).

As propositionally equivalent cross-varietal synonyms, euphemisms are hypernyms of their dysphemistic counterparts (the denotation of a euphemism is a set that contains the

subset of denotation of the dysphemistic term). There are sound pragmatic assumptions available in order to explain this hyperonymic property: the hypernym being less specific, picking the specific concept, requires inferencing then optionality, hence indirectness. The semantic generalization associated with the use of hypernyms enables the speaker to “broaden the borders of truth” as, for instance, anything can be meant by *incident*, *issue*, *situation*, *reform*, *optimization* and *doing it* (which, despite bordering on semantic vacuity, is a conventional euphemism for *having sex*).

Thus in the example (9), where the hyperonymic *come up for coffee* is used to euphemistically imply (stand for) the more direct *have sex*, the implicated meaning is defeasible, which allows for plausible deniability. In time, however, **the frequent inferential broadening the meaning of *come up for coffee* to *have sex* can lead to semantic change resulting from the conventionalization of such inferences** The dispreferred *have sex* can become the default meaning derivable (but still cancellable) from this expression irrespective of the underlying speaker’s intention in uttering this locution.

The following example from “The Big Bang Theory” (Season 2 Episode 20) demonstrates that the semantic change resulting from conventionalization of inferences associated with the use of *come in for some coffee* leading to is automatic interpretation as *have sex*, is a very individual-specific matter, i.e. it is a **convention of use**, rather than a convention of language:

(11)

*Penny: Um, you know, it’s kind of early. Do you want to maybe **come in for some coffee** or something?*

Stuart: Oh, gee, it’s a little late for coffee, isn’t it?

*Penny: Oh, **you think coffee, means coffee**. That is so sweet. Come on, I think I have decaf.*

In this example the lexicalized concept COFFEE can be interpreted as meaning COFFEE1 in its usual drink-sense, as well as COFFEE2 as meaning *sexual intercourse*. A speaker responding “No thanks, I’ve already had coffee” to an invitation “Would you like to come up for coffee” extended at the end of a date, can be implicating:

I don’t want to have any more COFFEE1

Implicated premise: if I drink much coffee in the evening, I will have trouble falling asleep

Implicated conclusion: I don't want to have coffee now because it will keep me up all night

On the other hand, the response can be intended as implicating "I'm not interested in having COFFEE2 with you", where both the speaker and the hearer can deny having intended *coffee* to mean COFFEE2. Such cases of polysemy are explained in Relevance Theory in terms of online modulation of conceptual meaning due to pragmatic factors operating at the level of individual words resulting in the construction of occasion-specific 'ad hoc' concepts (see Falkum 2011). In Chapter 9 I apply this relevance-theoretic model of lexical pragmatics to analyzing how euphemisms/PC are processed online.

According to Warren's (1992) observation, contextual meanings are constantly created in language and euphemisms are created when the novel term or expression is a "desirable alternative" (Warren 1992: 130). The following section reviews suggestions made in research literature on the topic regarding what should count as a 'euphemism' as well as proposals on various structural and lexical-semantic patterns of creating euphemisms.

2.3 Definitions and suggested ways of formation

2.3.1 Lexical-semantic and structural means of euphemization

This thesis does not pursue lexicographical goals of compiling and classifying paradigmatic lists of euphemistic synonyms related to various topics. This kind of research has been successfully undertaken previously and such sources are constantly updated by lexicographers. Among them are such reference volumes as Holder (2003), Neaman and Silver (1995), Rawson (1981), Ayto (1993). Lexicographers who compile dictionaries of euphemisms and dysphemisms typically base their collections on social attitudes to the situation in which they believe a given expression is uttered.

There exists a plethora of definitions of euphemisms in research literature, which Casas Gomez (2009) classifies into several main groups: the extralinguistic, the strictly linguistic and the ones that draw a distinction between word taboo or linguistic taboo/interdiction and concept taboo or conceptual interdiction. The author points out that most non-linguistic definitions classify euphemisms according to their motivation and not because of the mechanism underlying or linguistic resources employed for their production. For example, Scott (1990) argues that from the psychological point of view we tend to invoke euphemisms, and are encouraged by others to invoke euphemistic forms or phrasing, as a means of skirting around issues and ideas which, otherwise, would be problematic and/or discomfiting to address by more direct means.

Casas Gomez (2009) defines euphemism or dysphemism as “the cognitive process of conceptualization of a forbidden reality, which, manifested in discourse through the use of linguistic mechanisms including lexical substitution, phonetic alteration, morphological modification, composition or inversion, syntagmatic grouping or combination, verbal or paralinguistic modulation or textual description, enables the speaker, in a certain context or in a specific pragmatic situation, to attenuate, or, on the contrary, to reinforce a certain forbidden concept or reality” (Casas Gomez 2009: 738).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a euphemism as “*That figure of speech which consists in the substitution of a word or expression of comparatively favorable implication or less unpleasant associations, instead of the harsher or more offensive one that would more precisely designate what is intended... which partakes of the nature of metaphor*”. Halmari (2011: 828) notes that major dictionaries of the English language ascribe the following attributes to euphemistic expressions: they are mild, vague, roundabout, indirect, polite, less

distasteful, inoffensive, agreeable, tactful, less explicit, have comparatively favorable implications or less unpleasant associations, whereas the substituted phrase is characterized as harsh, blunt, direct, distasteful, painful, unpleasant, taboo, indelicate, offensive, or frightening.

For such informal definitions, what makes a euphemism such is directly linked to favorable and less unpleasant connotations vs. harsh or more offensive connotations triggered by the alternative wording. The obvious disadvantage of such an analysis is that it can turn into a discussion of the semantic meaning of the lexeme ‘euphemism’ rather than an insight into the mechanism underlying online cognitive processing of utterances interpreted as euphemistic.

According to Hughes (2010), euphemism and other forms of “verbal sanitization” have a long history and typically take two semantic forms: the metaphorical use of root terms (*pass water* instead of *piss* and *break wind* instead of *fart*), or the substitution of Anglo-Saxon words by polysyllabic abstract formulations using Latin vocabulary. Examples of such a substitution using *liquidate*, *neutralize*, or *terminate with extreme prejudice* instead of *kill*, *terminated pregnancy* instead of *abortion*, *erectile dysfunction* for *impotence*, *coitus interruptus* for *prematurely interrupted sexual act*.

Various models of euphemism production listing almost all types of morphological and semantic innovations have been proposed in research literature. Among them is the one put forward by Allan and Burridge (1991), which names such methods as: remodellings, circumlocutions, clippings, acronyms, abbreviations, omissions, one-for-one substitutions, general-for-specific and part-for-whole metonymies, by substituting some other term – perhaps a learned one, or one borrowed from another language – by hyperbole, or by understatement.

Warren’s (1992: 133) model provides a seemingly nearly-exhaustive list of the ways in which euphemisms can be formed:

I. Word formation devices:

1. Compounding
2. Derivation
3. Blends
4. Acronyms
5. Onomatopoeia

II Phonemic modification where the form of an offensive word is modified or altered

1. Reversal of words
2. Rhyming slang
3. Phonemic replacement
4. Abbreviation

III. Loan words

1. French
2. Latin
3. Other languages

IV. Semantic innovation

1. Particularization
2. Implication
3. Metaphor
4. Metonym
5. Reversal
6. Understatements or “litotes”
7. Overstatements or “hyperbole”

As well as several other methods which are not as productive:

Omission;

Use of proper names;

A description of the word.

Interestingly, Warren (1992: 133) also notes that there are occasional examples of where the connection between the novel referent and the conventional referent is **none of the enumerated above**.

Warren (Warren 1992:133) distinguishes several categories of euphemisms involving the semantic development of a novel sense for some established word or word combination without the use of word formation mechanisms:

1. Particularization: when a general term becomes “particularized” in a certain context to create a new sense, e.g. *innocent* (in the sense: “of a virgin, virginal”);

2. Implication: e.g. *loose*, which implies the sense “unattached”, and then, consequently “sexually available”;

3. Metaphor: e.g. *thick* (in the sense of “stupid”), where the image of a dense environment obstructing the progress of a traveller seems to be a mapping of a reasonable thought going through the medium which is someone’s head;

4. Metonymy (general-for-specific): e.g. *problem* (in the sense of “a disease, medical condition”), as in *alcohol problem*;

5. Reversal (irony): e.g. *blessed* in the sense of “damned”;

6. Understatement (litotes): as in *sleep* in the sense of “die”;

7. Overstatement (hyperbole): e.g. *glory*, as in *fight to glory*, in the sense of “death”.

Chamizo Domínguez (2005) notes that although there are many sources (borrowings, phonetic similarities, acronyms, allusions, verbal plays, back formations, diminutives, etc.) for the creation of euphemisms, many of them have originated in one (or several) figures of speech.

Although producing a typology of various ways of euphemism production is clearly useful and an interesting goal in itself, it offers more a description than an explanation of what is going on during actual comprehensions of euphemisms by hearers in discourse.

The heterogeneity of the existing taxonomies is immediately apparent as is the fact that all of these formal linguistic structures and strategies do not have to be used in their euphemistic function all the time. Naturally they can receive euphemistic interpretation under certain circumstances (in certain contexts) but so can the use (or failure to use) of any other linguistic device. For instance word-reversal, listed as one of the device of euphemism formation, as used by international retail store chain FCUK (French Connection UK) can hardly be said to have been used with the purpose of euphemistically replacing the need to name a store “FUCK”. It is most likely deliberately playfully meant not to veil but to focus on addressees’ ability to recognize dysphemism whenever an expression flags itself as ‘hiding something’ as is the pseudo-Chinese dyslexic statement *Yuck Fou!* and emphatically pronounced *Shut the front door!*, which in the context where no ‘front door’ is present can only be unambiguously meant to be recognized as *Shut the fuck up!* (on why such pseudo-euphemistic coinages give rise to humorous effects see the discussion of ‘mock-PC’ and creativity in section 3.5).

In an article titled “X-phemism and creativity” Allan (2012) suggests that overall there are two ways in which X-phemisms are created: formally through remodeling and semantically through figurative language. He argues that many X-phemisms are figurative; many have been or are causing semantic change; some show remarkable inventiveness of either figure or form; and some are indubitably playful. Allan notes that euphemism can be achieved antithetically by both hyperbole and understatement, by the use of learned terms or

technical jargon instead of common terms, and conversely by the use of colloquial instead of formal terms, by both general-for-specific substitution and part-for-whole substitution, by both circumlocution and abbreviation, acronym, alphabetism or even complete omission, as well as by one-for-one substitution from the existing resources of the language or by borrowing from another language.

It appears that “bottom up” exercises in typological taxonomies of euphemism formation, which seem to have been the primary concern of euphemism research, are not exhaustive and unproductive as they cannot capture all possible instances of euphemism formation.

Consider the following example from the show “Desperate Housewives” (Season 6 Episode 15):

(12)

Kathryn: Those two pigs confirmed what I’ve been thinking for a while now. I think it’s time for me to give up on men.

Robyn. Oh, Amen, sister!

K. It’s official. My dating days are over.

*R.: I mean you don’t have to take it that far. You can always just do what I did and **explore other options**.*

K: What do you mean?

*R: **Cast a wider net? Expand the pool?** Date chicks...*

K: Oh, so you’re a ...

R: Yep.

Explore other options, *cast a wider net* and *expand the pool* are used here as euphemisms for *become a lesbian*. Neither of these expressions is listed as a euphemism in dictionaries, let alone the silent placeholder ‘...’ in the ‘Oh, so you’re a ...’, yet all of them are immediately understood by the hearer by taking linguistic clues only as input to inferential processes responsible for relevance-driven recognition of a particular speaker-intended meaning in the context.

The following section considers metaphor-based euphemisms from the point of view of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the related discipline of Cognitive Linguistics.

2.3.2 Euphemisms as conceptual metaphors/metonymies

Many euphemisms can be regarded as metaphor-based. From the point of view of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the associated discipline of Cognitive Linguistics, in the conventional euphemisms 'to pass away', 'to depart', 'to be gone beyond the horizon' death is conceptualized as a journey so these euphemism can be seen as a product of engaging the conceptual metaphor DEATH-AS-A-JOURNEY (cf. Lakoff, 1987, 1993). In the metaphor-based euphemisms like *cast a wider net* in the example (12) above, linguistic expressions in the source domain are used to replace the dispreferred expressions in the target domain. The metaphorical nature of an utterance has to do with what it means, while its euphemistic nature has to do with attitudes and speaker intentions.

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) views metaphor as a cognitive mechanism whereby one experiential domain is partially mapped onto a different experiential domain, the second domain is structured or understood in terms of the first one. The domain that is mapped is called the source domain, and the domain that is mapped to is called the target domain. The two main functions of metaphor are highlighting and hiding.

Metaphors are systematic; the systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing to focus on one aspect of the concept, a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Through conceptual metaphor, the source domain (euphemistic expression) is mapped systematically to the target domain (taboo expression). Because of the systematicity, some aspects of the target domain (the positive, favorable or neutral aspects) are highlighted while others (the negative, unpleasant, or embarrassing aspects) are hidden. For example, in the conceptual metaphors DEATH IS REST and DEATH IS A JOURNEY the REST and JOURNEY domains are mapped onto the DEATH domain.

Similar to the treatment of conceptual metaphors, Cognitive Linguistics also considers metonymy to be systematic and experientially-based. According to the definition proposed by Radden and Kovecses (1999: 21), metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model (ICM). The authors subsume various types of metonymy-producing relationships under two general conceptual configurations: "Whole ICM and its part(s); Parts of an ICM" (Radden and Kovecses 1999: 30). They further classify typology of

metonymies into many what they call “most entrenched metonymies”. Their types are as follows:

1. Whole event for subevent
2. Subevent for another subevent within the same ICM
3. Part of a form for the whole form

Radden and Kovecses (1999: 44-51) point out that there are many cognitive (e.g. specific over generic; central over non-central) and communicative (e.g. clear over obscure; relevant over irrelevant) principles motivating metonymy. The fully motivated metonymies are called *default metonymies*. However, sometimes the motivations conflict with each other and thus decrease the overall motivation of metonymy.

The use of metonymy may be motivated by a speaker’s expressive needs or a given social situation. The use of euphemism occurs in the latter situation which is governed by social norms and usually involves violating some cognitive and communicative principles. The euphemistic expressions “to go to the bathroom” and “to wash one’s hands” describe activities that only tangentially relate to the central and relevant event, hence, according to Radden and Kovecses (1999), they violate the principles of central over peripheral, relevant over irrelevant as well as clear over obscure.

The euphemistic expressions may become so entrenched that they are no longer felt to be metonymic. Thus “to go to the bathroom” is no longer associated with its spatial meaning “to transport oneself to the bathroom”, but evokes the target sense directly in expressions such as “The dog went to the bathroom on the living room rug”.

Research by Gradečak-Erdeljić (2005) shows that while euphemisms do not abide by the Gricean Cooperative Principle and almost none of the maxims, in the light of cognitive linguistics, metonymy as part of ‘idealized cognitive models’ can facilitate mental access to a concept where a euphemism replaces some axiologically disfavorable expressions:

“Metonymic mapping is specific for its one-correspondence mapping, i.e. both the source and the target concept belong to the same domain, and precisely this contiguity quality, or the proximity of the concepts involved in the mapping renders this cognitive process a perfect candidate for construing euphemistic expressions. One of the most ubiquitous metonymies in the context of euphemisms is PART OF THE SCENARIO FOR THE WHOLE SCENARIO, where it serves as a vehicle to accessing the target concept via some narrowed semantically bleached content” (Gradečak-Erdeljić 2005: 298).

The euphemistic expression ‘air support’ standing for the central part of the scenario for *bombing* i.e. planes hitting and destroying the target, metonymically maps the more neutral concept of a non-violent part of the event – planes supporting military forces on the ground (note the use of a heavily positive lexical item: ‘support’) (Gradečak-Erdeljić 2005: 296). According to Gradečak-Erdeljić (2005) a euphemism ‘body count’ reflects the part of the whole scenario, which follows the actual killing of people and the latter consequences and actions undertaken, i.e. the survivors count the dead, the number of the dead bodies is reported and the focused body counting stands for the whole target domain of killed people.

Such uncooperative (see section 4.1) uses of euphemisms can be regarded as a form of lying. Using ‘body’ instead of ‘dead body’ or ‘corpse’ is definitely a way of not telling the truth by substituting direct nomination with the one with more positive connotations. Not mentioning ‘dead’ body as irrelevant and using ‘body’ instead is considered appropriate in the context where politeness effect would prevent notions of death – a classic example of the socially recognized taboo – from entering the scene (see Gradečak 2005: 298).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”, while euphemisms became a salient phenomenon of language usage in modern political culture by virtue of their ability to conceal something behind a hedged lexical unit for argumentative purposes. In the follow-up research paradigm of Cognitive Linguistics, such metaphors are viewed as being pre-wired in our cognitive systems rather than products of linguistic communication itself: a point of view with which Relevance Theory disagrees. From a relevance theory perspective, on the contrary, such linguistic metaphors would be seen as originating in creative uses of language for opportunistic communicative purposes, which, if repeated often enough, might result in the setting up of systematic correspondences between the domains.

Wilson (2010: 43) illustrates this point by discussing that many cultures have a set of flower metaphors (e.g. daisy, lily, violet, rose) which are typically applied to women. From a cognitive linguistics perspective, these linguistic metaphors might be seen as surface reflections of an underlying conceptual metaphor WOMEN ARE FLOWERS, based on systematic correspondences between the domains of women and flowers. Wilson (2010), however, questions the extent to which conceptual cross-domain mappings originate in language use, and argues that they have to be explained at least partly in pragmatic terms.

In Relevance Theory conceptual cross-domain mappings are viewed as originating in language *use* rather than being pre-wired in cognition. As Vega Moreno (2007: 3) puts it,

repeated derivation of the same sort of implications in processing a familiar stimulus may result in the development of a special type of cognitive procedure, a pragmatic routine, for the processing of this stimulus, which leads to the conventionalization of this inference.

Papafragou's (1996) critique of Cognitive Linguistics, in which she argues that the 'associationist' model adopted by this research paradigm is not backed up by any cognitive-pragmatic principle and that such an approach can at best deal only with conventionalized metonymies, can also be extended to conceptual metaphors. It follows that, since it is not based on any cognitive-pragmatic principle, the approach is unable to handle really creative or "one-off" metaphoric/metonymic uses, since according to Lakoff an association is supposed to spring up to mind almost automatically.

Abrantes (2005) points out that euphemisms often build up on already existing mechanisms (extensions of the DEATH-AS-A-JOURNEY conceptual metaphor in such expressions as to *pass away*), thus being easily detected and deciphered in their euphemistic function. Thus the major limitation of this analysis is that very few euphemisms lend themselves to interpretation through conceptual metaphors. Novel euphemisms very rarely relate to pre-established conceptual metaphors and therefore we need to have a mechanism that works out the meaning of the utterance if a euphemistic utterance cannot be associated with a particular metaphor.

Relevance Theory (e.g. Carston and Wilson 2005) suggests that the phenomena, which Cognitive Linguistics treats as "conceptual metaphors" are rather relatively standardized similes/analogies, which hearers may construct or retrieve from memory in understanding a novel metaphor:

"Life is not necessarily conceptualized in terms of journeys even if it may be compared to journeys on certain occasions as the two have some aspects in common. Life is like a journey in some respects, yet it is not a journey <...> Conceptualizing life as a journey would imply we cannot think of life without thinking of journeys. This is clearly not the case" (see Vega Moreno 2007: 139).

According to Carston and Wilson (2005), such analogies may be stored in long term memory and may be used as contextual assumptions brought to bear on the interpretation process.

Considering the multitude of suggested ways through which euphemisms can potentially be formed, for the purposes of this attempt to investigate euphemisms from the standpoint of their online processing, I suggest to treat any utterance (including the so-called

“communicative silence”) as potentially open to interpretation and/or post-dicto re-interpretation as x-phemistic. X-phemisms are not a natural class or category but a special pragmatic (perlocutionary) effect. The view proposed here advocates focusing on the way in which linguistic expressions contribute to the pragmatic processes involved in utterance comprehension to yield x-phemistic and politically (in)correct interpretations.

If we regard euphemisms in the broadest sense as substitutes for something which was rejected as dispreferred, we may end up with a picture in which *all* utterances may potentially receive euphemistic interpretation (in the sense that something else could have been said but was not), provided the right context. This assumption converges with phenomenological philosophy, which argues that every perception connects ‘presented’ data with ‘appresented’ data, that are not actually perceived, but integrated into perception (cf. Husserl 1973, 150 f.) and follows from the (revised) presumption of optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 270):

(a) [The utterance] is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.

(b) [The utterance] is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

It follows that the most relevant utterance possible is not necessarily worth the addressee's effort and that speakers might fail in producing the most relevant utterance. Hearers should be aware that speakers might not have the information hearers would find most relevant. Perhaps speakers even withhold the most relevant information deliberately or they just cannot think of it at the moment. Lack of time, of ability, or personal stylistic preferences could be reasons which prevent speakers from expressing themselves maximally relevant.

The ‘abilities and preferences’ clause of the presumption of optimal relevance is crucial for understanding the way euphemisms are produced and interpreted in discourse. If the hearer takes the “abilities and preferences” to be of benevolent nature, then euphemisms are interpreted as a cooperative face-saving strategy while when the “abilities and preferences” are taken to be of malevolent nature, the euphemisms can be interpreted as uncooperative or manipulative. A similar claim can be found in Blutner's (2000) bidirectional Optimality Theory, the crucial insight behind which is that for the hearer to determine what the optimal interpretation of a given form is, he/she must also consider the alternative expressions the speaker could have used.

The issue of choosing from a paradigmatic set of co-referential synonymous alternatives discussed so far in relation to x-phemisms, also lies at the core of the linguistic manifestations of non-discriminatory practices commonly known as ‘political correctness’ or ‘PC’, various aspects of which are the subject of investigation of the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Political correctness: general issues

This chapter introduces the notion of political correctness (PC), reviews the history of the term. I look at cases of “mock-PC” and provide theoretical explanation of the motivation and principles along which they are coined.

3.1 History and origin of the term “PC”

This section provides the state of the art of theoretical discussion concerning the linguistic³² manifestations of the phenomenon known as “political correctness” or “PC” and shows that although at the height of the debate much was written about PC from a cultural–theoretical perspective (Aufderheide, 1992; Beckwith and Bauman, 1993; Berman, 1992; Choi and Murphy, 1992; Dunant, 1994; Hughes, 1993; Newfield and Strickland, 1995; Richer and Weir, 1995; Thibodaux, 1992; Williams, 1995; Wilson, 1995), and there have been a number of insightful assessments of the political and philosophical implications of PC from a sociolinguistic point of view (e.g. Cameron, 1995; Janicki, 1997; Lakoff, 2000), and discourse-analytic perspective, much remains to be said about the topic from the point of view of pragmatics of production and interpretation of utterances containing the PC-related lexical units.

Regarding the origin of the term PC, several researchers argue that although the term ‘political correctness’ originated with left-wing politicians, it has been later largely ‘hijacked’ by those on the right. Thus Cameron (1995) and Lakoff (2000) show that the term has been used as an insult, as a joke and in sincerity by people who believe that the linguistic choice of terms used to represent minority and marginalized groups in discourse is indeed a relevant moral and ethical issue.

Suhr and Johnson (2003) point out that there are a number of differing accounts of the earliest occurrence of the phrase ‘political correctness’ and its derivatives. According to Wilson (1995), for example, ‘politically correct’ first appeared in the 1793 Supreme Court *Case Chisholm versus Georgia*, which upheld the right of a citizen to sue another state. The earliest examples of the use of the phrase ‘political correctness’ in OED is from 1948 “*In*

³² Apart from the linguistic aspect proper, PC on a broader scale encompasses practices aimed at ensuring equal treatment of all members of social groups or sometimes even preferential treatment in relation to minorities (e.g. the so-called “affirmative action” policy at US Universities); development of non-Eurocentric/non-western academic curricula with emphasis on non-western, non-white and female academic, cultural, literary etc. contributions.

general, Hull, although modest and tolerant of other views, is quite certain of the moral, legal, and political correctness of his own policies” (American Political Science Review, XLII, 1948) and then 1979 *“No matter what criticisms are hurled at this feminist fiction, no doubt the author will be cushioned by her political correctness”* (Washington Post, 09/16/1979).

Lakoff (2000: 94–5) identifies 1991 as a watershed in the discursive history of PC. In a survey of PC in the US print media from the early 1980s onwards, she describes how: “The term picks up steam around 1990, peaks between 1991 and 1995 and appears to subside after that” (Lakoff 2000: 95). She notes, however, that in spite of its apparent quantitative decline, PC continues to permeate everyday language use and, in particular, media discourse.

Wilson (1995: 8) suggests that PC first “exploded into popular consciousness” in the USA in 1991 by showing, for example, how the number of newspaper articles mentioning ‘political correctness’ in the US rose continuously between 1985 and 1994, with a significant increase occurring in 1991. This upward trend would then appear to have coincided with what Cameron (1995: 122–30) described as the point of ‘discursive drift’, whereby the ironic, in-group connotations of the term ‘PC’ as used on the left were rapidly transformed into a derogatory term.

Despite all the controversy it instigated, political correctness first emerged out of the need to refer to someone’s disadvantaged condition or “difference from the norm” without offending them. Similarly to euphemistic strategies, PC language is motivated by the same drive to be polite, inoffensive, but its primary concern can be seen as replacing arbitrary biased words and expression with new motivated linguistic units referring to human beings, thereby communicating relevance of tolerant attitudes and showing sensitivity to such social issues as age, race, ethnicity, gender, social status, sexual orientation, disability, religion, political views etc.

Pointing to the complicated nature of the issues related to such naming practices, Truss (2005) notes that:

“<...> most of the time a person who is female/black/disabled/gay wants this *not* to be their defining characteristic; you are supposed to be blind to it. But then, on other occasions, you are supposed to observe special sensitivity, or show special respect. . . I mention all this because ‘political correctness’ is sometimes confused with respect, but it operates quite differently . . . it’s mainly about covering oneself and avoiding prosecution in a world of hair-trigger sensitivity.” (Truss 2005: 163–4)

The type of language used to refer to certain stigmatized population groups was considered an irrelevant issue by the mainstream community prior to the introduction of PC practices, which was often undertaken by establishing prescriptive³³ codes of conduct on college campuses and introducing courses and departments dedicated to the study and inclusion of previously marginalized (usually non-male/non-Eurocentric) members of society. As a result of such prescriptive practices, PC has been often regarded as an attempt to enforce and legalize behavior that was previously supposed to be governed by the rules of etiquette and politeness³⁴, hence the term *political correctness* as opposed to *linguistic tact* (for more suggestions on etymology of the term ‘political correctness’ see Allan and Burridge 2006 and Perry 1992).

As a complex and sophisticated junction of cognitive, intentional and axiological aspects, the abstract concept of PC finds linguistic manifestation in communicative situations by representing competing notions of what is normal, standard, moral, ethical as well as other existential values. Such regular ‘objectification’ of this concept generates corresponding kinds of behaviors (PC and politically incorrect) and expectations in discourse. Thus the cognitive frame for political correctness can be viewed as encompassing culture-specific concepts and corresponding linguistic units, which nominate, describe and express politically (in)correct (verbal) behavior.

³³ Prescriptivism is defined in research literature as “[...] the imposition of arbitrary norms upon a language, often in defiance of normal usage. [...] Prescriptivism consists of the attempts, by teachers and writers, to settle [...] disagreements about which forms should be part of a standard language by insisting upon the use of those particular forms and usages which they personally prefer by condemning those others they personally dislike. [...] [T]he problem is that many prescriptivists go too far, and try to condemn usages which are in fact perfectly normal even for educated speakers [...]” (Trask 2007: 246)

³⁴ Politeness is understood in this thesis as a theoretical notion: the expected and appropriate level of behavior relative to the particular context of social interaction, established in terms of expectations, which can be anticipated in discourse as well as communicated both explicitly and implicitly (inferred in the form of a perlocutionary effect) (cf. Escandell-Vidal 1998, Jary, 1998; Fraser 1990, Padilla Cruz 2007; Terkourafi, 2003).

3.2 PC as the marked choice

The umbrella term ‘PC’ is applied to heterogeneous practices of replacing the existing standard or *unmarked* lexical forms with other forms in an attempt to construct new standard *unmarked* norms. Thus for instance, it has traditionally been a common practice to refer to male as the unmarked form or ‘the default’, while resorting to some marked form in referring to females: cf. *actor* – *actress*, *waiter* – *waitress*. In such nominations, the suffix –ess makes females appear somehow different from the norm since grammatically marked gender is a rare phenomenon in English.

Representative of various marginalized groups are keenly aware of this biased state of affairs as can be witnessed from the statement made by the African-American host of the talk show “Totally Biased with W. Kamau Bell” (Season 1 Episode 2):

(13)

President Obama recently sat down with ‘Black Enterprise’ magazine, or as I call it ‘Enterprise’ magazine.

In this example, the African-American talk show host is objecting to the word *Enterprise* ‘defaulting’ to the conceptually narrower *White Enterprise*, emphasized by the availability of the marked alternative *Black Enterprise*.

The marked / unmarked opposition can also be illustrated by the distinction drawn between the *NBA* (*National Basketball Association*) and the *WBA* (*Women’s Basketball Associations*) in the domain of sports. The interpretation of the unmarked form *NBA* is an autohyponym³⁵ of the narrowed *male basketball league* while the marked form *WBA* explicitly indicates that it includes only women and simultaneously claims that this is not the norm in basketball, cf. also a *Golf Tournament* vs. a *Ladies Golf Tournament*.

Nominations that have been around for some time become entrenched in people’s cognitive systems and the purpose of political correctness can be regarded as ‘recasting old news’ as once again newsworthy and thereby claiming the relevance of such issues as bias and discrimination, which were previously regarded as irrelevant. According to Cameron (1995), conversational participants are rarely aware of the cognitive and linguistic processes that underlie their understanding of others’ communicative intentions. She argues that only when the attempt to coordinate fails do people seem cognizant of their misunderstandings of

³⁵ Levinson (2000: 102) notes that this term is mentioned in Horn (1984), Lyons (1977) and Kempson (1980) who discuss how diachronically implicated autohyponymy leads to systematic polysemy.

what someone has intended to convey by the words he or she says. Even more importantly, the author points out that speakers can only try to avoid linguistic conventions of which they are conscious as the grip of people's native language on their perceptual and thinking habits is usually so strong that they are no more aware of such linguistic conventions than they are of the air they breathe.

Proponents of PC-related practices of prescribing and proscribing certain types of (linguistic) behavior consider its main goal as calling traditional usage of language into question by overtly contradicting previously held assumptions regarding what constitutes 'the norm' as well as the expected or *polite* behavior. Such practices aim at bringing people's unconscious biases to consciousness thereby making them aware of things, which could potentially trigger axiologically disfavorable responses in different individuals.

By way of illustration, consider how the prescription of 'male generics' has long been the center of debates about linguistic sexism in English and other languages: the use of *man* as a generic form used in the English language to define male and female and the ambiguous use of the pronoun *he* in neutral contexts where both sexes are to be addressed, e.g. *pedestrian*, *consumer*, *patient*. The reverse, i.e. the use of feminine nouns with gender-indefinite reference, has, until the relatively recent PC-induced changes, been the rare exception. Hellinger and Bussmann (2001) discuss that terms for occupations traditionally considered to be of higher status such as *lawyer*, *surgeon* or *scientist* are frequently pronominalized by the male-specific pronoun *he* in contexts where referential gender is either not known or irrelevant. On the other hand, low-status occupational titles such as *secretary* and *nurse* will often be followed by anaphoric *she*. They argue that social gender has to do with stereotypical assumptions about what appropriate social roles for women and men are, including expectations about who will be a typical member of the class of, say, surgeon or nurse and point out that deviations from such assumptions will often require overt formal markings, as in English *female surgeon* or *male nurse* (Hellinger and Bussmann 2001: 11).

According to Mills (2008), sexism has traditionally been defined as language which discriminated against women by representing them negatively or which seemed to implicitly assume that activities associated with women were necessarily trivial. The aim of feminist movements therefore was to call attention to the way in which the use of certain language items seemed to systematically discriminate against and cause offence to women, by compiling lists of such language items in dictionaries and calling for people and institutions to

avoid such language use. According to Mills (2008: 38), such lexicographical work has been important in calling attention to overt sexist language.

Allan and Burridge (2006) point out that the problem with such an approach to language change is that while some women may feel wrongfully excluded by compounds like *chairman*; others are probably comfortable with being referred to as *Madam Chairman* because they understand *chairman* to be a de-etymologized idiom denoting the office of chairperson in this particular context of use. The “sexist senses” of these words have long lost their dominating status and became semantically empty due to their grammaticalization and therefor can hardly be referred to as ‘sexist’, unless one consciously chooses to do so. The final stage of this de-etymologization can probably be illustrated by the fully grammaticalized plural form of the word *walkman*, which happens to be *walkmans* not *walkmen* (let alone the PC-inspired *walkpersons* or *walkpeople*).

From the pragmatic point of view, the use of marked (newly preferred) language in place of the unmarked (politically incorrect or otherwise dispreferred) one appears to be the right tool for dealing with gender, racial and other kinds of stereotypes as, according to Escandell-Vidal (1998: 46), conversational strategies can only have their *raison d’être* as exploitations of a default unmarked behavior. Thus replacing the use of generic anaphoric *he/his* pronoun in cases where sex is not indicated by the combined *his/her* or plural pronoun *their*, is meant to be deliberately clumsy. Allan and Burridge (2006) suggest that the use of generic *she*, for example, is intentionally distracting – it’s meant to jar. The presence of a linguistic stimulus in a code which is not expected by the addressee is interpreted as marked – it is an attention grabbing device³⁶.

On the other hand, due to the absence of synthetically marked grammatical gender in English, words like *stewardess* and *poetess* can be perceived to be discriminatory, especially by advocates of the feminist movement, because they stand out as anomalies in the predominantly genderless paradigm of the English noun and imply the ‘otherness’ of females, i.e. that female is not the ‘norm’ in the respective contexts. They focus on the fact that the referent is a woman, rather than stressing her professional status.

Gender stereotypes associated with such lexemes as *secretary*, *fire fighter*, *doctor*, etc. can be regarded as cases of the so-called default inference, which Levinson (2000) in his

³⁶ My teenage son was genuinely surprised to have read the following in a computer game: “When a player reaches **her** potential...” which proves to me the “attention-grabbing” effect as well as ubiquitous nature of PC in all kinds of discourse.

theory of Generalized Conversational Implicatures takes to be governed by the rule, according to which semantically general expressions automatically undergo narrowing in the derivation of a (generalized) implicated meaning and are only restored to the encoded concept if the resulting implicature clashes with a salient contextual assumption (see section 1.3). The concept MOTHER, for instance, is normally narrowed to the salient stereotypical concept HOUSEWIFE MOTHER, which reflects an (old-fashioned) cultural expectation about what a mother is supposed to be like (see Lakoff 1987: 79-90).

The discussion of how Relevance Theory can account for the lexical-pragmatic processes underlying the extension of the concepts *DOCTOR*, *POET*³⁷ and the like to include both males and females rather than the stereotypical ‘defaulting’ to (white) males alone, will be presented in chapter 9. It is worth mentioning at this point of the discussion that, from the RT point of view, such words and expression appear to achieve relevance as a result of the same mechanism, which several researchers working within the relevance-theoretic framework (namely Escandell-Vidal and Jary) propose for the way interpretations of **impoliteness** arise in discourse rather than for how utterances give rise to interpretations of **politeness**, which is considered to be the default or unmarked state of affairs in discourse (see the discussion in chapter 6).

This section has shown that ‘overt formal markings’ can be used to implicitly communicate what is standard and normal in the areas of racial, gender and professional relations. Unless otherwise specified, hearers following the sexist line of thought, often assume that *doctor* references a man, and speakers’ use of such terms as *lady doctor* emphasizes this assumption. In addition to *male doctor*, the default interpretation of *doctor* happens to also be a *white doctor* as speakers often include an ethnic nomination for historically white male positions (e.g., *black doctor*). The language that prescribes normalcy extends to bias in other areas as well.

³⁷ The word *stewardess* represents an exception to this pattern, as it was not reduced to *steward* as a generic term. Instead, both of the gender-marked terms were subsumed under *flight attendant* or *cabin crew*.

3.3. PC-inspired metonymic references

In addition to feminist anti-sexism campaigns to change the way gender and race are represented linguistically, during recent years, other population groups have attempted to draw attention to language used to talk about them. The so-called ‘people-first’ language constitutes one of the most recent fields for linguistic revision e.g. *people living with disabilities*, *people with AIDS / PWAs* and *people living with AIDS / PLAs*, *a person who uses a wheelchair*; Russian *человек с ограниченными физическими возможностями* (*chelovek s ogranichennymi fizicheskimi vozmozhnostyami* – *a person with limited physical abilities*).

Halmari (2011: 829) points out that the early 1990s saw a cluster of publications in psychological and educational literature, proposing the ‘people-first’ approach, where premodified nouns (*disabled people*) were to be replaced by postmodified nouns (*people with disabilities*). Just as with anti-sexist language campaigns, the purpose of introducing such conspicuously coherence-disturbing and therefore attention-grabbing linguistic units was, supposedly, to make them stand out in discourse since in the English language positive attributes normally precede nouns they modify, e.g. *beautiful people*, *healthy people*, *normal people*, making the new coinages sound odd.

Bias against people with a disability occurs whenever a disabled person is **identified by that disability**. For example, it is biased to refer to someone as “blind”; one must say instead, “a person who is blind”, “a person who uses a wheelchair” instead of “wheelchair bound”. In this context it should be pointed out that focusing on someone’s ‘difference’, be it disability, skin color, gender, etc. when it is irrelevant appears to be intrinsically dysphemistic no matter how “polite” a nomination one chooses to resort to. The ‘people first’ proposal is based on the idea that postmodification automatically draws attention away from the disability, however, the use of an odd marked postmodified noun phrase in place of the expected unmarked one is likely to have the contrary effect of bringing extra attention to what it attempts to hide.

Some words will be considered pejorative by the individuals they nominate regardless of the type of intentionality underlying their production and despite the fact that their introduction was motivated by considerations of politeness, since they stereotype or stigmatize certain groups of people by metonymically focusing on and communicating the relevance of only certain of their features, such as a disability or sexual orientation, rather than focusing on the whole individual as a person. By way of an illustration we can list such

substantivized adjectives as *disabled*, *dyslexic*, *diabetic*, *deaf* and *epileptic*. These lexical units will most likely be considered offensive as they define or ‘perspectivize’ people by their physical characteristics or condition of health.

In general, metonymic namings whereby a salient aspect of a person is used to stand for the person as a whole will always be dysphemistic. For instance, in referring to someone as *ham sandwich* or *a piece of ass*, the speaker is not saying that the person has the sandwich or possess a certain body feature, but that the person *is* a sandwich/ass and by identifying the whole person by some salient and, in speaker’s opinion, dominating with regard to a certain context feature, the speaker will be taken as expressing a derogatory attitude.

Papafragou (1996) has noted that there is a general cognitive tendency to metonymically identify an individual (or an object for that matter) through one salient property he/she possesses (cf. non-PC related metonymies used in relation to humans “the ham sandwich is getting impatient”). This practice has its roots in the general tendency of human cognitive systems to maximize relevance that is, deriving the greatest cognitive effects possible for the smallest processing effort (Sperber and Wilson 1995). The metonymic isolation of salient properties of objects or individuals for identification is accomplished when salient property is focused upon through the process of selective attention.

In Papafragou’s (1996) opinion, using a metonymy to name the referent by ‘holding up’ the property for the hearer to attend to it, allows the speaker to express her attitude toward him or her in an indirect way, and enables the hearer to infer that she wants him to know that she thinks that the referent possesses this property. Metonymy achieves relevance either by representing the most cost-efficient way to identify an individual or, in the cases where its primary function is to draw the hearer’s attention to a particular property of the referent, the extra effort that may be required to identify the referent of the description is offset by extra effects that would not be achieved by the use of a more direct utterance. Metonymies help to focus or defocus certain aspect of what is said and weaken the speaker’s commitment to what is said by distancing the speaker from what he/she is communicating.

Metonymic PC references appear to be functioning in a similar ways with slurs (see section 5.2.1) in that they “allows us to focus more specifically on certain aspects of what is being referred to” (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980:37). In contexts where mentioning particular features of people is not relevant (does not produce any positive cognitive effects compared to the available salient alternatives), such metonymic use highlights the fact that, the speaker resorting to such lexical units is not interested in the person as a person but only as a

representative of a certain racial, ethnic, religious etc. group, or a customer (cf. the absence of such terms as *European Americans* and *people living without disabilities*).

Mentioning somebody's features of, for instance, physical appearance in contexts where it is irrelevant, that is where the use of this word or expression does not contribute to the overall relevance of what is being communicated, but rather focuses on some other aspect of it. In other words, where it does not generate maximal cognitive effect with a minimum of processing effort (see Sperber and Wilson 1995: 158). I suggest that it is not even the lexemes used in each particular case that make all the difference, but rather the very process of metonymically referring to another human being by a nomination, at odds with what those people themselves prefer to be called as well as being in a position to do so, that is perceived as derogatory.

Thus comparing the following statements from an imaginary police report, one can immediately grasp the difference between what is communicated in uttering them:

(14)

(a) *Two people walked into the store yesterday* (neutral, hence PC)

(b) *Two African-Americans (blacks, people of color etc.) walked into the store yesterday* (the use of PC lexemes in an utterance which cannot qualify as PC according to our definition)

(c) *Two Russians/immigrants (etc.) walked into the store yesterday* (use of neutral lexeme in an utterance which cannot be classified as PC according to our definition – likely to trigger stereotypical inferences similar to the case of ‘two African-Americans’)

(d) *Two gay people (or “a lesbian couple”) walked into the store yesterday* (doesn't belong in the script – hard to imagine such a statement in a police report)

While “*two African-Americans*” will most likely trigger inferences about them being the ‘main focus’ of the police report in the cognitive environment of hearers based on the stereotypical frame/script, mentioning “*2 people*” will be less likely to lead to such conjectures (the people could themselves be victims of a crime or a roof collapse etc.)

Mentioning someone's race as the most relevant feature of the person in question will in most contexts constitute a face-threatening/dysphemistic behavior irrespective of using the allegedly PC nomination *African-American*. There are, however, contexts where mentioning race can be relevant for the conversation at hand. Consider:

(15)

(a) *Peter and Mary came to the polling station.*

(b) *Two African-Americans came to the polling station.*

Even when the name of the referent is known, the metonymic PC expression will provide the easiest access to the targeted referents in the context of a census, statistical surveys or public opinion polls. In keeping the record of the percentage of black, white, etc. voters, information about people's race is often more relevant to the corresponding agencies than their names. Thus for a population census or a statistical agency, wording such as (b) may be the most processing-saving way of achieving maximal positive cognitive effects in identifying the referents of an expression. However, as I have tried to argue throughout this thesis, to people outside this trade, euphemistic/PC paronymies cannot be considered as appropriate referential shortcuts.

Mentioning somebody's otherness only emphasizes this otherness. In this context, it was very hard to understand the slogan which was very popular during the 2005 Orange Revolution in Ukraine: *The police should be with the people!* Could such a slogan do anything but not 'hit home'? The "in-your-face" presupposition that this slogan triggered (the police are not the people) could only distance the police further from the protesters by focusing on its otherness stemming from the use of the ad hoc concept PEOPLE* narrowed to include only the protesters. Thus claiming the relevance of one's otherness in contexts where it is irrelevant can only convey a derogatory attitude.

From the relevance-theoretic point of view, resorting to a part-for-whole metonymy for naming purposes appears to be dysphemistic in itself as there *does not appear to be much of a difference* between referring to someone by using an orthophemistic or a dysphemistic part-for-whole metonymy. Moreover, as Wajnrub (2005: 11) argues by quoting Macquarie Dictionary's Sue Butler, that it really is the *act* of calling someone a "something," whatever it is precisely, that increasingly offends: "Today's taboos are all about the labels you use for people. So that the sentence '*you are a . . .*' is practically a no-no <...> because you're putting it in the same context as things which are clearly rude." Wajnrub (2005: 247)

It is not information encoded by utterances, but the fact that speaker focuses on one's race, nationality, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation as relevant for the eventuality at hand, that is responsible for classifying the utterance as PC or not PC. In other words, it is not the lexemes themselves that carry information about an utterance being neutral, racist or politically correct but the intention of the speaker which underlies their use and the appropriateness of mentioning somebody's otherness in a given context, thereby claiming such information as relevant.

In this section I have argued that metonymic nominations, despite being the most relevant effort-saving means of identifying their referents, will be interpreted as dysphemistic/politically incorrect when used in relation to humans. Mentioning and focusing on some aspects of one's identity rather than the whole person, constitutes intrinsically derogatory behavior when it is irrelevant to the conversation at hand.

In chapter 9 I will show that the 'people-first' proposal is semantically naïve (see also Halmari 2011: 839) in that its proponents believe that once new words have been introduced for old concepts, these new words will not be subject to the common fate of euphemism, where euphemisms inevitably, sooner or later, end up being associated with the features of the referents they were originally designed to hide.

Applying the strategy of 'avoiding discriminating against' irrespective of whether one is talking about discriminated groups or people with disabilities on the one hand and criminals, corrupt politicians and even inanimate objects (which are not in need of being equal with anything or anyone) on the other, leads to an absurd situation. If *all* people are equal, then representatives of such intrinsically politically, morally, ethically etc. negative social groups as serial killers, prostitutes and corrupt politicians deserve similar nominations with positive connotations (respectively: *sex worker* and *people with hard to meet needs*) as other supposedly discriminated against groups which needed to be renamed (*people living with AIDS*, *hearing-impaired people*). In this respect Halmari (2011: 838) notes that compared to "*Prosecutors not convinced killer retarded*", a PC alternative "*Prosecutors not convinced killer an individual with mental retardation*" would be not only awkward but might even show some overtones of sarcasm. It appears that the main paradox of PC-related practice was that it demanded tolerance to everything except the non-PCers. In other words, it became politically incorrect to discriminate against everyone except those who are not politically correct.

Since certain linguistic signs produced by speakers can lead to making adverse inference about the type of the speaker, speakers have an incentive to alter what they say to avoid that inference to preserve their public self-image or "face". The fact that some people see PC not as a set of anti-discriminatory practices, but primarily as a tool for preserving ones' positive public self-image/face, has led to it being perceived as something opposite of what it was meant to be. I elaborate on PC evaluated negatively in the next section.

3.4 PC evaluated negatively

Driven by the widespread assumption in the public and political institutions that language shapes thought, influences our worldview, conditions all our thinking about social problems and, generally, shapes ontological reality, proponents of political correctness are taken to insist that the use of sexist or racist language promotes corresponding types of thought and call for introduction of novel expressions, substituting previously used terms with the purpose of avoiding prejudice, discrimination and including all society members by treating them equally.

The assumption underlying such line of thinking is known as “linguistic determinism” or “the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” in linguistics. The hypothesis is not favorably looked upon in many linguistic circles, in part because of the popularity of Chomsky’s universalistic claims (see McGlone 2001, Pinker 1994b for a critique of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis). Sapir (1961) and Whorf (1956) argued that our world view is relatively constrained by the linguistic system we employ in representing the world. Whorf held that concepts have no existence independent of language. The weaker version of the Sapir-Whorf view, known as linguistic relativism, suggests that the world is not given to us directly by experience, but that experiences are, in part, mediated by language.

Researchers like Pinker, however, argue that since mental life goes on independently of particular languages, it is not possible to suppress “undesirable” thought by the PC-inspired inventions. Contrary to the view suggested by Orwell’s Newspeak, such concepts as *freedom* and *equality* will be thinkable even if they are nameless: “There are far more concepts than there are words, and listeners must always charitably fill in what the speaker leaves unsaid, existing words will quickly gain new sense, perhaps even regain their original senses” (Pinker 1994b: 82).

Some holding extreme views of the PC-related linguistic practices equate PC with an attempt to control people’s thoughts in the way Orwell’s Ingsoc did through Newspeak. Lakoff (2000), however, rightfully remarks that the opponents’ repeatedly cited descriptions of the PC phenomenon in the media suggest something much more threatening than is actually the case.

It needs to be pointed out that as a result of PC-related practices in English, for example, it has become impossible to talk about most socially sensitive issues (contemporary

taboos) without announcing one's point of view or "stance" towards it. In this respect Cameron (1995) points out that today:

"there is a choice of possible positions: you can say 'Ms A. is the chair(person)' and convey a more conservative attitude. What you cannot do any more is to select either alternative and convey by it nothing more than 'a certain woman holds a particular office'. Choice has altered the value of the terms and removed the option of political neutrality" (Cameron 1995: 119).

With the introduction of the new PC alternatives there is now a choice in most cases between resorting to androcentric or to PC terms : *man(men)* – *person(s)*, *people*; *policeman* – *police officer*; *chairman* – *chairperson*, *coordinator*, *moderator*, *presiding officer*, *head*, *chair*; *businessman* – *business executive*; *he* – *they*, *he or she*. Speakers of languages are now in a position of making a conscious choice which will reflect their views, beliefs and attitudes.

The introduction of the salient readily available lexical alternatives to choose among created a situation in which some people do not welcome "politicizing" of their words against their will or, in the parlance of cognitive-pragmatics, derivation of unintended inferences. Cameron (1995) raises this issue in her book "Verbal Hygiene":

"<...> at times, "radicals charge that a certain word is, say, 'racist'; their critics indignantly deny this on the grounds that when they use the word they do not intend to be racist, and accuse the radicals of 'reading things in'. At other times, the critics stress that words do have meanings independent of speakers' intentions in using them, and that 'political correctness' precisely perverts those time-honored meanings. It is therefore an attack on the language, and on the possibility of communication" (Cameron 1995: 119).

Today the choice among the expressions *Merry Christmas* and *Happy Holidays* (the discussion of which term to give preference to is often labeled "The War on Christmas" in the conservative US media), *Christmas Tree* or *Holiday Tree* or between *Founding Fathers* and *Founders* clearly signals one's ideological stance to others. Hearers may choose to interpret the greeting *Happy Holidays!*, as well as any other substitution of *Holiday* for *Christmas*, either as driven by consideration of economy of expression, a convenient shorthand for *I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!* or a euphemistic substitute expressing an attitude of tolerance to other religions. The utterance of this greeting can be interpreted as communicating the unwillingness to utter the religious greeting *Merry Christmas!* by, for instance, conservative media. In a similar way, the proposed renaming of *St. Patrick's Day* to

Potato Day at one of Los Angeles schools (attested: “The Daily Show” 7.04.09) as a more appropriate and hence politically correct substitute can sound very derogatory to the Irish as it metonymically declares potatoes as the most salient feature of what it is to be Irish.

The existence of skeptical, ironic or just plain negative attitude among speakers of English to PC can also possibly be explained by the fact that the English word ‘correct’ does not have ‘degrees’, it’s not a gradable notion and has more to do with linguistic prescriptivism than sensitivity and tactfulness. One can either be correct or incorrect unlike such more vague notions as civility, tactfulness, politeness and appropriateness. The word ‘корректный’ (korrektniy) in Russian, for instance, and some authors³⁸ suggest that PC is of the Russian, namely “Leninist” origin, is quite different and can be found in such collocations as *некорректный вопрос* (inappropriate, but not *incorrect* question), *некорректное поведение* (tactless/impolite, but not *incorrect* behavior). Consequently, in Russian the meaning of ‘политическая корректность’ is closer to ‘political civility’ rather than ‘political rightness’, which would be ‘политическая правильность’. If the term ‘political correctness’ is indeed of Russian origin, it is interesting to note that something seems to have gotten lost in translation as the opposite of *корректный* (korrektniy) in Russian is not ‘wrong’ or ‘incorrect’, but *некорректный* (nekorrektniy) rather means ‘inappropriate’ or ‘intolerant’. Thus in the Russian linguistic environment ‘политическая корректность’ means ‘political civility’ rather than ‘political rightness’, which would be ‘политическая правильность’.

According to Cameron (1995), the term ‘political correctness’ was most likely first used in a straightforward way, in the sense of political actions, which the speaker approved of. In time, however, its use became laden with ironic connotations as it was extensively used as a self-mocking joke to describe the extreme, overly pious or “holier-than-thou” standards of behavior. As a result, Talbot (1998) notes that today ‘political correctness’ is used almost always in derogatory terms and in contexts where it is characterized as a problem.

Similarly, Mills (2008: 33) observes that ‘political correctness’ is generally viewed negatively, to the point that the term ‘political incorrectness’ is characterized in a positive way as something quite risky and daring, criticizing those who are seen to be trying to limit

³⁸ Berman, for example, suggests that “‘Politically correct’ was originally an approving phrase on the Leninist left to denote someone who steadfastly toed the party line. Then it evolved into ‘P.C.,’ an ironic phrase among leftists to denote someone whose line-toeing fervor was too much to bear. Only in conjunction with the P.C. debate itself did the phrase get picked up by people who had no fidelity to radicalism at all, but who relished the nasty syllables for their twist of irony” (Berman 1992: 5).

freedom of expression. And since the term ‘politically incorrect’ is assumed to have “connotations of daring to voice unspeakable truths which the ‘nanny’ state would prefer to keep hidden” (Mills 2008: 114), the negative connotations of ‘political correctness’ are so well established today, that it is now virtually impossible to use the term in any positive sense.

The label ‘PC’ was successful in discrediting the movement to which it was attached as can be witnessed by such descriptions as “The new McCarthyism”, “thought police”, “Orwellian”, “Fascist” and “totalitarianism”, which “conjure up a Nineteen Eighty-Four world of inexpressibility, constriction, and savage repression” (Lakoff 2000: 98). A search for “political correctness” on google books yielded titles, discussing how PC corrupts American journalism, attacks higher education, sabotages art, causes “pan-cultural dumbing down”, intimidates, threatens civil liberties, generally tells people to keep their “mouth wide shut” and has “racial paranoia” as its unintended consequence.

As a result, nowadays proponents of neutral language do not use the term ‘PC’ descriptively, in RT terms, to refer to their ideology or actions. The term as such is used interpretively, *about* the proponent of such language reforms by the conservative right for attack purposes (“you’re so PC”), as a disclaimer (“I’m not PC, but . . . ”), or in irony or jokes.

The predominantly ironic, bordering on negativity, attitude to the notion of PC, regarded by some as a form of censorship and an attack on freedom of speech, has prompted numerous coinages, which mock the earlier earnest “PC-as-tolerance”-induced language, as can be illustrated by the example in which a professor of economics at University of Texas (interviewed on the “The Daily Show” 14.11.2011) suggests to extend legal protection to ugly people or *Uglo-Americans* (ugly Americans) analogously to the way it has been done with racial and ethnic minorities, women and disable individuals. Among the examples of such mock-PC are *vertically-challenged* (short), *chronologically-challenged* (old) and *follically-challenged* (bald), *pavement deficiency* (sidewalk), *the otherwise located* (people who are absent – example from “The Big Bang Theory” Season 04 Episode 02) etc., which effectively undermine serious attempts at language reform and deflect attention away from the underlying issues.

The mixing of real and invented examples of suggested reforms, together with the use of the term ‘PC’ in contexts where it is uniformly negatively evaluated, has led to a genuine confusion amongst the general population about what ‘PC’ actually is. The following section analyzes instance of satirical ‘mock-PC’ language use, i.e. neologisms, which speakers coin by analogy with the existing constructions employed by proponents of PC.

3.5 Mock PC, alternative curse words and creativity

This section considers examples of “mock-PC”, which are interpretively used ‘echoic’ nominations created analogously to the PC language already in use. I suggest that PC expressions which fit the Optimal Innovation Criterion, put forward by R. Giora et al. (2004), will receive ironic interpretation and thus cannot be treated as instances of PC, but rather are instances of mock PC.

In exploring recent trends in the use of neologisms such as adverbial phrases incorporating ‘challenged’ (*physically challenged, intellectually challenged*, etc.), derivational uses of ‘-centric’ and ‘-ism/-ist’ (*ethnocentric, racialism, fattist*) and changes in phrase structure brought about by both a restructuring of noun phrases (*people with disabilities* as opposed to *disabled*) as well as the apparent demise of the generic pronoun ‘he’, Nagle et al. (2000) draw attention to the difficulties in delineating clearly between serious and humorous usages of many phrases, which came to be associated with PC-inspired language. Among such phrases, the authors name *vertically challenged* for *short* or *follically challenged* for *bald/balding* (Nagle et al. 2000: 265). The challenging nature of such a delineation is also discussed by Johnson and Suhr (2003), who argue that it is problematic to describe the empirical effects of PC on actual language usage as the analyst would be placed in the methodologically awkward position of having to stipulate a priori both what does and does not ‘count’ as linguistically ‘PC’.

The effects of PC practices as well as negative reactions of the general public to such use of language appears to stem from the general ‘anti-euphemistic’ vein, noted by Leech (1969: 139-140), which he sees as a modern age tendency of referring to a taboo subject by means of a jokingly indelicate periphrasis, often a figurative one: *kick the bucket* for *die*, etc. He considers this tendency to be motivated by a, deeply-rooted in the human mind, urge to overcome one's fear by turning its object into a matter of familiarity and fun, or, in other words: “If it’s ridiculous, it can’t be very threatening” (Lakoff 2000: 100).

This anti-euphemistic tendency noted by Leech in the 1960s continues to flourish today, which is illustrated by the joke-generating potential of PC expressions: *amphibian American* – *frog*, *osmotically challenged* – *thirsty*, *creatively re-dyed* – *stained*, *motivationally challenged* – *lazy*, *person with hard to meet needs* – *serial killer* or *the differently pleased* – *sado-masochists*. A show on the US channel ABC is called “*Romantically challenged*”, which means *single* or *not with somebody at the moment*.

This practice even gave rise to entire books where, for instance, the most famous fairy-tales are rewritten in the mock-PC language. Thus the author James Garner describes the title character Goldilocks as *melanin-impooverished*, and the bears' porridge as *thermally-enhanced*. He is purposely overusing PC-inspired phrases to replace concepts like WHITE and HOT that do not require any PC substitutions, at least as they are used in the given context, so that he can exaggerate the PC-related practices of replacing potentially offensive lexical units with more neutral ones. In the foreword the author of the book makes the following disclaimer:

“If, through omission or commission, I have inadvertently displayed any sexist racist culturalist, nationalist regionalist, ageist, lookist, ableist, sizeist, speciesist, intellectualist, socioeconomicist, ethnocentrist, phallocentrist, heteropatriarchalist, or other type of bias, as yet unnamed, I apologize and encourage your suggestions for rectification”. Garner (1994)

The author's disclaimer is important here since, as shown in the experiment by Pfaff, Gibbs and Johnson (1997), readers attempt to match their perceptions of the author and their understanding of the point of the story. So for the participants who recognize the author's intended satirical object, there should be a tendency to describe the author as critical of political correctness, and for those who do not recover the intended object, the descriptions refer to liberalism.

The mock-PC version of the following lines from the Gettysburg Address delivered by President Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863: “*Four score and seven years ago our founding fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal*” would probably run as follows: “*Four score and seven years ago our founding caretakers (founders), with the expressed explicit permission of the local population – the Native Americans, brought forth upon this continent a new nationTM, conceived in LibertyTM, and dedicated to the proposition that “all womyn/men are created (born) equal”[®]*”.

The use of mock-PC neologisms like *the horizontally-gifted* instead of *fat* or *the chronologically gifted* for *old* created by analogy with such earlier serious attempts of linguistic reform as *physically disabled* for *invalid*, which have by now already successfully become conventions of both language and use, are certainly not part of any serious conversation in the English language. In this respect, Allan and Burridge (2006: 82-83) rightfully note that it is doubtful that expressions like *person with hard to meet needs* (for

serial killers) or *the differently pleased* (for *sado-masochists*) were ever more than satirical inventions.

The popularity of this type of linguistic creativity³⁹ whereby speakers coin mock-PC neologisms, can be explained by the fact that in processing such lexical material, hearers are able to recognize the familiar behind the novel as, similarly to euphemisms, all PC expressions in general (both real and mock) are the result of metarepresentational substitution of some salient nomination one considers dispreferred for some other preferred one. According to the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (Giora et al. 2004), people are more willing to start using novel language if the neologisms evoke familiar concepts.

Thus in the following example from “The Daily Show” (01.11.2012) *Afroamericans* is easily recognized in the new coinage *Akroamericans* (which does not really require a PC-inspired substitution):

(16)

Paul Ryan: One of my best friends is from Akron.

Jon Stewart: Oh, really. “One of my best friends is from Akron. I’d let my daughter go out with someone from Akron”. Well, if that was true, you’d know that they prefer to be called Akronamericans.

Effective novelty is such that induces change but is rooted in salience to the extent that it allows for the recoverability of the familiar (Giora 2003). The Optimal Innovation Hypothesis suggests that such neologisms as *War against Terra* (instead of *terror*) or *Weapons of mass distraction* (instead of *destruction*) will catch on easily. In order to qualify as optimally innovative, an (ostensive) stimulus must:

- (a) involve a novel – less or nonsalient– response to a given stimulus, which differs not only quantitatively but primarily qualitatively from the salient response(s) associated with this stimulus and at the same time,
- (b) allow for the automatic recoverability of a salient response related to that stimulus so that both responses make sense (e.g., the similarity and difference between them can be assessable).

To the extent that a linguistic innovation allows an insight into some salient meanings while promoting new ones, it is optimally innovative and pleasurable (Giora et al. 2004). For example, it is easy to recognize the familiar *Shut the fuck up!* in the novel *Shut the f...ront*

³⁹ Bauer (1983: 63) – following Lyons – defines productivity as rule-governed innovation, as opposed to creativity, which is said to be rulechanging.

door!; *anger management* in *Anchor management* (attested example: “The Daily Show” 03.03.2010 referring to the biased nature of Fox News); *shit happens* in *shift happens*, as well as effortlessly reach the intended interpretation of such exclamations as *Mother Ford Ka!* and *Market Farmer!*

The echoic nature of mock-PC expression enables hearers to recognize the salient PC expressions by analogy with which they were coined and not some stigmatized referent, to which the PC expression itself refers. The referent of the PC expression is thereby “pushed” one inferential step or metarepresentational level further. Such practices converge with and reinforce the main large-scale goal of PC-inspired language reform as an attention-grabbing device, which is bringing people’s unconscious biases to consciousness by defamiliarizing/de-automatizing the familiar⁴⁰, insisting on seeing the object as opposed to mere recognition through deliberately increasing effort required for processing a stimulus by claiming that it is relevant.

The mocking attitude to PC-inspired neologisms also arises when there is a perceived discrepancy between the way it aims to represent the world and the way things are actually perceived to be. In such cases utterances containing both PC and mock-PC expressions achieve relevance by ironically echoing some attributed thought and speakers can express the ‘dissociative’ attitude to this attributed thought.

According to Saussure and Schulz (2009), the contrast between what is said and what should be said (the expectations of discourse participants with respect to a certain socio-pragmatic context or ‘frame’) can give rise to an ironic effect. As a result of this the hearers resort to ‘metarepresenting’ conventionalized alternatives whenever they come across a ‘marked-with-respect-to-a-certain-frame utterance’ using their existing background (encyclopedic) knowledge about *what should be said* in a certain setting. It is the discrepancy between what is said and what should, according to the hearer, be said to describe some state of affairs, that creates the ironic effect.

For example, calling a *pothole* ‘*pavement deficiency*’ (Allan and Burridge 2006) is tantamount to equating the social importance of such topics as discriminating against ethnic groups to discrimination against inanimate objects. Such expressions refer to non-human

⁴⁰ The Optimal Innovation Hypothesis bears close resemblance to the view put forward by Russian formalists (e.g., Shklovsky, 1917/1965) and Prague linguists (e.g., Mukarovský 1932/1964, 1978) regarding the attention-grabbing capabilities of ‘estranging’ (*ostranenie* in Russian) of ordinary routines in poetic discourse (see also Jakobson 1960; Lakoff and Turner 1989).

entities that cannot possibly find any nomination dispreferable and therefore do not actually need to be part of any PC-inspired language reform. Neither will such coinages be used seriously and without irony/sarcasm in any real conversation.

Ferdinand de Saussure observed that “Of all social institutions, language is least amenable to initiative,” because of what he identified as a “collective inertia towards innovation” (de Saussure 1966: 73–4) (see Hughes 2010 for discussion).

Interestingly, the existence of satirical uses of PC facilitates acceptance of the very ideas the satirists intend to disparage as the use of irony/satire may have facilitated acceptance of the more moderate forms of PC. Unlike PC expressions proper, the mock-PC ones (e.g. *Amphibian-American* for *frog*) were not coined with the goal of replacing some existing dispreferred word or expression that actually required a PC-inspired alternative. They function to amuse, entertain and/or criticize PC practices through satire (by showing a dissociative attitude to them).

Calling for change at the lexical level aims at drawing attention to problems at the level of conceptualization as PC-related practices represent an attempt to alter people’s perceptions of certain signifieds (concepts) by replacing old signifiers (labels) with new ones. From the semiotic point of view, the introduction of new PC expressions may be viewed as an attempt to call traditional usage into question and replace signs where the relationship between the signified and the signifier is arbitrary with the motivated compositional phrases where this relationship is not arbitrary anymore but motivated by considerations of avoiding discrimination as well as preserving one’s positive public self-image or “face”.

According to Saussure (2005), cognitive representations of the individuals involved in a discursive interaction evolve through time. Unlike individual-specific sets of assumptions, which can be relatively easily modified (strengthened, contradicted), culture-specific sets of assumptions remain relatively stable. Information that contradicts them does not change them but tends to be interpreted as incorrect or abnormal. This position converges with the well-known cognitive ‘confirmation bias’: confirming pre-existing assumptions is less effort-consuming for the brain than cancelling them.

Considering this, the thesis argues, following Giora (2003), that PC practices seen as motivated by the goal of bringing people’s unconscious biases to consciousness can only be effective when they are still perceived as novel. I will return to this issue in the discussion of euphemism treadmill in chapter 9.

In the next section I turn to a more detailed examination of the range of goals and functions that resorting to euphemistic and PC-inspired language may have in discourse by considering the extent to which speakers intend to cooperate with their audience in using such language and either facilitate or impede the process of recognition of speaker-intended meanings.

Chapter 4. Functions of euphemisms/PC in discourse

The chapter discusses functions of euphemisms/PC in various types of discourse. Following research by Abrantes (2005) and Attardo's (1997) distinction between various types of cooperation in discourse, I distinguish between, on the one hand **cooperative euphemisms** where there is equal access to information for all parties involved. On the other hand there is **uncooperative argumentative** euphemistic jargon or 'doublespeak', which speakers resort to in an attempt to conceal or distort some states of affairs as not beneficial to them or some third party. In such cases one of the interlocutors has direct access to information while the other only attains it through the first one's version as the relation between the word or phrase and the referent is not clear.

4.1 Conventionalized vs. argumentative euphemisms

Euphemisms are instances of cooperative communication when it is known (later to be referred to as "mutually manifest", using the notions adopted in Relevance Theory) to the participants that the particular linguistic unit is used in place of another dispreferred one to refer to some unmentionable subject. Such euphemism is a compromise between the need to be accurate and the wish to avoid offence. Whenever such euphemisms are used, both the referent they designate and their concealing intention are transparent to the participants of a communicative act (see Abrantes 2005).

Burchfield (1985: 15) observed that "a language without euphemisms would be a defective instrument of communication". Not all language scholars agree with his assessment. Some have argued just the opposite that euphemisms exert a corrosive influence on communicative clarity and argue that a well-adjusted, mature society would have no need for euphemism at all (Bartsch, 1994; Lutz, 1989). George Orwell (1946) considered euphemisms to be useful tools for politicians who engage in the 'defense of the indefensible'. He condemned euphemism as a weapon of mind control that can be used to "make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" Orwell (1946: 56).

The functional classifications of euphemisms found in research literature are rather heterogeneous. Moskvina (2001), for instance, identifies as many as 6 functions of euphemisms in discourse: 1) to stand for names of frightening objects; 2) to stand for names of unpleasant and repulsive objects; 3) to signify something, which is considered indecent; 4) etiquette euphemisms; 5) to camouflage the true essence of the signified; 6) to name

(embellish the names of) organizations and professions, which are not considered ‘prestigious’.

Unlike Moskvin’s (2001), Rawson’s (1981: 1) classification is on the leaner side drawing a twofold distinction between *positive* and *negative* euphemisms. His positive euphemisms are motivated by the desire to inflate and magnify, making the euphemized items seem more important and positive than they really are. The negative euphemisms are defensive in nature, offsetting the power of tabooed terms and otherwise eradicating from the language everything that people prefer not to deal with directly. Rawson’s (1981) positive euphemisms include what he refers to as ‘fancy’ occupational titles, used to elevating the status of certain professions, e.g. using *custodian* for *janitor*, *counsel* for *lawyer*, the many kinds of *engineer* (*exterminating engineer*, *mattress engineer*, *publicity engineer*, etc.), *help* for *servant*, and so forth. His negative or defensive euphemisms are the fear taboo-based replacements referring, for instance, to supernatural beings.

It appears that Rawson’s positive and negative euphemisms are two sides of the same coin as making something more positive and making something less negative/threatening appear to be two dialectic ways of looking at the same mechanism of mitigation of some negative emotional response certain words and expressions can trigger in the audience or some third party.

In drawing the distinction between euphemisms based on the degree of their conventionalization and the extent to which interlocutors cooperate in resorting to them, Abrantes (2005) views conventionalized euphemisms as a face-saving strategy resulting from a tacit implicit agreement between conversational participants. The avoided subject is well known to the hearer, who is fully capable of what she refers to as ‘decoding’ the true meaning lurking behind the speaker’s current lexical choice. In such cases, the author argues, the speaker’s choice and the face-saving intention are transparent to the hearer and both discourse partners are glad that there are alternative euphemistic expressions for them to use: the speaker avoids being offensive, the hearer recognizes this purpose and engages in a sort of complicity with the speaker.

This type of euphemism can be illustrated by the following example from “The Big Bang Theory” (Season 3 Episode 7):

(17)

*Penny: Okay, we **went out a little bit**, a long time ago, but we were never like “going out”.*

*Leonard: Okay, not to be pedantic, but the last I checked **went out** was in fact the past tense of **going out**, which I think we all know is a popular euphemism for **saw each other naked**.*

The expression ‘go out’ is referred to as “popular euphemism” in this exchange since it is commonly used to refer to one part of the dating scenario (going out to dinner, for example) instead of another part of the scenario (sexual intercourse or, in this case also a subpart of that, namely ‘seeing each other naked’). The expression ‘got out’ can be said to have been conventionalized for this particular use as most speakers will immediately be aware of what it is used to cover up upon encountering it in such a context.

Similarly to Abrantes (2005), Burkhardt (2010: 358) observes that in cases of cooperative euphemisms there is a “secret coalition between the parties concerned, a tacit understanding of the true reference of a euphemistic expression, e.g. that *golden age* is used to euphemistically refer to *old age*, is, or at least could be recognized by almost all speakers. In such cases, even if the euphemistic character of an expression is obvious to any language user, there will, arguably, still be a slight psychological effect of maintaining emotional distance, which will make it easier to talk about some axiologically disfavorable state of affairs, whenever there is a need to make reference to it, by changing the perspective from which the hearer is invited to look at it (e.g. focusing on one part of dating scenario instead of another).

This transparent nature of cooperative euphemisms promotes their acceptance and eventual conventionalization in discourse. For example such euphemisms as *pass away*, *join the majority*, *meet the maker* for *die* in English or *отправиться к праотцам* (*otpravit'sia k praotsam*), *отдать богу душу* (*otdat' bogu dushu*), *приказать долго жить* (*prikazat' dolgo zhit'*) instead of *умереть* (*umeret'*) – *to die* in Russian, where the meaning and motivation is transparent to all communication participants, are used as a sort of verbal anesthesia in order to change the perspective from which to conceptualize death. Such euphemisms are used to avoid triggering axiologically disfavorable reactions in hearers associated with the negative connotations of the straightforward nomination *die*. As previously discussed, such lexical substitutes have traditionally been used in place of direct nominations prohibited by social norms to hedge or attenuate some aspects of reality capable of causing communicative discomfort. Words and expressions like these can be thought of as linguistic makeup or fig-leaves, since they provide ways to refer to things which are considered bad or forbidden in a certain society at a certain period of time without actually

uttering the words that designate those things directly. Such use is, according to Cameron, a “<...> form of superstitious word magic whereby I can convey the meaning without ambiguity, but without actually allowing the taboo word to pass my lips” (Cameron 1995: 74).

Unlike the transparent cooperative euphemisms, which are used as a response to taboos and subscribe to social conventions of avoiding offence, argumentative uncooperative euphemisms, are deliberately used as a tactic of avoiding a negative reference, by intentionally concealing and/or distorting some aspects of reality as strategically motivated by speaker’s interests (e.g. not damaging the image of some public figures). The result is the occurrence of vague expressions, which are not always easy to interpret, i.e. the hearer is not always able to recognize the referent behind its name. Such expressions are often not immediately recognized as euphemisms and the lexical units they make use of are taken literally.

Speakers resort to uncooperative euphemistic jargon in an attempt to conceal some states of affairs as not beneficial to them, mislead the hearer, hide their mistakes, soften unpleasant messages etc. Such euphemisms function as a “manipulatory veil” (Mey 2001). In such cases speakers appear to be using some ‘wrong’ lexical form for their intended concept (e.g. *operation* for *war*) for argumentative purposes. According to Carston (1999), speakers can resort to wrong lexical forms either because they simply have the wrong concept-form mapping in their lexicon, as a slip of the tongue or with a specific purpose in mind.

Both the cooperative and the argumentative euphemisms can be used as a result of a taboo on mentioning the denotation (e.g. the explicit proscription against using the name of the Lord in vain found in the Bible discussed in section 2.1.1), as well as a proscription where it is not the denotation itself that is tabooed but there exist a verbal ban on certain linguistic forms used to refer to it as they can potentially trigger associations considered axiologically disfavorable by some hearers.

Euphemistic expressions for sensitive topics like disease or death, sex or the human body are carefully chosen by speakers in a deliberate attempt to veil something, which they believe can have an adverse perlocutionary effect on the hearer, e.g. the one resulting in hearer holding a certain negative belief regarding the speaker’s face: “the speaker is impolite, insensitive, intolerant”, etc. Such substitutes are ubiquitous in any human language since taboos, which give rise to them, have been found to be a linguistic universal by many researchers (see section 2.1). They function as linguistic shields, are relatively salient on

people's minds due to their conventionalized nature (they are marked in their euphemistic function in dictionaries) and, therefore, are easy to find whenever the need to resort to them arises.

In section 8.3, I show that hearers interpreting utterances containing such expressions in contexts relative to which they are conventionalized and unmarked, immediately recognize such euphemisms for what they are, without having to pay special attention to the particular intention underlying their production. However, it is necessary to point out that the degree of conventionalization of lexical units is subject to variation both cross-linguistically and intra-linguistically. Terkourafi (2001:130) defines conventionalization as a relationship holding between utterances and context, which is a correlate of the (statistical) frequency with which an expression is used in one's experience of a particular context. Conventionalization is thus a matter of degree, and may vary in different speakers, as well as for the same speaker over time.

In the thesis I do not view conventionalization in the sense that some expressions in a particular language are conventionalized in comparison with some others. That is, conventionalization is not viewed as a property of linguistic expressions, "inhering in particular linguistic forms" (Brown 1995: 154). This does not preclude the possibility that a particular expression may be conventionalized in a particular context for virtually all speakers of a particular language, thereby appearing to be a convention of the language. In this thesis, by 'conventionalized euphemism' I mean that it is listed as "euphemism" in dictionaries, which appears to be the only criterion for conventionalization bearing at least some degree of objectivity.

I agree with Terkourafi (2001) who argues that an expression can be regarded as conventionalized for some use only in relation to some context. Uttered in a different context, the same expression will no longer be conventionalized, and the recognition of the speaker's intention will then be crucial for recognizing the intended meaning. By way of an example, we can take the lexeme *gay*, which not only changed its salient meaning diachronically from *cheerful* to *homosexual*, but whose salient meaning in the English-speaking discourse of young people currently acquired a new meaning of *boring*, *uninteresting*, along with *lame* (which earlier was used only to refer to a person's physical handicap), e.g. "The movie was so gay/lame".

The cooperative/uncooperative nature of euphemisms is a crucial factor in establishing the degree to which they become conventionalized in discourse. The line between cooperative

and uncooperative euphemisms, however, is very thin and dynamic as the following section shows.

4.2 The issue of cooperativeness

Attardo (1997: 756) distinguishes between two levels of cooperation in discourse: speakers may be locutionary cooperative without necessarily being perlocutionary cooperative. Following Abrantes (2005), we may consider some euphemisms (most conventionalized ones) to be locutionary cooperative and perlocutionary cooperative, while others only locutionary cooperative – cooperation takes place only on the semantic level (ostensive stimuli are successfully decoded by conversation participants) while there is no cooperation on the perlocutionary level (by intentionally using the “wrong” word forms, speakers pursue some hidden self-interest or positive self-presentation agenda which is not, in relevance-theoretic terms, manifest to hearers as, for example, in the case of political speeches or reporting about war). If both locutionary and perlocutionary cooperation are present, the euphemisms gradually become the established, commonly accepted and even desired and expected responses in discourse to unmentionable subjects and the urge to speak about them.

Abrantes (2005: 97) suggests that in the case of locutionary cooperative but perlocutionary uncooperative euphemisms the speaker is aware of the intrinsic negativity of a subject, as well as the effect it might have on the hearer, if it were to be openly mentioned in discourse. Yet she cannot simply avoid it, and for this reason chooses to use a euphemism instead, mostly not to veil the subject but rather to conceal or disguise it. The hearer in turn has no access to the subject to which the speaker refers, since the euphemism is sufficiently effective not to be explicit. Therefore the hearer derives only the inferences that the speaker wants him to derive (no cooperation at Attardo’s perlocutionary level takes place). The only way the hearer can identify the true referent of the euphemism is by gathering background information (provided it is available or ‘manifest’ to him). An example of such an uncooperative euphemisms is using *the internally displaced people* to refer to *refugees who have been driven out of their homes but cannot leave their home-countries*⁴¹.

Abrantes (2005: 97) argues that in cases of perlocutionary uncooperative euphemism, when (or rather if) the hearer comes to know what the speaker actually means by using a particular lexical form, he becomes aware of the purpose of the speaker’s lexical choice, mostly one of concealing or disguising an unpleasant fact, in order to make it sound less harmful. According to the author, the next step is to question this intention and the information the hearer receives after this point. The concealing function consists in disguising

⁴¹ Attested example from the National Public Radio broadcast 10.12.2005

a segment of reality, so that the euphemistic expression presents a fact in such a way that the hearer's attention is guided to specific parts of the utterance or to opinions which are deliberately chosen by the speaker. The author concludes that the speaker's manipulation of this discursive reception does not necessarily imply a loss of face, since the speaker does not actually lie.

Consider the following dialogue from the show "Friends" (Season 1 Episode 3):

(18)

Phoebe: Hi guys!

All: Hey, Pheebs! Hi!

Ross: Hey. Oh, oh, how did it go?

Phoebe: Um, not so good. He walked me to the subway and said 'We should do this again!'

All: Ohh. Ouch.

*Rachel: What? He said '**we should do it again**', that's good, right?*

*Monica: Uh, no. Loosely translated 'We should do this again' means '**You will never see me naked**'.*

Rachel: Since when?

*Joey: Since always. It's like dating language. You know, like '**It's not you**' means '**It is you**'.*

*Chandler: Or '**You're such a nice guy**' means '**I'm gonna be dating leather-wearing alcoholics and complaining about them to you**'.*

*Phoebe: Or, or, you know, um, '**I think we should see other people**' means '**Ha, ha, I already am**'.*

Rachel: And everybody knows this?

Joey: Yeah. Cushions the blow.

*Chandler: Yeah, it's like when you're a kid, and your parents put your dog to sleep, and they tell you **it went off to live on some farm**.*

Ross: That's funny, that, no, because, uh, our parents actually did, uh, send our dog off to live on a farm.

Monica: Uh, Ross.

Ross: What? Wh- hello? The Millners' farm in Connecticut? The Millners, they had this unbelievable farm, they had horses, and, and rabbits that he could chase and it was- it w- Oh my God, Chi Chi!

In this exchange, the participants are considering ways to ‘translate’ the special language or jargon of dating into plain English and argue that resorting to this sort of language cushions the blow similarly to the way parents, who are trying to spare their children’s feelings, basically resort to lying about the death of their pets (*put to sleep* is used in this exchange as a euphemism for *euthanasia*) by using the, conventionalized for adults relative to this context of use, formula *went to live on a farm (upstate)*, which children perceive as the true state of affairs. Children are not aware of what this code actually means for adults. Therefore this formula can be considered as conventionalized and cooperative relative to the context of a conversation between adults, but uncooperative relative to the context of talking to one’s children.

When euphemisms are cooperative on both the locutionary and the perlocutionary levels, speakers have access to the same amount of information, share the same conversational goals and these goals are strongly mutually manifest to them⁴². In this case, both the underlying referent and the covert nature of the situation are mutually manifest to the interlocutors. A typical example of this group of euphemisms is the strategy of ‘bleeping’ expletives on TV. Seeing such ‘fig leaves’ as *f!/?k* written down is the same as seeing the swearword because everyone knows what it stands for as illustrated by the following example from “The Daily Show” (29.07.2010):

(19)

(CNN Live “American Morning”, onscreen text says “Goldman Bleeping Sachs”) Goldman Sachs announcing a zero tolerance policy for profanity in employee e-mails. You can’t even spell out swearwords with asterisks.

*Jon Stewart: Lesson learned. So let the word go forth: Goldman may still f**k you over, from now on they themselves will refer to it as making sweet sweet love to you.*

These are taboo-related types of euphemisms, which do not attempt to mislead the hearer regarding the true meaning behind the indirect expression. In this situation people don’t say what they mean because the underlying tabooed or disfavorable referent is transparent (mutually manifest) to both parties. To borrow an example from Pinker (2007), in the film “*Fargo*”, two kidnappers with a hostage hidden in the back seat are pulled over by a policeman because their car is missing the plates. The kidnapper at the wheel is asked to produce his driver’s license, and he extends his wallet with a fifty-dollar bill protruding from it, saying,

⁴² On the notion of (mutual) manifestness, see section 1.2 of the thesis.

(20)

So maybe the best thing would be to take care of that here in Brainerd.

The statement, of course, is intended as a bribe, not as a comment on the relative convenience of different venues for paying the fine. Pinker (2007) asks why is it that people don't just say what they mean: "If you let me drive off without further ado, I'll give you fifty bucks"? His answer is that in this situation the speaker says something the he doesn't literally mean, knowing that the hearer will interpret it as he intended. At the same time, the hearer knows that the speaker intended it to be interpreted that way, the speaker knows that the hearer knows that the speaker intended for the hearer to interpret it that way, and so on.

The notions of mutual manifestness and plausible deniability are, thus central to understanding why speakers resort to euphemisms. Pinker explains that with the veiled bribe one might guess that the technicalities of plausible deniability are applicable: bribery is a crime, and by avoiding an explicit proposition, the speaker could make a charge harder to prove in court. But this veil is so transparent that it is hard to believe it could fool a jury.

The use of both cooperative and uncooperative euphemisms can serve the purpose of distancing or "moral disengagement" of the communicating parties from the content of utterances, which according to Bandura (2002), may center on redefining harmful conduct as honorable by moral justification. The notorious morally disengaging agentless passive in *Mistakes have been made* works via diverting hearer's attention from the agent and highlighting the 'mistakes' which is tantamount to saying that the speaker deplores that fact and that was not his/her responsibility (the responsibility is diffused). It serves as an exonerative tool by creating the appearance that reprehensible acts are the work of nameless forces, rather than people (for discussion see Bolinger 1980).

In examining practices aimed at cleaning up language by regulating its use Cameron (1995: 73) considers how language can be criticized for being obfuscatory: the allied forces' use of the phrase *collateral damage* during the 1991 Gulf War to describe the unintentional killing of civilians in attacks on military targets. Cameron points out that the classic argument for finding this usage objectionable would be that (a) it is jargon or "code" (a sort of militarese), and to the extent that hearers cannot decode it, it conceals what is actually going on; and (b) it is a euphemism, abstract, agentless and affectless, so that even if people succeed in associating it with a real act or event they will be insulated and disassociate from any feeling of repulsion and moral outrage.

Cameron (1995) defines the term *collateral damage* in several different ways, including the *killing of civilians*, *civilian deaths*, *murder* and *mass murder*. She correctly notes that these other expressions use plainer words, but are no more neutral descriptions than *collateral damage* itself. She notes that to choose any one of them, and to object to any one of them, is in essence to state a position on the morality of the military action. If one finds the military strategy unjustifiable, she will probably regard the nomination *civilian deaths* as a euphemistic denial of agency which implicitly devalues lives of the victims; if one believes that the strategy is regrettable but necessary she will probably find *murder* and *mass murder* overtly emotive and biased. It is impossible to come up with a description which could not be interpreted as in some way taking sides.

Abrantes (2005: 98) echoes this line of thought in her analysis by arguing that once the euphemism is detected, as well as the concealing function it intends to achieve, its euphemistic power decreases:

“Whenever we hear of collateral damage in the context of a war, for example, we have no doubts as to what is meant by it. In this particular case, the official euphemism almost seems like a conventional one, since it is immediately decoded: ‘collateral damage’ means ‘death of civilians’ in the course of war. Yet there is a great difference between calling it by this euphemism and using a conventional expression for death, such as ‘to pass away’. ‘Collateral damage’ has a moral side to it, since it does not refer to a naturally caused death, but to death as the result of a deliberate action of war (even if its primary goal was not to kill civilians, but to aim at military targets). The sense of guilt, irrespective of whom it is imputed to, is part of the word itself. Expressions like this have the side effect of pulling the veil aside and revealing what they were supposed to hide. Since the original disguising intention is also revealed, the utterance raises distrust and its effect turns out to be quite the opposite of what it intended”.

The author concludes that uncooperative euphemisms are more susceptible to a **short existence** than the cooperative ones. I will analyze this claim further in the discussion of euphemism treadmill in chapter 9 of the thesis.

Comparing the functions of euphemisms in discourse from the point of view of degree of their cooperativeness, we can see that argumentative euphemisms like *collateral damage* present more complicated cases than transparent euphemisms like *pass away*. The former does not permit the same immediate, conventional and unambiguous ‘translation’, as in the

case when the latter is used. The hearer may go first to the more common meaning, and only later realize that it was a euphemistic expression. In some instances double-processing is required in order to recognize a euphemism for what it really is. Adding extra inferential steps creates a sort of a buffer and encourages 'moral disengagement', a strategy which is probably in most demand in political and military types of discourse as, according to Enright (1985), in political and military discourse euphemisms play a more sinister role than in the traditional areas of sex, medicine and religion. I now turn to analyzing the argumentative functions of euphemisms in various types of discourse.

4.3 Spheres of use: jargon and doublespeak

As discussed in the previous section, in addition to being used as substitutes for direct nominations referring to traditional strongly tabooed and merely sensitive topics, today euphemisms are increasingly used argumentatively in political and military discourses, which have become very “productive areas of lexicalization as governments have become more democratically accountable and sensitive to adverse public opinion of their wars” (Trask 2007: 89).

Modern commercial discourse also abounds in argumentative lexical units used with the intention of covertly encouraging potential customers, passengers, patients etc. to buy a certain product or service. Such lexical strategies are resorted to for argumentative purposes in an attempt to elevate the attractiveness of goods and services so that they could appeal to as many consumer groups as possible as demonstrated by such airline terms as *first-class*, *business class* and *economy (cheap) class*; shops for *petites* and *plus sizes* or *Renoir Collections*; *family-size tooth-paste* and *Jumbo packs of detergents*; cf. hedged English *best before* found on food-product packages vs. straightforward Russian *goden do* (*good until*), *pre-owned* for *used*, *affordable housing* instead of *low-income housing*, *efficient* instead of *small* apartments, *studio* in place of *one-room apartment*, *starter home* for *small house* as well as *compact car* for *small car*.

Used in commercial discourse, such lexical units focus on and exaggerate positive aspects and features of the goods and services while defocusing and diminishing the negative features that could have an adverse effect on how successfully they sell. As a commercial strategy, widely exploited to incite potential clients towards the consumption of a product, such practices appear to bear a strategic manipulative dimension according to the definition of prototypical manipulative communicative behavior, put forward in Saussure (2005). These practices meet at least one of the (necessary but not sufficient) preconditions for being manipulative – information conveyed by the utterance must be of *benefit* to the speaker:

“[...] communication is manipulative when the speaker retains some relevant information, or provides the correct information in order for the hearer to conclude that he should behave in a way which favours the speaker’s interests, without being aware of it” (Saussure 2005: 119-120).

As a recent illustration of the use of euphemisms in commercial discourse, consider for example, how the PR teams of beef-producing industry seek substitutes for the term *pink slime* to make it more appealing to customers. The term *pink slime* was coined in 2002 by the

US Food Safety and Inspection Service to refer to heat-treated highly processed low quality beef; a food additive consisting of animal by-products treated with ammonia gas to kill foodborne illness causing bacteria, which makes the by-products legally fit for human consumption. Nowadays beef-producing industry refers to it *as lean finely textured beef* instead of *pink slime* since it is perceived as less disgusting and implies that it is beef and not an unknown processed chemical meat substitute, which is the connotation that accompanies *pink slime*.

This awkward substitution strategy is extensively mocked in the US media. “The Daily Show” (28.03.2012), for instance, mocks this manipulative substitution by pointing out that the PR teams make an attempt to elevate the status of this ammonia-soaked centrifuge separated byproduct paste and make it sound like “the Cashmere of beef”, “bovine velvet” or “Johnny Walker pink” by referring to it with an alias *lean finely textured beef*.

The suggested allegedly more accurate alternative to *pink slime* is mocked on “The Colbert Report” (02.04.2012) as an awkward attempt to conceal the underlying reality: “Pink slime is believed to be an offensive slur against slurry because it already has a lovely name. The real name of the product is ‘lean finely-textured beef’. It’s called ‘LFTB’. (cut to Governor Rick Perry): “Let’s call this product what it is. And let ‘pink slime’ become the term of the past”.

Jargon is a linguistic code shared by, for example, members of the same social and/or professional circle, which is designed to be intelligible for the insiders while creating communication barriers to keep out out-groupers, who find it unintelligible. Allan and Burridge (2006: 50) explain that to the initiated, jargon is efficient, economical, and even crucial in that it can capture distinctions not made in the ordinary language.

Professional jargon is a good example of how language can be used in an attempt to frame reality by communicating the relevance of certain assumptions over others. Jargon is the language peculiar to a trade, profession, or other group, what some scholars call ‘specialist’, ‘technical’ or ‘restricted’ language (Firth, 1968), ‘sublanguage’ (Kittredge and Lehrberger, 1982), and others ‘register’ (e.g., Zwicky and Zwicky, 1982; Wardhaugh, 1986). In ‘militarese’ jargon, for instance, *disengage from the enemy* or *tactical withdrawal* can be misleadingly used instead of the straightforward *retreat*. Sometimes new euphemistic jargon is introduced to replace medical terms which were often earlier euphemisms themselves e.g., *people with long term mental illness* for *CMI*, itself a euphemistic acronym for *chronic mental illness*. Brook (1974:72) points out that the use of initials as in *t.b.* for *tuberculosis* serves the

double purpose of promoting conciseness of expression as well as glossing over the reference to unpleasant reality.

It goes without saying, that the perfect candidates for obscuring the relations between words and their referents are brand new coinages, which require most inferential work and sometimes will even fail to be decoded at all as, for instance in the case of such acronym as *NEET*, which economists use to refer to *those who are not in employment, education or training*⁴³ or *index* (example from the show *Rake* Season 1 Episode 13) used in police reports to euphemistically stand for *indecent exposure of a person* (where *person* is itself a general-for-specific metonymy-based euphemism). Borrowings from other languages appear also to be suitable strategic framing material. The use of words of Greek and Latin origin as well as French borrowings in English, for example, is likely to trigger connotations to the effect that these lexemes are more scientific and technical, while their Anglo-Saxon counterparts are often considered dispreferable. For example, *honorarium*, *campaign contributions* and *per diem* sound more “prestigious” than *bribes*, *graft* and *expenses-paid vacations*.

Another area where jargon is common and widespread is medicine. According to Chamizo Domínguez (2009), *medicalese* is a paradigmatic field where the words used by patients widely differ from the words used by physicians or related professionals. The author observes that sometimes this divergence in words is not due to the fact that the terms in medical jargon are more precise and less ambiguous than the “normal” words are; most of the time it is due to the urge to use vocabulary that no ordinary person is able to understand and, for such a reason, doctors keep hold on the unfathomable mysteries and prestige of the medical profession itself. Thus technical terms like *hepatic losses* are frequently used in *medicalese* instead of *haemorrhage* or *bleeding*, which would be easier to understand for most people outside of medical professions.

When doctors face the need to explain a medical condition to patients or refer to *death* in their medical records, they can resort to such euphemisms as *therapeutic misadventure*, *diagnostic misadventure*, *diagnostic misadventure of the highest magnitude*, *negative patient-care outcome*, *patient failed to fulfill his wellness potential*. There is often a need to refer to the so-called *stigmatized* (itself a euphemism here) terminal or ‘shameful’ diseases as *cancer*, (euphemisms for which include *tumor*, *growth*, *C*, *the Big C*) *mental illnesses* and *sexually-transmitted diseases* in a circumlocutionary way.

⁴³ Attested example: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/16/world/europe/youth-unemployment-in-europe.html?src=me&ref=general>, also discussed in Crystal (2008: 3).

The extreme cases of strategic framing in, for example, medicalese are sometimes achieved through uncooperative complete withholding of assumptions. The degree to which assumptions are attempted to be withheld (the degree of cooperativeness) can vary considerably as illustrated by the following examples from medicalese jargon:

(21)

- 1) *You have fluid on your lungs as your heart is not pumping hard enough*
- 2) *Your heart is a bit weaker than it used to be*
- 3) *Your heart is not pumping properly*
- 4) *Your heart is not working efficiently*
- 5) *Your heart, which is a pump, is not working as well as it should, causing back pressure on the lungs*
- 6) *Your heart is not as strong as it used to be*
- 7) *Heart strain*
- 8) *Your heart is not strong enough*
- 9) *You have left ventricular dysfunction*

(examples from Tayler and Ogden 2005).

Unlike the framing by attempting to completely withhold assumptions, there can be cases when assumptions are not withheld, but speakers rather attempt to alter relevance of certain aspects of what they are attempting to communicate. For instance, the framing attempt of substituting *foetus* for the *embryolike entity* or *activated egg* can in certain cases indeed make it easier to experiment on an *embryolike entity*, whereas one may not have wanted to manipulate a *foetus* (for discussion see Chamizo Domínguez 2009: 442-443).

If, in the case of cooperative euphemism, the hearer has no difficulty in grasping what the utterance refers to, and can then process and evaluate it accordingly, in jargons this is not the case. The hearer grasps an informative content, but is not aware that it is not quite equivalent to the referent. Therefore, he cannot evaluate it globally and objectively. That is what happens in utterances 7) and 9) of example (21), which can't be relevant to an ordinary patient because of the lack of background knowledge.

When a doctor uses utterances such as 2), 3), 4), 6) or 8), she does not substitute a strongly connotated expression with another one according to conventional patterns, nor does she create a euphemistic-like figurative way of presenting the information. The doctor simply fails to provide relevant information because of the *lack* of information embedded in these utterances with regard to the amount of information expected by a patient with a possibly vital

health problem. And, what is said about the medicalese can be said about the legalese, which is “an extremely powerful weapon with which the legal profession is able to intimidate and dominate the public” (Allan and Burridge 1991: 202).

Crystal (1987) poses an interesting question “Why should people deliberately use language that is unintelligible to all but a few initiates?” and provides three general reasons as an answer:

“<...> to mark a person’s membership of a group, to provide a pastime, and to ensure secrecy when performing a particular activity <...> Genres of secret language can thus be found in many cultures and in a wide range of human contexts, especially those where there is a concern to avoid detection (as in criminal argot, or cant), or to keep something hidden from lay people (as magical formulae)”. Crystal (1987: 58)

The use of jargon is thus dysphemistic to out-groupers despite the fact that everyone necessarily uses jargon for some purpose or other. Jargon can become cooperatively euphemistic once its meaning becomes transparent to all participants.

In addition to such professional spheres as medicine and law, jargon can be used in political discourse as an attempt at concealing some deplorable facts of reality and presenting the state of affairs in the light that is beneficial to the speaker or some third party, as can be seen from the following conversational exchange from the “Daily Show” (21.03.2011):

(22)

Jon: Aasif, the United States military, now finds itself at war on three fronts.

*Aasif: (acting as a senior Libya correspondent) Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold on there, General Patton. Who said anything about war? This is merely **a coalition partnership imposing a no fly zone through a military operation.***

Jon: Aasif, we're not just grounding planes here. We've destroyed entire columns of tanks outside of Benghazi.

Aasif: That's right. That coalition partners have now assured me they will never fly again.

*Jon: Well, let's call it a **robustly enforced through missiles no fly zone led by the United States military** and its ...*

Aasif: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Who said anything about "led by"?

Cut to President Obama: We will provide the unique capabilities that we can bring to bear to stop the violence against civilians including enabling our European allies and Arab partners to effectively enforce a no fly zone.

*Aasif: We're not leading. We're **enabling**.*

Jon: How many missiles did the US fire yesterday?

Aasif: 122.

Jon: How many did Britain fire yesterday?

Aasif: Two.

*Jon: We're **enabling** our partners' **enforcement of a non-war** to get rid of Moammar Qaddafi.*

Aasif: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. No one said anything about getting rid of Qaddafi.

Jon: We bombed his compound.

Aasif: No, no, no.

Cut to Fox News: The compound residence of Libyan leader Moammar Qaddafi has been hit. The Pentagon is saying it was not one of our tomahawk missiles. It was a British cruise missile that slammed into Qaddafi's compound overnight.

*Aasif: We didn't do anything except **enable**.*

Jon: So the British bombed Qaddafi's compound ...

*Aasif: No, no, they **implemented a building inrubblefication program**.*

Jon: ... to hasten regime change.

*Aasif: No, no, no. No, **to encourage Libyan leadership self-relocation**.*

Jon: Aasif, what are we doing? Why are we doing this? Why these semantic acrobatics? Why not just "we're bombing Libya to get rid of Qaddafi".

*Aasif: No, we are odyssey dawning **to reenable enforcement of the refreedoming of...***

Jon: Just stop. Just stop.

Similarly to the "semantic acrobatics" ridiculed in the example (22) above, in another example, the US Admiral Mike Mullen has referred to war in Libya as "Limited Operation, narrow in scope focused on supporting the United Nations Security Council resolution, which very specifically focused on humanitarian efforts protecting the civilians in Libya" (quoted on "The Colbert Report" 21.03.2011). Euphemistic reframings like this are referred to as 'semantic shenanigans' by people outside of the field of linguistics research.

In his critique of the language of corporations, institutions, and governments, Lutz (1989) writes that they use ambiguity, vagueness, and inflated language to misdirect. He argues that, for individuals and institutions alike, wordiness, jargon, and euphemisms replace frankness in dealing with people and complicate what might otherwise be simple and direct. Along the lines of the proposed view of euphemisms as fulfilling the cooperative and

argumentative functions, Lutz (1989: 96) draws a distinction between euphemisms proper and doublespeak⁴⁴: “When a euphemism is used to deceive, it becomes doublespeak.”

Lutz points out that basic to doublespeak is incongruity: “the incongruity between what is said, or left unsaid, and what really is; between the essential function of language and what doublespeak does – misleads, distorts, deceives, inflates, obfuscates” (Lutz 1989: 96). Therefore, the sole purpose of doublespeak is to make the unreasonable seem reasonable, the blamed seem blameless, the powerless seem powerful. Such language is often associated with governmental, military, and corporate institutions. In this respect, Chomsky noted that “to make sense of political discourse, it’s necessary to give a running translation into English, decoding the doublespeak of the media, academic social scientists and the secular priesthood generally” (Chomsky 1993).

Chomsky’s statement should certainly not be taken to mean that during the process of communication one English word or expression actually needs to be translated, or in his own parlance ‘decoded’, to yield something meaningful in English. This would be tantamount to saying that English is translated into English. However, Relevance Theory has shown that in addition to the mere decoding, utterance comprehension involves rich inferential processes at the core of which is relevance-driven recognition of speaker intention. Understanding certain utterances containing euphemistic and politically correct words and expressions will require more cognitive processing effort than others depending on the degree of their conventionalization relative to some context of utterance and the degree of their salience in speaker’s cognitive systems. The following section addresses the role of intentionality in causing certain utterances to be labelled as ‘euphemistic’/‘PC’ in discourse.

⁴⁴ The term ‘doublespeak’ was coined as an amalgam of two Orwellian expressions, ‘doublethink’ and ‘newspeak’, both of which appeared in Orwell’s dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* in which he represents a totalitarian society where the ruling party is in the process of inventing a new artificial language, Newspeak.

Chapter 5. X-phemisms/PC and intentionality

This chapter addresses the role of intentionality in assessing the x-phemistic value of utterances. It analyzes derogatory and appropriated uses of slurs and explains the notions of euphemistic dysphemisms and dysphemistic euphemisms.

5.1 Euphemisms/PC as intentional acts of communication

The debate around figurative language processing in general, as well as euphemisms and the related phenomenon of political correctness in particular, touches upon one of the fundamental questions in linguistics and philosophy of language: do words have meaning independent of speakers' intention in using them? For instance, if someone is charged with using a racist language, can that person accuse the critics of "reading meanings in" by denying the intention to be racist and offend anyone by that kind of language? Is it indeed possible not to be racist if one preempts a discourse string by a disclaimer "I'm not a racist, but..."?

The issue is complicated by the fact that, most of the time, intentions are of implicit nature, known only to the speaker, sometimes only in retrospect or 'post-dicto', and need to be guessed/recognized by the addressees in the process of online interpretation of utterances. To illustrate this point, let's take the following situation from the show "Two and a Half Men" (Season 9 Episode 16) in which a man named Allan praises his friend's girlfriend for being educated and having a refined taste for opera but then realizes that this makes his own girlfriend angry and attempts to remedy the situation:

(23)

Allan: That's one talented lady! And by talented I mean 'annoying' and by 'lady' I mean "bitch".

In this example the speaker is making his intentions explicit 'post-dicto' by asking the hearer to read/interpret his utterance as ironic despite the fact that ironic interpretation was clearly not originally intended.

Sometimes hearers may not have necessary background information which would provide necessary tools for recognizing the true intentions behind speaker's utterances as in the following example from "The Big Bang Theory" (Season 5 Episode 16) where the University President is saying that Dr. Sheldon Cooper (who happens to be a workaholic theoretical physicist) is obligated to take a vacation:

(24)

Sheldon: But if I don't come in to work, what am I supposed to do with myself?

University President: Read, rest, travel. I hear Afghanistan is nice this time of year.

*Sheldon (turning to his friends): **Sarcasm?***

Howard: No, you should go!

Sheldon is unsure whether to recognize President's utterance about Afghanistan as sarcastic or literally intended, since he has no frame of reference for what Afghanistan is like at that point due to spending most of his time in the laboratory and being oblivious to the ongoing war in that part of the world.

Consider the following exchange (from the "Daily Show" October 21, 2008):

(25)

Anderson Cooper CNN 360: *In recent days McCain and his running mate Sarah Palin have raised the S-word...*

Jon Stewart: *Oh no you didn't!... Wait, which one... 'scallywag, scoundrel, salsa-dancer, superman'? I'll tell you what, I'm gonna write down the S-word that I think the McCain campaign called Barack Obama and then we'll see if I'm right...*

[Cut to McCain and Sarah Palin each charging Barack Obama with being a 'socialist']

By uttering 'S-word' Anderson Cooper actually attempts to communicate that 'socialist' is a forbidden or 'tabooed' word in the 2008 US presidential campaign discourse. That is why it is undesirable to say it out loud as it may be for some reason offensive to the potential audience. Therefore he chooses to cover up the allegedly undesirable or dispreferred lexeme by wording his statement in an opaque manner and letting the hearer derive or "infer" the underlying meaning. This substitution also happens to echo (is modeled after) the way another strongly proscribed derogatory lexeme is commonly replaced by 'the N-word' in discourse.

It appears that in order for an utterance to be meant as an insult, the speaker must intend the utterance to be an insult and that intention must be, or be capable of being, recognized as such by the object of the insult or a third party. There are however instances when the offensive effect is generated when no offense is intentionally meant. For example, the racial dysphemistic slurs are so "explosively derogatory", enough so that, according to Croom (2011: 11) just hearing them *mentioned* (as opposed to intentionally used with the purpose of offending someone) can leave one feeling as if they have been made complicit in a morally atrocious act.

Faced with the S-word hearers can and are very likely to generate an inference to the effect that uttering ‘S-word’ was a slip of the tongue (in this case ‘S-word’ will be pragmatically enriched to ‘N-word’) and that McCain campaign actually resorted to using a racist slur to talk about the African-American presidential candidate Barack Obama. Another possible candidate for the ‘slip of the tongue’ inferential path, the one Jon Stewart pretends to be following for humorous effect, would be one of the notorious ‘four-letter words’, the ‘F-word’ (fuck).

Since these inferences are of implicit nature the speaker can always deny having communicated them and thereby avoid being responsible for whatever meanings speakers may have derived from that particular utterance. Thus in example (25) the McCain campaign can certainly deny having resorted to the racist slur by saying that they did not ‘say’ anything of the kind.

Allan and Burrige (2006) claim that it is not merely context that leads underspecified expressions like *the f-word* (fuck) or *the c-word* (cunt) to be immediately understandable; it is the shared common ground in the salience of the so-called SMD lexicon (lexical units associated with sex, micturition, and defecation). However, in cases like the above, the ‘S-word’ is not a representative of the Allan and Burrige’s SMD lexicon and there are numerous other sensitive and tabooed topics speakers may choose to ‘cover up’ by resorting to such substitutions. Guided by the relevance-seeking nature of pragmatic inference, the ‘N-word’ is immediately understood and inevitably enriched to the original racial slur as it is one of the constituent parts of the interdependent and co-activated frames.

Indeed, some researchers find substitution practices like these to be controversial and objectionable. Hill (2008: ix), for instance, argues that such substitutions are an even more powerful site for the reproduction of racializing practice than is the moment of shock when the reader encounters the words spelled out. With the ellipses, both writer and reader share a false comfort – we are not the sort of people who would ever spell these words out – that is immediately contradicted by what is silenced in a deep presupposition – we both know these words”. In such cases, the underlying dysphemisms are, in relevance-theoretic terms, strongly mutually manifest to the interlocutors.

It is interesting to note in this respect that diachronically, the same linguistic form can trigger activation of totally different frames. Thus in discourse on the US civil war the ‘S’-word would most likely be assigned to the ‘slavery’ frame and therefore immediately inferentially enriched to the relevant ‘slavery’ and not to ‘socialism’. Within the same frame

of civil war, for instance, *agriculture* and *resources* were used to refer to “slavery” in speeches of leaders of confederacy of southern states.

It is also very significant that both ‘the S-word’, ‘the N-word’, ‘the F-word’ and other fig-leaf like cover-ups formed along the same pattern ‘the x-word’, e.g. ‘the c-word’ for ‘cunt’, are all used with the definite article ‘the’. The “x-word” substitution coined after the ‘N-word’ is very common today. Sometimes it is used to generate a humorous effect as can be seen from the following example from the show “How I Met Your Mother” Season 7 Episode 13):

(26)

Lily: You really wanna read our kid bed-time stories about monsters?

Marshall: First of all, I wouldn't use the M-word! Only they can call themselves that.

As Allan and Burridge (2006: 135) point out that the “x-word” substitutions are as much proper names as *the Himalayas* and *the Pope*, immediately recognizable to the normal speaker of English despite the fact that, though there is only one set of Himalayas and only one Pope, there are thousands of <...> words beginning with *n-*, *c-* and *f-*. It can thus be assumed that these are new ‘proper names’ given to the existing concepts, an epiphenomenon caused by the need to change how something is referred to in discourse. Such instances can be viewed as *attributive* (as opposed to *referential*) uses of definite descriptions and from the point of view of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995), the gap between the encoded meaning of such a definite description and what that description contributes to propositional content in a particular context is bridged by the relevance-guided pragmatic inference.

From the relevance-theoretic standpoint that the N-word is used with the definite article similarly to the way ‘the waiter’ and ‘the check’ may be preceded by the definite article as such representations are constituent parts of larger stereotyped sequences of actions (*scenarios* or *scripts*, see Schank and Abelson 1977) that defines a well-known situation which make the specific sets of related assumptions strongly mutually manifest.

Euphemistic language use is necessarily deliberate. “Accidental euphemisms”, if there is such a thing, will not be processed as such. Hearers should somehow be able to become aware that a euphemism has been used even without necessarily having to be able to label a discourse string as “euphemistic”. Many speakers who are non-linguists simply do not have the necessary terminology in their cognitive arsenal, i.e. they are not familiar with the notion of ‘euphemism’. What such speakers do become aware of, though, is a sort of effect consisting in holding the belief that some weaker lexical form has been used instead of some

stronger one, which could have been used, but was not and understand (in relevance-theoretic terms ‘metarepresent’) this stronger form accordingly. This process will inevitably involve mental representation of the relevant salient (or in relevance-theoretic terms ‘strongly mutually manifest’ in the interlocutors’ cognitive environment) dispreferred alternative expressions instead of which the euphemism has been used.

The use of x-phemisms appears to be intentional in the sense that they are part of conscious linguistic behavior performed for special pragmatic purpose and one can’t be x-phemistic or politically correct by accident. In order for these strategic conscious communicative practices to work and be perceived as such, the specific x-phemistic/PC intentionality-attitude underlying their use must be recognized and ascribed to speakers by their audience.⁴⁵ In order for a discourse string to give rise to the euphemistic/PC interpretation, its addressees must recognize that a different, stronger and contextually inappropriate word or expressions could have been used instead of the one actually uttered but was not due to face-saving considerations. From the relevance-theoretic standpoint euphemistic and PC language can be viewed as relying on such representations of salient alternatives (metarepresentations) in order to be produced and understood.

According to Rawson (1981: 3) euphemisms may sometimes be used unconsciously. He notes, however, that instances of such a use include mainly linguistic units that appeared so long ago that hardly anyone remembers the original motivation. Rawson exemplifies this category by such now orthophemistic terms as *cemetery* (from the Greek word for ‘sleeping place’), which replaced the more deathly *graveyard* (Rawson 1981: 3). Thus it is probably safe to assume that in the predominant majority of cases, being euphemistic/PC means behaving intentionally and such verbal behavior can be explained using the tools provided by a theoretical model of ostensive communication.

⁴⁵ Euphemisms/PC, for instance, can be used to express a humorous/ironic attitude to what is said. For instance, one can produce an ironic understatement “He is only a little tipsy” about someone who is completely drunk.

5.2 Assessing the x-phemistic value

5.2.1 Derogatory and appropriated uses of slurs

As already discussed in section 2.1, following Allan and Burrige (2006), there is no such thing as an absolute taboo, absolute euphemism or dysphemism, which would hold for all cultures and times: “Like euphemism, dysphemism is not necessarily a property of the word itself, but of the way it is used” Allan and Burrige (2006: 45). According to the authors, the x-phemistic value of utterances entirely depends on, or in Allan and Burrige’s own words ‘wedded to’ context, place, time and intentions that lurk behind them.

While acknowledging the central role of intentionality and context in assigning x-phemistic values to utterances, Allan (2014) concedes that although particular language expressions are not necessarily euphemistic in all contexts, it ignores reality to pretend that ordinary people do not speak and act as if some expressions are intrinsically euphemistic and others dysphemistic – for instance, *loo* is euphemistic whereas *shithouse* is not.

Allan and Burrige (1991: 21) suggest the hypothetical context of “being polite to a casual acquaintance of the opposite sex in a formal situation in a middle class environment” as one in which orthophemisms and euphemisms are likely to be used in place of a dispreferred alternative (dysphemism). As we can see, in naming the middle class politeness criterion (MCPC) as the one that establishes a default condition for resorting to orthophemisms and euphemisms, Allan and Burrige view context as a set of situation-specific socio-cultural extra-linguistic variables-cues, which can constrain the interpretation process.

Similar to the frame-based view of politeness proposed by Escandell-Vidal (1996, 2009) and Terkourafi (2001), among others, Allan (2014) suggests that such socio-cultural variables take the form of cognitive frames/scripts against which the appropriateness of (linguistic) behavior is evaluated. Different contexts-frames impose different standards of appropriateness.

Socio-cultural contextual variables (e.g. social status, gender, age, etc.) are also considered important in triggering euphemistic interpretations by Fussell (1983) and Senichkina (2006:), who suggests that it is possible to test whether a given linguistic unit is a euphemism by applying the following appropriateness conditions: “imagining resorting to it while conversing with an interlocutor of a higher social status” Senichkina (2006: 21). According to these authors, if a unit is appropriate to use under certain circumstances, fulfills

a softening (hedging) function and ameliorates the denotation, then the unit in question is a euphemism.

Sometimes it is very difficult to establish the exact x-phemistic value of the expression with any degree of objectivity without taking sides. This point can be illustrated by a politically charged expression *anchor baby*, which is as a pejorative substitute for a lengthy “a child born of an immigrant in the United States”, used as a tool by which a family can find legal foothold in the US, since those children are automatically allowed to choose United States citizenship. The term is generally demeaning to both children and their parents as such ‘nicknaming’ is based on a dehumanizing metaphor ascribing human children functions of inanimate objects (anchors) in a derogatory reference to the supposed role of the child. It is interesting to note that the fifth edition of the New American Heritage Dictionary initially defined this term, considered to be a racist and deliberate effort to dehumanize immigrant children by many, as neutral:

(27)

Anchor Baby, n. A child born to a noncitizen mother in a country that grants automatic citizenship to children born on its soil, especially such a child born to parents seeking to secure eventual citizenship for themselves and often other members of their family.

This sparked controversy in the media and later the label ‘offensive’ was added to the entry in the online version of the dictionary by its editors to show that in uttering this expression speakers can and often do show their negative attitude to this phenomenon. This example shows that judgments regarding what may or may not be appropriate in certain situations are individual and differ from person to person, let alone culture to culture or different periods of time (see Warren 1992).

I agree with van Dijk (2008), who argues that it is not the social situation that influences (or is influenced by) conversation, but the way the participants define such a situation. On his view, contexts are subjective constructs designed and updated in interaction by participants as members of groups and communities. He rightfully observes that if contexts were objective social conditions or constraints, all people in the same social situation would speak in the same way. Thus van Dijk (2008: 22) assumes a cognitive stance towards context as “subjective participant representations of communicative situations”, not as the communicative situations themselves: “[...] contexts are not some kind of objective social

situation, but rather a socially based but subjective construct of participants about the for-them-relevant properties of such a situation, that is, a mental model” (van Dijk 2008: 56)⁴⁶.

Croom (2011) discusses the observation previously made by Hom (2008) and Hornsby (2001) to the effect that semantic and pragmatic theorists make rather different claims and generally disagree as to the role of intentionality in assessing the x-phemistic value of utterances. He notes, in this respect, that semantic theorists advocate the context-independent view of slurs where the derogatory content of a dysphemistic slur gets expressed in every context of utterance as it is part of its lexical meaning, whereas pragmatic theorists argue that derogatory content is rather context-specific, i.e. that which gets pragmatically communicated by the slur. Let us examine this in more detail.

Slurs are traditionally regarded as “a conventional means to express strong negative attitudes towards members of a group” (Richard 2008). They ‘target’ racial, ethnic, religious, gender etc. groups by derogating⁴⁷ them, e.g. portraying the group as inferior and/or despicable. They also vary in intensity of the conveyed contempt. The ‘targeting’ is accomplished through, for instance, referring to the hearer or some third person’s race, ethnicity, or nationality in such terms as to cause a face affront. The face affront can be caused intentionally as well as unintentionally. The speaker who utters slurs without having racist beliefs or intentions is regarded as having resorted to slurs unintentionally. The unintentionally used slurs are referred to as ‘gaffes’ by Hill (2008: 88), who notes that the actual linguistic content of slurs and gaffes can be identical; one commentator’s slur is another’s gaffe.

Slurs are characterized as strictly tabooed linguistic expressions (see Anderson and Lepore 2013), along with other pejorative units, such as expletives or swear words (e.g. *fuck*, *shit*, *damn*) and insults (e.g. *dick*, *bastard*) (for a taxonomy of pejoratives see Hom 2010: 164). Anderson and Lepore (2013a) note that, unlike derogatory or pejorative expressions (e.g. *moron*, *dork*), which can target individuals, slurs target whole groups of people: “anyone who uses the N-word slurs all black people, but one who uses ‘moron’ needn’t be slurring every mentally disabled person” Anderson and Lepore (2013a: 3).

⁴⁶ Van Dijk’s (1977: 209) original definition of relevance is similar to the one adopted in Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory: “a fact, and hence the knowledge of a fact, is important (or relevant) relative to a context or in general to a situation if it is an immediate condition for a probable event or action (or prevention of these) in that context or situation”. Relevance Theory defines relevance in the following way: “an assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 122).

⁴⁷ According to Hom (2008: 432), derogation is the actual application, or predication, of a slur.

According to Anderson and Lepore (2013a), the linguistic role of slurs, which the authors treat as words prohibited not on account of their offensive content, but because of relevant edicts surrounding their prohibition, is exhausted by picking out the same group as a neutral counterpart. Their account of slurs, which they refer to as Prohibitionism, explains that groups prohibit names not explicitly adopted by them, since calling a group by a name that its members have not chosen may be viewed as an attempt to usurp their authority to choose (Anderson and Lepore 2013b: 7). On their view, it is the taboo violation resulting from the use of slurs that causes offence.

Croom (2013: 195) suggests an alternative semantic account of slurs, according to which by choosing to use a slur instead of some neutrally descriptive term, the speaker *prima facie* intends to express their endorsement of a (typically but not necessarily negative) attitude towards the (prototypical) *descriptive properties* (rather than the agent) possessed by the target of their utterance.

Hornsby (2001: 128-129) observes that derogatory words apply to people and are commonly understood to convey hatred or contempt but that for each such word, there is another word that applies to the same people but whose use does not convey these things – there is, that is, a neutral counterpart. Accordingly, since speakers have a lexical choice regarding how they identify their intended targets – i.e., between (a) opting to use a slurring term (e.g. the N-word), which is commonly understood to convey hatred or contempt (Hornsby 2001: 128–129), or instead (b) opting to use a slurring term’s neutral counterpart (e.g., African-American), which is not commonly understood to convey hatred or contempt (Hornsby 2001: 128–129) – that speaker will be *prima facie* expected to choose the term that they consider most appropriate for identifying their intended target.

Croom (2013: 180) notes that considering that the choice of words has often determined whether one lives or dies in real-life situations, it is clear that our practical choice of terms often carries immense significance. He goes on to say that speakers may exploit their understanding of the difference in derogatory force between neutrally descriptive terms and non-neutrally slurring terms to strategically choose to use one rather than the other in order to most aptly communicate to others, through their lexical choice, the corresponding attitude that they are intending to express towards the target of their utterances.

Slurs have non-derogatory correlates – or at least there are alternative lexical options available to speakers such that their use of the slur over a neutral counterpart typically expresses a strategic choice that can signal derogatory intent towards a target – and so the

speaker's choice to use the slur is often taken to indicate their approval of the slurring term and what it is typically used to convey.

Slurs are derogatory by virtue of being indicative of the intention to show negative/contemptful etc. attitude associated with having selected the particular lexical unit from all the possible available alternatives to refer to some group of people, which the speaker could have resorted to instead of the slur (see Croom 2005, 2011 for discussion).

Croom (2011: 1) points out that although it is true that the utterance of slurs is illegitimate and derogatory in most contexts, sufficient evidence suggests that slurs are not always or exclusively used to derogate. Existing semantic accounts of slurs suggest that descriptions used as neutral references to some stigmatized population groups are part of literal meaning of slurs together with the expression of a certain derogatory attitude to them along the lines of “x and bad/despicable because of it” where x stands for the neutral description of a stigmatized population group (cf. Blackburn 1984; Hom 2008; McCready 2010; Saka 2007). Such theoretic proposals are problematic as they appear unable to explain how it is, if derogation is taken to be part of the literal content of slurs, that they can mean something non-derogatory or be felicitously applied in relation to some individuals who do not belong to the group typically associated with the slur. For instance, when the sexist slur ‘fag’ is used to target non-homosexual individuals (see Szekely 2008). The semantic accounts fail to explain how slurs can communicate non-derogatory meaning between close in-group interlocutors as a means to strengthen the in-group solidarity (usually by representatives of the very in-group that the slur was originally intended to target)⁴⁸ (see Croom 2013; 2014a, 2014b for discussion).

Some accounts (e.g. Potts 2007, 2008; Camp 2013) are classified by researchers as ‘pragmatic’ (Bianchi 2014), since they treat slurs in terms of conventional implicatures. Since the notion of conventional implicature is not given any theoretical significance in most modern pragmatic theories (including RT and neo-Gricean accounts) and such meanings are considered to be on the semantic side of the divide, I will refer to such approaches as ‘semantic’ as well. According to Carston (2003), most of the linguistic devices allegedly generating conventional implicatures are viewed in RT as encoding *procedural constraints* on

⁴⁸ Bianchi (2014) considers such ‘appropriated’, ‘reclaimed’ or ‘subversive’ uses of slurs for non-derogatory purposes (which the researcher collectively refers to as ‘community’ use of slur) from the relevance-theoretic standpoint as cases of attributive (interpretive) use echoing derogatory uses in ways that make manifest the dissociation from the offensive contents.

the inferential processes involved in deriving conversational implicatures. Carston (2003) notes that certain of these devices are seen in RT as contributing to “what is said”, where this is construed as an entirely semantic notion.

Hill (2008) discusses Butler’s (1997) arguments to the effect that since slurs cannot be completely eradicated from language thought proscription, they must be reshaped to acquire new kinds of subjectivity, i.e. be used as tokens of in-group solidarity. Hill (2008: 58) notes, however, that this circulation or ‘resubjectified’ slurs will reinforce the salience of these lexical units in discourse, thereby making them continually available for potential malign re-appropriation. In such appropriative or in-group uses, a slur is a form of “mock impoliteness” since it is understood as intentionally nonoffensive (Culpeper, 1996). Leech (1983) has argued that interlocutors may act superficially impolite with one another in order to foster a sense of social intimacy and to reduce relative inequalities between them, and Culpeper (1996: 352) suggests that the more intimate a relationship, the less necessary and important politeness is. He argues that lack of politeness is associated with intimacy, and so being superficially impolite can promote intimacy. This only works in contexts in which the impoliteness is understood to be untrue such as in communicative exchanges between close friends or in-group members.

From the pragmatic point of view, words don’t possess any literal meaning outside of the actual context of use. Therefore, depending on the underlying intentions or “who says what to whom” (Lasswell 1948), the use of ‘fag’ as well as the N-word, for example, can range from the most intensive of slurs to the rapport⁴⁹-fostering indicator of friendship and solidarity and actually by synonymous with ‘my closest friend’ in this ad hoc use⁵⁰.

Some semanticists concur that in cases of non-derogatory appropriated uses of slurs we may be dealing with a change in meaning (Richard 2008: 9; Hom 2008: 17). The meaning of slurs is altered for the in-group use so that, for instance, ‘camaraderie’ becomes part of the meaning of the N-word (Saka 2008: 145). Such accounts, however, leave the mechanism underlying such semantic change unexplicated. Bianchi (2014) suggests a solution “compatible with the semantic and the pragmatic perspectives” (2014: 36) without postulating

⁴⁹ I use the term ‘rapport’ to mean “affective quality of relations” (see Spencer-Oatey 2005, 2008, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009). It refers to “people’s subjective perceptions of (dis)harmony, smoothness-turbulence and warmth-antagonism in interpersonal relations” while the term “rapport management” is used to refer to the ways in which this (dis)harmony is (mis)managed” (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009: 102).

⁵⁰ Some scholars argue that diachronically, slurs undergo semantic change and their meanings can be broadened and transformed (Butler 1997; Coupland 2007; Keckes 2008).

a change of meaning in appropriated uses. She regards the appropriated uses of slurs in relevance-theoretic terms as ‘echoing’ derogatory uses in ways and contexts that make manifest the dissociation from the offensive contents.

I suggest that the account regarding appropriated uses of slurs as echoic and dissociative would render them ironic as it is verbal irony that is regarded in Relevance Theory as an interpretive echoic use displaying a dissociative attitude to the proposition expressed (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Wilson 2006). Such an account is only applicable to the appropriated use of slurs by the in-groupers who echo derogatory uses in ways and contexts that make manifest the dissociation from the offensive content conveyed by a slur as an ironical use requires a context where the dissociation from the echoed offensive content is clearly identifiable (see Bianchi 2014). If we allow that the appropriated uses of slurs are resorted to in their non-derogatory senses by the out-groupers, they could be regarded as echoing the appropriated use of slur (e.g. occasion-specific broadening of the N-word to denote closeness/camaraderie on the account of belonging to the group targeted by the slur as its salient contextually-relevant meaning) by in-groupers echoing the derogatory use of a slur with a dissociative attitude, which out-groupers regard as the new non-derogatory meaning of a slur (e.g. *friend*). The attitude expressed by out-groupers resorting to such appropriated uses of slurs will be one of endorsement of this new meaning rather than dissociation from it and such uses can be treated as phatic (see Padilla Cruz 2007c). Viewing such uses as phatic would explain their rapport-management potential, which is one of the functions attributed to the use of phatic utterances since Malinowsky’s (1923) seminal work, describing phatic communication as a “type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words” and where the linguistic expressions are exploited to fulfill a social function (Žegarac 1998; Žegarac and Clark 1999a).

Bianchi (2014) recognizes that, diachronically, the appropriated uses of slurs leads to semantic change and facilitates the appropriation process. When the process is completed the new meaning of slurs becomes open for use by in-groupers and out-groupers alike without conveying any derogatory content.

In order to produce an x-phemism, speakers choose words and expressions from paradigmatic sets of available alternatives due to more positive, in case of euphemisms or negative, in case of dysphemisms, connotations associated with their use. A word or expression can be considered euphemistic only relative to some other dispreferred one. Thus uttering ‘collateral damage’ presupposes a prior rejection of ‘civilians killed as a result of

military operations' as contextually inappropriate. The preferred word or expression *gains meaning from the salience of the dispreference*. The dispreferred representations has to be mentally entertained before producing the preferred one.

5.2.2 To praise or to offend?

In the previous section I have touched upon the issue that although it is true that utterance of slurs is derogatory in most contexts, these lexical units are not always used to derogate. Speakers can and do resort to swearwords and racist slurs as rapport-enhancing in-group solidarity markers (see Daly et al. 2004) and in case of the “N-word⁵¹”, for example, even non-African-American who identify with black hip-hop culture use the otherwise highly offensive word with no detrimental consequences (e.g. white hip-hop artist Eminem), since this kind of “mock impoliteness” is taken by all participants of communication to be intentionally non-offensive, i.e. that in this particular case the speakers has uttered the, otherwise racist, slurs without having racist beliefs or intentions.

From the point of view of pragmatics of x-phemistic language use, Allan and Burridge (2006) show that linguistic forms (locutions) conventionalized in their dysphemistic use, can sometimes convey a benevolent attitude. Examples of such ‘dysphemistic euphemisms’ include calling a good friend an *old bastard* in English or Сукин сын! (Sukin syn! – Son of a bitch!) in both English and Russian, where the allegedly dysphemistic expression is used with the intention of praising and admiring someone’s good luck or wit.

Research by Mateo and Yus (2000) demonstrated that the use of dysphemisms can be motivated by several various types of intentionality ranging from offense- to interaction- to praise-centered. Example (28) shows that the word *cunt*, which was regarded as the most offensive word in British English in the year 2000 (McEnery 2006: 35), can also be used as a token of an in-group friendly greeting:

(28)

*Now consider the final sentences of this diary report from a British undergraduate: A close friend of mine from Norway was eating with myself and my parents. They asked about our shared friends and my friend (Eddie) began to tell anecdotes about them. Throughout this point he used the word ‘cunt’ repeatedly. I felt very embarrassed as I knew that Eddie uses this word in the place of words like ‘guy’ and ‘dude’. In our circle of friends “Hi **cunt**” was a friendly greeting (example from Culpeper 2010: 323)*

⁵¹ Used jokingly or as part of a phatic greeting, the N-word is pronounced with the [a]-ending, while the [er]-ending pronunciation is considered derogatory.

From the point of view of the so-called “naturalist hypothesis” mentioned in section 2.1, the act of swearing, e.g. uttering the so-called “four-letter words” etc., by itself should usually be perceived as dysphemistic and therefore tabooed. However the linguistic forms *dick* and *pussy* are sometimes allowed on the air in the English-speaking media, but only as insults and not as references to anatomical parts. In other words, it is permissible to say *You’re such a dick!*, *Don’t be a pussy!* and even *He’s such a pussy!* (meaning a coward) but never *Your dick...*, *Your pussy...* etc. This shows that, contrary to the naturalist hypothesis it’s not the phonological form of the word itself that is tabooed and is in need of euphemization, but the way it is actually used in discourse, i.e. the type of intentionality underlying the actual utterance.

By way of another illustration, consider how in episode 1 of season 5 of the US animated show “South Park”, euphemistically titled “It hits the fan”, the word *shit* is uttered uncensored 162 separate times (a counter in the bottom left corner of the screen actually counts the number of times the word has been uttered) and the point is made to the effect that there are acceptable forms of *shit* on TV. The show mocks the fact that it has become acceptable in the US to utter this lexeme in any context where it does not mean *excrement*.

The plot of the episode revolves around the fact that everyone in the town of South Park is anxiously anticipating the follow up to the announcement that a famous TV Cop Drama is going to use the word *shit* uncensored. The broadcast of the show leads to widespread acceptance of the word, even in schools, causing people to use it constantly, in casual conversations and often out of context. A school teacher is forced to clarify the acceptable context of use for the previously unacceptable word: as a noun or adjective meaning *bad*, or as an exclamation of disappointment, the word is acceptable, but as a noun or adjective referring to feces, it is apparently unacceptable (a reference to real-life US Federal Communications Commission standards of indecency). Eventually all characters in the show come to the inevitable realization regarding intentionality and conventionalization of lexemes in discourse: it is not that saying *shit* in itself is wrong but saying it in excess leads to boredom with the word, or in the words of one of the characters, Stan Marsh: *This sucks. Now that ‘shit’ is out, it isn’t fun to say it anymore* (see the discussion of the ‘associative contamination’ and ‘camouflage’ hypotheses related to ‘careers’ of x-phemisms in discourse in section 9.2).

Wajnrub (2005: 40) makes a similar point: “It would seem that not only has FUCK lost its referential base but, as an intensifier, it no longer intensifies. In other words, nowadays

it takes more FUCKs to achieve what one lone FUCK would have achieved ten years ago.” The claim here is that overuse of *fuck* in the everyday speech of many people has led, to some extent, to a lessening of its impact as an expletive. According to Wajnrub (2005: 45-46) it started out as a taboo word because of its referential function where *fuck* stands for the sexual act. Then, as the word gravitated over time toward more emotional outlets, it lost its referential meaning. The author observes that now the taboo still lurks, though nowhere as strongly as even twenty years ago. There is barely a sexual glimmer of meaning in the word, as it often means something more like "go figure."

Wajnrub (2005: 45) notes that although FUCK has no other exact synonym (*screw* and *bang* come closest), its referential sense is today one of its less frequent uses. Wajnrub (2005: 47) quotes British writer and politician Wayland Young who contends that the supposed alternatives and euphemisms, such as *copulate*, *fornicate*, *have sexual intercourse*, *sleep with*, and *make love* are either incorrect or inappropriate. He argues that FUCK clearly and unequivocally says what it means. It's worth pointing out in this respect that topics like this appear to be taboo irrespective of vocabulary used to refer to them.

Returning to our discussion of the equivocal nature of utterances containing euphemistic lexemes, equally capable of offending and praising, depending on intentionality underlying their production. In addition to cases in which a speaker's dysphemistic intention can be accomplished euphemistically, the opposite is also possible – a locution conventionalized in its euphemistic meaning can turn out to express a dysphemistic attitude. This is illustrated by example (29) in which the US President Barack Obama tells the talk show host Jay Leno during his appearance on the "Tonight Show" (19.03.09) that he is a decent bowler and that he bowled a 129 score. Jay Leno sarcastically says: "That's very good, Mr. President." At that comment by Leno, President Obama laughs and says: "it's like the Special Olympics or something."

Here *Special Olympics* is a euphemism for *Olympic games for the physically handicapped* so Obama is actually saying that he bowled like an *invalid* by covering it up with an allegedly euphemistic *special Olympics*. However, in this case this particular expression will function as a dysphemistic euphemism since by using the euphemistic form, the speaker expresses a derogatory attitude:

(29)

Obama: *I have been practicing bowling*

Leno: *Really*

Obama: I bowled a 129

Leno: That's 'very good', Mr. President!

Obama: That's like Special Olympics or something. No, listen, I'm making progress on the bowling... (attested: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXcgpZwsBPY>)

Another example of a dysphemistic euphemism would be the Russian expression *лица кавказской национальности* (litsa kavkazskoy natsional'nosti - persons of Caucasian nationality). Coined after *лица еврейской национальности* (litsa yevreyskoy natsional'nosti - persons of Jewish nationality), which was an awkward attempt during Soviet times at curbing presumably anti-Semitic use of *еврей* (yevrey - Jew), the expression refers to a non-existing *кавказская национальность* (Caucasian nationality). Krongauz (2008) argues that this seemingly preferred construction is “hypocritical and in fact even more offensive than the expressions, which name the nationality directly, while **the very unwillingness of referring to the nationality directly is indicative of a negative and disparaging attitude to it**” (Krongauz 2008: 205, my emphasis, A.S.). This statement is crucial to the discussion of euphemisms and especially PC – related terms as most of them were coined with the purposes of referring to certain aspects of social, economic etc. life by, arguably, more positive alternative nominations.

As already discussed in the previous section, discriminatory language can be analyzed as having several functions in discourse: apart from *derogation* itself, it can serve the purpose of *group solidarity enhancement* and *face management*. All these uses share a common feature: the use of a label implies that the speaker views the target as a group member rather than as an individual. In discriminatory discourse members of some social groups are never personalized, never depicted as individuals with unique characteristics. (cf. Van Leeuwen 2000). The difference between the derogatory and appropriated uses lies in the type of attitude expressed to such a group labeling, and x-phemistic language serves just this purpose of communicating the descriptive propositional content along with the attitudinal expressive one.

In addition to being explicitly expressed by the derogatory and appropriated uses of certain locutions (such attitudes can be seen as derived in the form of higher-level explicatures in RT terms, and so as actually being part of what is explicitly communicated by the speaker, rather than what is implicated), derogatory meanings may be derived at the level of discourses and patterns of language use rather than individual lexical items (Mills 2004: 154). This can happen when language use, for instance, is not ‘inclusive’ or prescribes what is ‘normal’ (see Ruscher and Wallace 2008). Such implicitly derived derogatory

interpretations may arise when organizations, for instance, address invitations to social events to “employees and their wives”, which conveys an implicitly communicated message of ‘exclusion’ to female employees. Similarly, men may ask a female co-worker her opinion on a tie or a retail store, but may fail to include her in discussions of sports. In such cases, implicit discrimination can be found in what is *not* said.

Regarding lexically-based derogation and discrimination, I argue in section 8.3, that understanding speaker’s intentions in uttering some discourse string is crucial to ascribing it x-phemistic/PC status when some lexical material still stands out as ‘marked’ in discourse. Once the linguistic form becomes conventionalized relative to some context of use, it is processed in an automatic heuristic-based manner without considerations of speaker intentions, all else being equal. Words and expressions, whose x-phemistic meanings have not yet become conventions of use acquire meanings in certain contexts as part of hearers’ recognition of the intentionality underlying what the speakers say.

It certainly cannot be denied that some words and expression are **generally** presumed to be dispreferred in most contexts due to some established conventionalized semantic meaning. Thus *making love* can be considered a euphemism for *having sexual intercourse*, which in itself is a euphemism for *shag, bang, fuck, screw* etc. In such cases the dispreferred nature of the expression is not an individual matter but rather a convention of use in a socio-cultural setting. In the following example, the alleged dispreferred or ‘curse-word’ status of the linguistic form *fuck* is so strong that the movie character McGrubber mistakenly considers dysphemistic *rammed, humped* and *bone-session* as euphemisms for the ‘F-word’⁵² thereby creating a humorous effect:

(30)

McGrubber: ...and then we rammed.

Piper: You what?

McGrubber: I humped her. I don’t wanna use the F-word cause I don’t wanna diminish its beauty in any way but it was fucking great and I’ve never felt this way about a bone-session before.

Piper: Yeah. Sounds really special.

McGrubber: Thanks!

⁵² Taking to an extreme, this X-word substitution strategy can also be (jokingly) applied to coin such, later to be called ‘echoic’, euphemisms as *the M-finger* for *the middle finger* (example from Saturday Night Live 11.02.2012)

The examples of Chinese and Japanese homophone-based taboos discussed in section 2.1 seem to point in the direction of words sometimes having meaning irrespective of the underlying intentionality. The tabooed nature of some concepts is so dispreferable and salient on people's minds that even the contextually independent semantic meanings of word forms themselves are axiologically disfavorable rather than their actual use or what uttering those words on particular occasions means.

The association of a lexical unit with a taboo topic can become so strong that it arguably becomes dominant and contaminates the word-form itself eventually leading to the word "falling into disgrace" and becoming a dysphemism (e.g. the scientific Latin term for *oral sex* - *fellatio* is certainly a euphemism vis-à-vis the dysphemistic *blow job*, however, it can hardly be considered an acceptable substitute as the topic itself does not allow for an appropriate orthophemistic or polite way of referring to it in most discourse situations⁵³).

Among the researchers who paid attention to such semiotic paradoxes was Leech who back in 1974 discussed how a completely lexicalized euphemism comes into being when a given euphemistic sense becomes the salient meaning of a given word by looking at the history of the euphemistic sense of the English noun *cock*⁵⁴ used as a substitute for *penis*, which has become so salient that it has pushed away the word's axiologically neutral meaning of *domestic fowl* and become transparent with regard to its taboo association. This has allegedly caused the speakers of English to gradually abandon the word *cock* in its axiologically neutral sense and substitute it with *rooster*, not to be misunderstood or perceived as violating a taboo (see Leech 1974: 19).

It is interesting to note, however, that according to the associative contamination hypothesis (see section 9.2) the word *rooster*, used as a replacement for *cock* would be subject to the same treadmill and a new substitute would eventually take its place in the vernacular, which is clearly not the case. If non-taboo homonyms of tabooed lexemes were subject to euphemism treadmill as well, this would lead to their subsequent abandonment, and this would render impossible explaining why nothing of the sort seems to be happening to the short form of *Richard* – *Dick*, whose homonym *dick* happens to be the absolute synonym of

⁵³ As mentioned in section 5.2, Allan and Burridge (2006) name the MCPC as the typical situation in which speakers will be likely to resort to euphemisms in order to save their own and/or some third party's face.

⁵⁴ Allan (2012: 16) notes that the ambiguity of *cock* in English is found elsewhere in Indo-European languages, e.g. Latin *gallus* had a meaning 'penis' from classical times, through Vulgar Latin, and this meaning was maintained in Italian and Spanish.

cock (intersubstitutable in all context in its meaning *penis*), e.g. the name of the former US vice-president Dick Cheney has certainly never been substituted for anything in the US political discourse as potentially taboo-violating.

To summarize the above view, the x-phemistic value of a lexical unit can be established only relative to some existing saliently unexpressed alternative nominations, which are part of the same frame-like paradigmatic set of synonyms. Generally speaking, any linguistic string can potentially receive euphemistic interpretation as rational communicators continuously make choices in terms of which wording to give to their thoughts at the expense of some other alternatives which are discarded as ‘dispreferred’ if the communication is to be cooperative. Thus uttering *collateral damage* presupposes a prior decision not to use *civilian casualties* on the part of the speaker. The preferred word or phrase gains meaning from the salience of the dispreference and the dispreferred content has to be mentally represented before producing the euphemistic (preferred) expression.

5.3 Explicating the euphemistic/PC intentions

In this section I show that euphemistic/PC meanings can be inferentially derived in context or qualified explicitly by adding such disclaimers as ‘euphemistically speaking’, ‘diplomatically speaking’ or ‘to be politically correct’. Such disclaimers are variously referred to as metalinguistic comments, contextualization cues indicating how speakers intend for their hearers to interpret what they say.

Since people do not unconsciously, or otherwise spontaneously, label utterances as being ‘metaphoric’, ‘idiomatic’, ‘metonymic’, ‘sarcastic’, scholars such as Gibbs (2012: 109) *inter alia*, suggest that there is no empirical evidence to support the claim that in the process of online interpretation hearers typically recognize any type of figurative language as some special type of discourse. There is simply no time for that sort of labeling to be incorporated as part of their fast-acting unconscious comprehension processes.

Gibbs (2012) quotes experimental studies that demonstrate that people may be greatly influenced by the figurative nature of certain arguments when making decisions, but have little conscious awareness, even when asked, of the type of language that shaped their thinking (Gibbs 2012: 110). Considering this, it is worth considering closely that the same may well apply to euphemistic discourse: comprehension of utterances containing euphemistic and PC expressions does not involve labeling words and expressions as ‘euphemistic’ or ‘PC’ unless they are explicitly marked or ‘pre-empted’ by such disclaimers as *euphemistically speaking* and *to be politically correct*.

On the one hand, speakers’ utterances can and do give rise to a certain hedged/attenuated/indirect or not-saying-it-all effect without being recognized and labeled as ‘euphemistic’ or ‘PC’ by the hearers, while on the other, speakers themselves can explicitly signal that they have deliberately resorted to euphemisms/PC expressions as specific type of linguistic devices with the intention of producing these cognitive effects.

Language users all make particular linguistic moves in conversations and, when called upon to do so, may be able to rationalize why they made that particular move. Such rationalizations are metalinguistic comments in which the speaker states what it is he/she did with language, or at least intended to do. From the RT standpoint, such devices, along with “smileys” and other emoticons in written conversations, show the direction in which relevance is to be sought. The metalinguistic comments trigger a process of inferencing to calculate and specify the speaker’s communicative intention(s) with regard to some attitudinal meaning. Whenever speakers feel that hearers do not have enough accessible conceptual

information for the derivation of the intended contextual effects, they may provide additional contextual assumptions to facilitate the process of interpretation. In other words, implicated or contextual premises may be made explicit (cf. Blakemore 1997: 15). The purpose of such reformulations is to modify the audience's cognitive environments by guaranteeing access to certain assumptions, making them mutually manifest. Therefore, they contribute to extending the cognitive context in order to ensure that addressees understand the intended relevance of the original formulation.

The intended optimal relevance depends on the contextual assumptions that are made accessible to the interpreter and the decision to reformulate is based on the assumption that the original formulation did not achieve optimal relevance. This means that there are expectations about how the assumptions made manifest may be processed in a relevance-rendering manner. Thus the aim of reformulations is to provide further assumptions in order to maximize expectations of relevance. In deciding on the degree of accessibility of certain assumptions, speakers metarepresentationally attribute thoughts to the hearers. The decision inevitably depends on speakers' own abilities and preferences and on speaker's metarepresentation of hearers' abilities and preferences and on speakers' metarepresentation of hearers' abilities and processing resources.

The euphemistic function of words and expressions is often marked by pauses, various hesitation markers (*you know, uh, like*) and other metapragmatic hedging devices, which accompany indirectness in discourse (cf. Katsev 1988: 46-47; Senichkina 2006: 39). These hedging units indicate that the hearer is reluctant to use a direct nomination in referring to a given topic and is searching for a euphemistic substitute. Such metapragmatic means serve the purpose of preparing the hearer for something he or she might find axiologically unfavorable.

Similarly to irony, all euphemisms, precisely because they are not literal, are code terms or phrases depending on tacit or mutual understandings. Unlike irony, which can't be introduced with 'to speak ironically' without ruining the ironic effect, some euphemisms can be introduced with 'to speak euphemistically'. In irony there is a claim that you are displaying your attitude as opposed to describing it. Unlike cases of cooperative transparent euphemisms, introducing an argumentative euphemism with *euphemistically speaking* to make the euphemistic intention explicit will destroy the speech act since euphemisms do not constitute a behavior but a special pragmatic effect of 'behavior evaluation', a description of an attitude (similarly, saying *To speak angrily "John left" would be totally odd and would ruin the effect of anger itself).

Metalinguistic comments are thus only applicable to transparent conventionalized euphemisms and cannot be used with the argumentative ones (cf. **There was, euphemistically speaking, collateral damage*) as they would immediately reveal the true argumentative nature of the euphemism. Once the argumentative euphemism is recognized for what it is, the underlying dysphemism will be meta-represented and the manipulative intention will become explicit resulting in the subsequent collapse of the manipulative attempt, as discussed in Maillat and Oswald (2009): “<...> manipulation is a kind of speech act which is not meant to be recognized at all, not even indirectly”.

The use of militarese jargon, for instance, outside of the context relative to which it is conventionalized, e.g. the White House press conference instead of the Pentagon meeting of chiefs of staff, will inevitably trigger a request for more explanations about the intended meaning. This will expose the manipulative nature of such discursive strategies, concealed in most cases behind the alleged intention of sparing the hearer communicative discomfort. In cases where speaker’s manipulative intention is recognized for what it is, hearers can demonstrate that they are not endorsing the use of a euphemism by resorting to metalinguistic negation and/or by placing scare quotes around the exposed euphemism or using ‘so-called’ and ‘alleged’ to express skeptical/ironic attitude: *they are not ‘displaced people’, they are ‘refugees’, it’s not “collateral damage”, it’s ‘killing of civilians’*.

In irony, on the contrary, the speaker is making mutually manifest the echoic intention while in euphemism the hearer infers it without being intended by the speaker and this launches the ironic effect. The echoed proposition needs to be recognized for the utterance to receive euphemistic interpretation. Thus in using the euphemistic *collateral damage* ironically (pronouncing mockingly with an ironic tone of voice or saying ‘there was, euphemistically speaking, collateral damage’), the speaker is expressing a dissociative attitude to an attributed ‘echoed’ thought, which helps with recognition of irony but spoils the euphemistic effect.

The echoic use of such ironic attitude markers as ‘so-called’ or ‘alleged’ implies that the speakers dissociate themselves from the euphemistic nomination as they believe that it is not the ‘right’ linguistic unit to use to refer to some aspect of reality while realizing that such a use is called for by the current discursive situation. For example, someone who says ‘so-called political correctness’ expresses a mocking attitude to this kind of ideology which is viewed by some as a sort of censorship, an attack on freedom of speech.

In addition to reformulation markers, which are usually used to explicate euphemistic/PC intentions, their meanings can also be explicated by metalinguistic comments

which follow them. Metalinguistic comments which come after the euphemistic/PC expressions are referred to as ‘reformulation markers’ (RMs) (e.g. *that is* or *in other words*), which present their host member in a new perspective from which it is to be interpreted by assigning a new interpretation on the grounds that relevant inferences have not been achieved. Thus *in other words* communicates that the proposition expressed by the utterance linked to it, is an alternative means of communicating the content of the preceding discourse segment. That is, it provides other words for something. For example, the proposition *Peter is fired* is an alternative means for the euphemistic *The boss no longer requires Peter’s services*.

According to Blakemore (1996), items such as *that is (to say)* and *in other words* are conceptual and non-truth conditional, that is, they encode concepts which are constituent not of the proposition expressed, but of higher level explicatures. Blakemore (1996: 333–334) maintains that Wilson and Sperber’s argument for the conceptual status of adverbs like *regrettably* is also relevant for reformulation markers. Thus in “Regrettably, I couldn’t help you” (Wilson and Sperber, 1993: 17), the adverb does not contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance (i.e., “Mary couldn’t help Peter”), but it does contribute to its higher level explicature: Mary regrets that she couldn’t help Peter.

Let’s consider the following examples from (Blakemore 1996:335):

(31)

Regrettably, they said that my paper was too long

Higher level explicature: *It is regrettable that my paper was too long*

and

(32)

A: We will have to let her go

B: In other words, she’s fired

Higher level explicature *She’s fired* is an interpretation of the thought encoded by A’s utterance (Blakemore 1996: 338). Blakemore (1996: 333) explains that that, in contrast with a speaker who uses *so* or *after all*, a speaker who uses *that is* or *in other words* can be charged with untruthfulness. She uses the following example as evidence (ibid. 1996: 334):

(33)

She said she no longer requires your services

In other words, she said I’m fired

That’s not true. She didn’t say that

She said she no longer requires your services; therefore, you are fired

#*That's not true. That's not a conclusion* (Blakemore 1996:334)

J. Wilson (1995) shows that such implicated meanings can be used to direct a hearer's interpretation, while avoiding responsibility for any inferences which the hearer makes. The author calls this a form of "thought manipulation" – a conjuring trick where we employ those forms, which we predict will lead to the interpretation most conducive to our aims at a point in time.

Following Ifantidou's (1993) analysis of parentheticals, Blakemore states that *that is* and *in other words* can be analyzed as contributing to propositions which have their own relevance, although they do not contain the main point of the utterance as a whole. Thus in discourse sequence uses, the discourse marker consists of a parenthetical that expresses a proposition such as *That is another way of putting it; These are other words for something* (Blakemore 1996: 337), which in turn leads the hearer to recover a higher level explicature expressing a reformulation: The speaker believes that P is a faithful representation of a thought Q where Q is the thought communicated by the reformulated utterance Blakemore (1996: 340). This analysis is based on the idea that reformulations are representations of utterances which they resemble. As she points out, "where the resemblance involves the sharing of logical and contextual implications, the utterance can be said to be relevant as a representation of a thought, or as Sperber and Wilson would say, as an INTERPRETATION of a thought" (Blakemore 1996: 338). Further, a speaker who produces an utterance which is a representation of another utterance cannot be creating expectations of truthfulness, but of faithfulness (Blakemore 1996: 338).

Metalinguistic comments assist, to varying degrees, in the inferential process by making explicit reference assignment, disambiguation, further enrichment and elliptic material in connection with the recovery of the propositional form. They do this also by supplying further explicatures, which in their turn bring about the intended contextual effects, and by explicating implicated premises and conclusions. We may conclude that, in general, they help in all sorts of inferential processes that are involved in the interpretation of an utterance. In cases of restatement of explicatures and explication of implicatures, metalinguistic comments contribute to the recovery of higher level explicatures. They do so irrespective of their position in the utterance.

The possibility of being charged with falsehood while attempting to explicate euphemistic expression with reformulation markers explains the principle motivation for euphemistic language use, i.e. plausible deniability or being in a position of declaring "I said

no such thing”. The implicated inferences enable speakers to deny having a certain level of commitment to the content communicated in uttering something. Thus if one doesn’t intend to convey a political attitude by some choice of words, anyone who discerns one could be said to be making an illegitimate inference. This is, according to Cameron (1995), one of the most controversial issues concerning the functioning of ‘euphemisms with attitude’ or politically correct words and expression in discourse.

Cameron (1995) rightfully predicts that hearers may end up inferring something, which is at odds with the coiner’s intentions (though repeated exposure to a term will refine initial hypotheses about its meaning), but the point is that they will make something of it rather than nothing. Furthermore, it is impossible to prevent speakers from engaging in metalinguistic speculation on the reasons why one term was chosen over other possibilities; that is, *evaluating* as well as simply interpreting phrases like ‘collateral damage’. One possible inference here is recognition of ‘moral disengagement’ of the allies who, in describing a certain state of affairs as ‘collateral damage’, are trying to minimize what is happening and their own responsibility for it. And the moment such an inference is actually made, any attempt at concealment and disinformation has failed and, considering that hearers’ realization that they have been lied to, actually aggravates the negative effect the expression produces in the cognitive environment of the hearer.

The next section looks into the possibility of drawing a distinction between euphemisms and the language associated with political correctness.

5.4 Distinguishing euphemisms from PC

This section presents a discussion of the methodological issue of the possibility of distinguishing euphemisms from PC-inspired lexical substitutes.

From the analysis presented so far, it follows that the principal function of euphemisms can be regarded as attempting to frame some denotation, which can be perceived as negative, positively through linguistic means. Unlike cases of euphemistic language use, PC-inspired substitutes are resorted to not when some denotation is negative and is in need of amelioration, but when the wording used to refer to it needs rephrasing.

The function of euphemisms in discourse is not limited to a cooperative hedging or ‘veiling’ of axiologically disfavorable aspects of reality and they can also be used with a purpose of attempting to conceal the truth behind one’s words by framing or ‘sugar-coating’ the underlying axiologically disfavorable reality: “to blur reality, not so much to avoid offense, but to deceive” (Allan and Burrige 2006: 85).

Unlike euphemisms, PC vocabulary is used not to refer to bad or forbidden things but rather to express a positive attitude to certain population groups reference to which is considered a sensitive issue in a certain society at a certain period of time, by carefully chosen and often preferred by the stigmatized population groups themselves⁵⁵ vocabulary units. This is done with the purpose of avoiding lexemes considered discriminatory by those population groups e.g. *senior citizens* for *old people*, *developmentally* or *educationally-challenged* or *special* instead of *retarded*, *differently-abled* or *people with disabilities* instead of *disabled*; *physically challenged* for *invalid*.

Hughes (2010: 18) argues that euphemisms clearly bear close relations with the language of PC, since all the classic formulations of political correctness show avoidance of direct reference to some embarrassing topic or condition. Halmari (2011) considers euphemism to be the main tool of political correctness and other researchers agree that the PC-inspired language is basically euphemistic” (Chamizo Domínguez and Nerlich 2002). Burrige (2006: 455) notes, however, that although modern dictionaries of euphemism (such as Ayto, 1993) include politically correct expressions among their entries, many accounts of

⁵⁵ There are, however, instances with the population groups themselves actually prefer non-PC vocabulary. Thus, *deaf* is preferable to *hearing-impaired* for those who identify with *Deaf Pride*. *Blind* appears to be the term of choice of the National Federation of the Blind, which rejects “people who are blind” etc. (see <http://www.blind.net/bpg00005.htm>).

non-discriminatory language in handbooks such as Banks and Mulder (1996) expressly deny the language they are recommending is euphemistic. Allan and Burridge (2006: 98) echo this line of thinking when they write:

“For many people, euphemism is a pejorative label attaching to any deodorizing language; the sort of doublespeak that turns *dying* into *terminal living*, *killing* into the *unlawful deprivation of life* and *potholes* into *pavement deficiencies*. They believe such euphemism to be value-laden, deliberately obfuscatory jargon intended to befuddle the hearer. Understandably, if euphemism is seen in this light, those promoting PC-inspire relabelling disown it”.

Euphemisms and PC share a significant common feature: they are used as attenuating devices in discourse. The effect of a “cushioned blow” produced by euphemisms and PC expressions is akin to the function of the hedged “I don’t think you’re right”, which sounds more acceptable than “I think you’re wrong”. This function of ‘cushioning the blow’ can be achieved by various lexical, syntactic and even graphic and phonetic means where the denotation is not actually ‘improved’ but is rather masked by resorting to abbreviations or graphic elliptical means, e.g. *H.E. double hockey sticks* for *hell*, *s...t*, *f?Ik*, *fcuk*, ... and *bleep* or such phonetic distortive substitutes as *freaking* and *blinking* instead of *fucking*.

According to Israel (2006), hedging/attenuation in general is a way of framing an expressed proposition, *t*, against the background of a saliently unexpressed proposition, *u*, where it is understood that *u* unilaterally entails *t*. The author observes that attenuation differs from mere un informativeness in that *u* is not just unsaid, but salient in the context as something which could easily have been said.

As hedging/attenuating strategies, euphemisms have traditionally been used in place of direct designations considered to be tabooed or prohibited by *social* norms. Many of such taboo-related euphemisms do not have a neutral counterpart (orthophemism) e.g. there is no neutral substitute for English *N1* (the act of urination) and *N2* (the act of defecation). Medical terms *urinate* and *defecate* can hardly be considered orthophemistic as they still bear negative connotations associated with the intrinsic awkwardness associated with mentioning these topics in most contexts and, therefore, are not commonly resorted to in discourse. It appears that such euphemistic substitutes are quickly contaminated in discourse by their stigmatized denotations and are subject to the process of euphemism treadmill, which is discussed in chapter 9.

On the other hand there are linguistic units which are used instead of some other nomination due to the existence of a *verbal* interdiction on its use: their denotation is neutral or positive but the word or expression is considered to be axiologically disfavorable by some population groups and inappropriate by proponents and adherents of political correctness. The focus of the cushioning attitude here is the dictum or the verbal form of the utterance itself, not some stigmatized topic. This can be observed when students from foreign countries are referred to as *international students* instead of *foreign students* to make them feel more welcome and at home; *corporate apparel* is used instead of *company uniform* to make it sound more ‘classy’ and not focus on the uniformity of people wearing it.

These lexical substitutes do not arise in response to taboo and do not cover up any real taboo topic in the traditional superstitious word magic sense, i.e. fear of falling into disfavor with supernatural powers or contracting diseases if one utters the forbidden words or expressions. In other words, while it is generally inappropriate to talk about sex under most circumstances and one has to find ways of distancing the audience from the denotation to make as if one is not actually mentioning the forbidden topic, there is nothing impolite or shameful in mentioning someone’s race, profession, age etc. However the way these topics are referred to, i.e. their linguistic ‘packaging’ can vary considerably.

Whenever we say that something is a euphemism, a question naturally arises: ‘what is it a euphemism for?’ Is the term *bailout* used to refer to a federal loan to the ‘big three’ US automobile manufacturers a euphemism for *financial assistance to prevent bankruptcy*? In many cases it is rather problematic to find a neutral orthophemistic term that would merely describe reality without positive or negative connotations, which corresponds to some purported euphemism. It is not entirely clear, for example, whether ‘die’ is a neutral alternative for ‘pass away’ any more than ‘deaf’ is for ‘hearing impaired’. The word ‘die’ can certainly be considered as more direct and hence an orthophemism, and in some contexts might well be the mundane and ‘neutral’ expression. But in most contexts its mention would conjure up associations too vivid to be considered neutral.

Cameron (1995) argues that euphemism has been a key notion in the debate on politically correct language. She claims, however, that PC language cannot be equated with euphemism, because the existence of euphemism and dysphemism always implies the presence of what she calls ‘neutral’ (orthophemistic) terms that lie somewhere in the middle. Indeed, in case of PC language it is very often impossible to find a neutral, value-free term

that corresponds to some purported ‘euphemism’ as most PC expressions were invented with the purpose of replacing the existing discriminatory ones (e.g. racial slurs).

Hughes (1993) suggests that whereas *physically challenged* is a ludicrous attempt to gloss over the true condition of the person in the wheelchair; *cripple* would be a perfectly truthful and value-free description. However to researchers like Cameron *cripple* in present-day English appears to be more on the derogatory side of the continuum: “Applying it to someone with a physical disability – as opposed to, say, a playground companion whose clumsiness you wished to deride – was taken to be offensive, or at least tasteless, long before most English speakers had ever heard of ‘political correctness’” (Cameron 1995: 143).

Cameron (1995) argues that someone who claims African-American is a euphemism because it covers up the fact that African-Americans are dark-skinned is implicitly asserting that a description of people by skin color is a value-neutral description, the natural and obvious way to classify them. She concludes that in most cases, the old and new terms differ in way that are more complicated than just ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’ or more versus less polite: “*Homosexual is neither more nor less taboo than gay, and most people outside the group regard them both as negative terms, but homosexual is a clinical description invented by sexologists, whereas gay is by origin an in-group label signifying a social or political identity.*” (Cameron 1995: 146)

PC calls for a more precise and accurate use of language. The argument goes as follows: since women can also chair meetings, chairperson is not euphemistic, it is simply accurate (Allan and BurrIDGE 2006: 96). The same way *news conference* is more accurate than *press conference* since it includes TV media and not only newspapers and magazines – the press. Expressions like *firefighter* and *Ms* mean something, which is not offensive and inclusive: *firefighter* means person (male or female) who fights fires, *Ms* means both married and unmarried woman. Firefighter doesn’t mean neither fireman nor firewoman, but both. PC terms deliberately highlight certain aspects of a group’s identity. When members of the black community campaigned for *African-American* it was to emphasize, not genetics or color, but the historical roots of a group that forms part of the US, thus bringing the name in line with those of other ethnic minorities such as *Japanese Americans* and *Italian Americans*. Thus political correctness can be viewed as being more accurate and as a way of calling various groups by the names they prefer.

By resorting to euphemisms speakers suggest that whatever they are referring to (a denotation) is in need of amelioration or attenuation. On the one hand, it is possible that a

denotation that is in need of amelioration or softening will be ascribed a status of axiologically sensitive, on the other hand a lexeme that refers to a positive denotation can be ascribed the disfavorable status. It follows that such expressions as *collateral damage* can hardly be considered PC, as the primary motivation behind coining them was to blur reality by defocusing negative referents *innocent civilians*, *accidentally killed as a result of military actions* (cf. also *correctional facilities for prison* and *clients of correctional facilities for prisoners*).

Paradoxically, the fact that a denotation is in need of euphemization ascribes the denotation the status of potentially axiologically sensitive. Thus from the point of view of semiotics, it is important to establish whether the lexeme itself is disfavorable or what it refers to in the world is. The introduction of new PC substitutes for concepts which did not previously require to be hedged: *policeman* – *police officer*, *chairman* – *chairperson* (to include women), *drugstore* – *pharmacy*, *foreign student* – *international student* are cases in point. In cases like these the denotation itself is not axiologically disfavorable, but the lexeme used to refer to it is considered dispreferred and needs to be substituted.

If one views PC as a form of euphemistic communication, it loses all its ‘correctness’ since being euphemistic to or about somebody also implies inferiority of the hearer and presupposes speaker’s patronizing position of power. People’s choices of words announce their stance towards traditionally stigmatized population groups. Resorting to PC-inspired language, can therefore amount to having the attitude of the following type: ‘I have the power to name you with a name that can offend you, but I will not do that due to face-saving considerations’. Being vested with the power to name and trying not to offend presupposes the ability to offend. Therefore, it appears impossible to avoid offending someone by paternalistically choosing how to ‘name the other’.

Similarly to euphemisms, PC expressions can push the real subject to the background and highlight instead a specific detail or a particular view of the whole topic, thus evoking the feeling of ‘not saying it all’, which lies somewhere between lack of seriousness and irony. Therefore, in many cases politically correct expressions turn out to have a contrary effect to the one initially intended as discussed in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

The problem with specifying all possible ways of producing euphemisms and PC-related terms stems from the fact that dysphemisms in the form of discrimination can occur at the level of presupposition, humor or irony and therefore can be difficult to substitute as illustrated by the following anecdote from Cameron (1998) in which she relates how a

friend's father, when he sits down to eat his dinner, always asks his wife: "Is there any ketchup, Vera?" and this indirect question is interpreted by all as a request by the man for his wife, Vera, to fetch the ketchup for him rather than as a request for information about the availability of ketchup. Mills (2004: 128) calls it 'indirect sexism' as gender is not oriented to explicitly in the interaction; however, the presupposition underlying the utterance are gendered and based on sexist beliefs, therefore can be considered dysphemistic.

A euphemistic/PC intention can be attributed to a speaker even when none was intended especially when the hearer has grounds to be epistemically vigilant (Sperber et al. 2010) and suspect the speaker of not being benevolent (e.g. previous record of being uncooperatively vague or otherwise manipulative), as illustrated by the following example from the TV show "Veep" (Season 2 Episode 1) in which in order to disambiguate the meaning of *boat*, the hearer is requesting that speaker's intention be made explicit:

(34)

Mike: I'm in a financial hole, ok? I bought something I shouldn't have and I can't get rid of it.

Sue: What did you buy?

Mike: A boat!

*Sue: Is that a **euphemism**?*

Mike: No it's a boat. It's a leaky fucking boat and noone's betting on it (on Ebay – A.S.).

Despite numerous attempts of defining the category of euphemisms in terms of their semantic properties in extant research literature (such as 'semantic vagueness', 'stigmatized nature of the denotation', 'potential to generate positive connotations', 'preservation of truthfulness of the utterance', 'superficial nature of amelioration of the denotation' among others (see Potapova 2008 for an overview), researchers are yet to find a single set of semantic properties common to all and defining euphemisms as such. Therefore, euphemisms as a category need to be analyzed in terms of their *pragmatic functions* and not exclusively in terms of the type of linguistically encoded information. Such an analysis would include considering the role of inferential processes in the interpretation of euphemistic utterances. Therefore, these linguistic units can only be fully understood within a framework of a cognitive pragmatic theory of communication.

Of central importance to the analysis of functional feasibility of PC is the question of whether PC language is effective only when it is novel (cf. Giora 2003), that is when it is

inferred as ‘marked’ in discourse and arises in interaction only when the “politically correct” intention is attributed to the speaker by the addressee or anticipated as the default and, therefore, expected linguistic behavior.

Euphemisms and PC expressions appear to be different teleologically since the aim of PC is to bring people’s unconscious biases to consciousness and hence it is only efficient when it is novel, while euphemisms are used to camouflage taboos or axiologically disfavorable topics and their euphemistic or manipulative potential increases, by leading to their processing being shallow in discourse, as they become more conventionalized. In most cases euphemisms relate to covering already existing taboos and sensitive topics while PC practices came as a response to the need for changing the way some population groups are referred to, which came to be perceived by many negatively as a form of censorship and thought control associated with the liberal political agenda. This resulted in the term PC falling into disfavor and led to the situation in which PC groups attempt to distance themselves from being PC.

What is interesting to investigate is the interpretive procedure a euphemism displays and the similarities or differences among different procedures. Providing descriptions of particular euphemisms, establishing taxonomies and their limits, or creating paradigms or relationships among the literal and metaphorical values of a given euphemisms, is not, from the cognitive-pragmatic standpoint, worth pursuing.

The next section considers whether euphemisms and PC can be subsumed under the broader category of linguistic politeness as well as touches upon the issue of whether some acts are inherently face-threatening/impolite despite the type of linguistic packaging chosen to communicate them and regardless of speaker’s intention underlying their use.

Chapter 6. X-phemisms/PC and (im)politeness

Linguists have traditionally characterized euphemisms as intentionally used substitutional face-saving strategies speakers resort to for politeness purposes, i.e. motivated by the desire of sparing addressees from communicative discomfort by representationally displacing topics that evoke negative emotional response (see Allan and Burrige 1991; Liszka, 1990). This chapter critically reviews various theoretical approaches to (im)politeness and analyzes whether euphemisms/PC can be subsumed under the broader category of linguistic politeness.

6.1 The Speech-Act theoretic view of (im)politeness

Politeness has traditionally been defined in terms of good manners, etiquette or more generally social norms, which prescribe how people should behave in certain situations. Being polite amounts to knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate in a given communicative situation. This everyday notion of politeness, however, according to Terkourafi (2001), turns out to be ambiguous and imprecise, and cannot serve as the basis for a theoretical definition with reference to which politeness phenomena may be identified and described (Terkourafi 2001: 5).

Allan and Burrige (2006) inextricably tie euphemistic language use to politeness and see politeness and the notion of ‘face’ as central to their discussion of x-phemisms. They argue that politeness and orthophemism or euphemism go together as do their negative counterparts impoliteness and dysphemism:

“(In)offensiveness is definable in terms of face which, Anglo-centrally, we described as ‘public self-image’. All these categories of language and behaviour are wedded to context, time, and place... In fact the tabooed, the offensive, the dysphemistic, and the impolite only seem more powerful forces because each of them identifies the marked behaviour. By default we are polite, euphemistic, orthophemistic and inoffensive; and we censor our language use to eschew tabooed topics” (Allan and Burrige 2006: 47).

As we can see, on Allan and Burrige’s (2006) view, if one’s behavior is congruous with the norms or ‘unmarked’, it is evaluated as polite and if those norms are not followed, it is considered impolite or rude.

According to Mills (2003: 151) politeness, and particularly notions of etiquette or “proper behavioral conduct” (Eelen 2001: 1), have played an important role in distinguishing between and keeping separate the working and middle class. Mills notes that etiquette books

are far less common at present; however, even outdated notions of *U* and *non-U* behavior still prevail. For example, when Prince William fiancée's mother Carole, used the inappropriate *pleased to meet you* and “unaristocratic” words like *toilet* instead of *lavatory* and *pardon* instead of *I beg your pardon* in front of The Queen⁵⁶, this behavior was deemed “non-U”, highly impolite and lowbrow by the royal watchers. Other words allegedly proscribed by royal etiquette include the perfectly appropriate in other contexts *mirror*, *settee*, *serviette* and *notepaper*, which should be *looking glass*, *sofa*, *napkin*, and *writing paper*⁵⁷.

Numerous volumes have been written on the phenomenon of linguistic politeness. However, according to Fraser “while the existence of politeness or the lack thereof is not in question, a common understanding of the concept and how to account for it is certainly problematic” (Fraser 1990: 219). The lack of consensus over how to understand and define the notion of politeness has permeated politeness research to date. According to Escandell-Vidal (1998: 49) classical approaches to politeness see it as derivable in the form of conversational implicature and the length of the inferential path as representative of the degree of politeness. There are currently debates in research literature regarding whether politeness should be studied as a lay or ‘folk’ notion called 1st order politeness or politeness1 (Eelen 2001, Watts 2003, Locher 2006, Locher and Watts 2005) or as a theoretical construct specifically devised for pragmatic research called 2nd order politeness or politeness2 (Watts 2003).

Among the first researchers who paid attention to the theoretical status of politeness was Goffman (1955, 1967), who introduced the idea that face-work, or maintaining one's positive public self-image, mediates social interactions. Under his theory, people strive to maintain their own face, as well as protect the face and feelings of others, in an interaction. Using Goffman's concept of facework and combining it with Grice's (1975) maxim-based theory of conversational implicature, Brown and Levinson (1987) designed a framework for explaining motivation of polite forms in language use, one of the major tenets of which is that linguistic politeness, as a reason for deviating from norms of rational⁵⁸ efficiency expected from communicators in a conversation, is communicated in the form of a conversational

⁵⁶ Attested: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/17/world/europe/17royal.html>

⁵⁷ Attested: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-art-of-etiquette-a-bluffers-guide-to-being-posh-445059.html>

⁵⁸ Brown and Levinson define rationality as a “mode of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61).

implicature and the absence of communicated politeness may, *ceteris paribus*, be taken as absence of the polite attitude (Brown and Levinson 1987: 5).

Brown and Levinson (1987) developed Goffman's conception of face to include negative face, i.e. the wish to act freely and remain free from imposition, and positive face, or the desire to maintain a positive self-image. Brown and Levinson (1987) regard certain speech acts as intrinsically capable of threatening hearer's negative face (e.g. orders, requests) as well as speaker's/hearer's positive face (confession, disapproval, criticism). The face-threatening capacity or 'weightiness' (W) of a speech act depends in Brown and Levinson's theory on such variables as social distance (D), relative power (P) between the speaker and the addressee, and the absolute ranking of imposition of the act (R). They illustrate this with the following formula: $W(eightiness)_x = D(istance) \text{ between (Speaker, Hearer)} + P(power) \text{ between (Hearer, Speaker)} + R(anking \text{ of imposition})_x$.

Faced with a potentially face-threatening communicative situation, the speaker, in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, has several possible options in her disposal ranging from doing the face-threatening act (FTA) without any redress to minimizing the potential face-threat by resorting to some mitigating linguistic strategy and avoiding doing the act altogether:

Do the FTA

Do the FTA on record

Do the FTA on record bluntly, without redressive action

Do the FTA on record with redressive action

Do the FTA on record with positive politeness

Do the FTA on record with negative politeness

Do the FTA off record

Don't do the FTA

Indirectness in general and euphemisms in particular fall on the 'off-record' side of the spectrum of the possible strategies. They are resorted to with the purpose of mitigating face threat (either of the speaker, the hearer or some third party) and avoidance of mentioning some taboo topic. Under Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, speakers are considered polite if they mitigate FTAs and enhance or maintain an addressee's face during a face-threatening utterance and euphemisms/PC qualify as exactly this kind of language use.

Brown and Levinson's classification of FTA-mitigation strategies is based on the speech-act-theoretic (SAT) model of communication put forward by Austin (1962) and

further developed by Searle (1965). From the SAT standpoint, politeness as mitigation of FTAs is seen as one of the main motivations for the use of indirect speech acts (Searle 1975, Brown and Levinson 1987, Terkourafi 2001).

SAT-based theory of politeness, which pairs certain speech acts with what the speaker is doing (their illocutionary force) in uttering them, will not hold in light of the discussion of cases in which the linguistic form of words uttered is at variance with the illocutionary point of the utterance (euphemistic dysphemisms and dysphemistic euphemisms discussed in the previous chapter). Therefore a conclusion can be made to the effect that linguistic forms cannot be viewed as directly linked to communicating (im)politeness out of context of use.

Contrary to the SAT view, in Relevance Theory, there is no claim about a constant correlation between sentence types and illocutionary act types. Linguistic forms do not directly encode illocutionary forces, but merely serve as a guide for interpretation, i.e. as a constraint on relevance: they “make manifest the direction in which relevance is to be sought” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 254). On the relevance-theoretic view, sentence types encode information that restricts the range of possible interpretations but the particular force of a particular utterance always depends both on the linguistic form and the context. Thus the intended interpretation of the expression “Can I help you?” may vary on a scale from very polite to utterly rude depending on the tone of voice with which it is pronounced. This can be illustrated by the following example from the TV series “Lie to me” (Season 3 Episode 13) where a stranger is eating a sandwich and reading a book in Loker’s office:

(35)

*Loker: **Can I help you?***

Stranger: Depends... you got any mustard?

...

Stranger: Why do people do that?

Loker: Do what?

*Stranger: Say “**Can I help you**” when you really mean “**Who the hell are you?**”*

Despite questioning that the assignment of every utterance to a particular speech-act type is part of what is communicated and plays a necessary role in comprehension, Sperber and Wilson (1995: 244) allow that some speech acts do, however, need to be communicated and identified as such in order to be performed. Euphemistic/PC acts are instances of such acts, as in order to produce the ‘cushioned blow’ effect, euphemisms must be communicated

ostensively and recognized as substitutes for some other, saliently unexpressed dispreferred content.

Politeness/impoliteness/rudeness are second-order notions ranging over behaviors. Like other second-order notions (e.g. modifiers such as ‘fast’), they must be fleshed out in the shape of a particular behavior (‘fast turtle’) to come into being. An utterance such as “I am(being) polite/rude” is unlikely to constitute/threaten face even if the hearer recognizes the speaker’s intention, because such an utterance fails to provide behavioral evidence that the hearer can evaluate as polite (or rude). It, therefore, appears essential that the hearer ascribe the speaker a euphemistic/PC attitude: “the speaker is being euphemistic in saying that P” in order for the euphemistic/PC act to be successfully performed. As an ‘off-record’ politeness strategy, euphemistic use can be viewed as indirect speech acts⁵⁹ where speakers leave it to the hearer to work out the intended meaning. We can assume that the possible perlocutionary effect that an utterance may produce is not under the speaker’s control although she can anticipate it. Such is the case when unintentional offence is given by the mere mention of terms utterance of which is regarded derogatory irrespective of intention underlying their use (e.g. racist slurs).

The central issue concerning indirect speech acts (ISA) has always been the question of how the hearer arrives at the interpretation intended by the speaker. Traditionally, scholars have held that in order to interpret an ISA, the hearer has to do a certain amount of inferencing, i.e. that the propositional content and the illocutionary force of the indirect speech act are arrived at via a stepwise application of inferencing rules of some sorts.

Leech (1983:102) provides the following explanation: “In an absolute sense, [1] Just be quiet is less polite than [2] Would you please be quiet for a moment? But there are occasions where [1] could be too polite, and other occasions where [2] would not be polite enough. There are even some cases where [2] would strike one as less polite than [1]; where, for example, [1] was interpreted as a form of banter, and where [2] was used ironically”.

More recently, it has been suggested that the ISA activates one part of a cognitive model that then metonymically evokes the whole model or some other part of it (Thornburg and Panther 1997; Panther and Thornburg 1998; Gibbs 1994: 351 ff.) Thus a hedged or

⁵⁹ A different view is held by Burkhardt (2010), who observe that although euphemisms are violations of the Gricean maxims of Quality on the one hand and of the maxims of Quantity and Manner on the other, they may not be considered as indirect speech acts, for their purpose is to block rather than to provoke reinterpretations in their recipients (Burkhardt 2010: 369-370).

mitigated conventionalized indirect speech act such as “I would like you to close that window” metonymically evokes the (face-threatening) request itself “Close that window!” as a conversational implicature that comes about through the pragmatic enrichment of the propositional blueprint expressed by an indirect statement like “There is a draft in here”, where the speaker can always deny having asked the hearer to close the window and the implicature (close the window) could be cancelled in another context as seen in the following exchanges:

(36)

a) *There is a draft in here*

Implicature: *Close the window*

b) *The heat is unbearable. There is a draft in here.*

Implicature: *Let's go into this room.*

"Could you please close the window" has become a conventionalized way of referring to another speech act similarly to the way *drink* in *I need a drink* has become a conventionalized way to refer to 'I need an alcohol beverage' without actually saying 'alcohol' via a process of pragmatic narrowing. This meaning has become conventionalized relative to the specific context of use. Thus uttered by an adult at a bar, *drink* would normally not be understood as expressing the speaker's desire for a glass of milk. Nevertheless the *alcohol beverage* reading is cancellable as in *I need a drink but no alcohol, please*.

Relevance Theory accounts for such kind of language use in terms of the descriptive/interpretive use distinction, by claiming that the relationship between what people say (public representations) and their thoughts (mental representations) is that of interpretive resemblance (Sperber and Wilson 1995).

The idea is that an attribute of a speech act can stand for the speech act itself in the same way that an attribute of a person can stand for the person. The **source** of a metonymy serves as a “reference-point” (cf. Langacker 1993) whose sole purpose is to provide access to and activate a **target** meaning. For example, the concept SPECIAL in *special education* is part of a knowledge structure which it evokes and the metonymic reading involves a shift from this concept to the most readily available salient element in the frame along with the whole array of conceptual (meta)representations present in this frame. Through the metonymic shift, the neologistic reference point *special* is backgrounded while other previously used concepts are evoked, since any derogatory or unfavorable denotation or

connotation within language expressions happens to be very salient and will dominate the interpretation of their immediate context (for discussion see Allan and Burridge 1991).

Metonymies can be used for economy of expression as they provide quickly understood stereotype-based references or cognitive shortcuts. Lakoff (1987) argues that people tend to think of categories/frames, such as, for instance MOTHER in terms of the salient stereotypes, in this case ‘housewife mother’ Lakoff (1987: 79-90). Metonymies evoke such stereotypical meanings due to the fact that people’s knowledge in long-term memory can be metonymically referred to by the mere mention of one salient subpart of these events. Historical examples of the use of stereotypes for economy of expression, as cognitive shortcuts to activate entire frames they are part of, include ‘frogs’ for Frenchmen, ‘iron maidens’ for professional women and recently ‘crackers’ for lower income rural whites. Similarly to racist slurs, PC speech can also be used to proclaim racial inferiority and deny the personhood of target-group members by presenting all members of the target group as alike and therefore inferior (see the discussion in Lakoff 2000: 101). This happens due to most PC expressions being partonymic metonymies. They represent (quite similarly to their biased counterparts) the whole person through a certain quality (origin, race, sexuality, health condition etc.), highlighting a certain feature of the source domain, which is subsequently attributed to the target (cf. *She is an African-American* and *She is just a pretty face*).

Thus if we compare the presently politically incorrect *old people* with the hedged *senior citizens*, we can see that both expressions focus on and highlight one exclusive single salient feature of the referents – *age* and identify them according to this property (cf. calling Steve Wonder a *blind black man* as opposed to referring to him as an *outstanding musician and composer*). In using PC expressions, speakers assume the ingroup/outgroup discourse stance or perspective and by using these metonymies they highlight and focus on single salient features thereby preventing the perception of individuals of phenomena as a whole.

The meaning of such metonymic euphemistic expressions as *go to bed* used to stand for *have a sexual intercourse*, is underspecified, similar to the example where the speaker offers his/her date to *come up for coffee*, since they omit reasons for going (cf. also *go to the bathroom* (to urinate), *go to the hospital* (for a medical procedure), yet they succeed in referring appropriately by invoking a frame or script so the missing information is filled in inferentially. The ‘stand for’ relationship is a basis of every metonymic construction and euphemisms work along exactly the same line – they substitute or ‘stand for’ something else by providing a mental referential shortcut to another concept.

In a series of articles Pinker et al. (2008), Lee and Pinker (2010) question the traditional viewpoint that politeness is the primary motivation for indirectness. Adopting Brown and Levinson's distinction between on-record and off-record indirect speech acts, they present experimental results showing that while the choice between speaking bluntly and on-record (positive and negative) indirect speech acts are indeed sensitive to considerations of face-threat, off-record indirect speech acts do not seem to be similarly affected (Lee and Pinker, 2010:789). The authors then go on to construct an alternative explanation, according to which the point of off-record indirect speech is to negotiate situations where the speaker's willingness to cooperate is uncertain, by introducing the option of plausible (or at least possible) deniability.

Similarly to neo-Griceans (see section 1.3), Récanati (2010) considers that processing of indirect speech acts happens via Generalized Conversational Implicatures, which he calls default implicatures (DIs). He points out that:

“<...>(G)eneralized conversational implicatures are not merely generalized, they are also conventionalized: they are associated with certain linguistic items serving as triggers for the automatic process of implicature generation. That generalized implicatures tend to become conventionalized in this way seems natural. The conventions associating linguistic forms with DI arguably belong to the category of 'conventions of use', as opposed to straightforward 'meaning conventions' (Searle 1975, Morgan 1978). They are similar to the conventions in virtue of which an instance of the construction 'Can you VP?' is readily interpreted as a request, even though literally it is a question. The derivation of the indirect speech act of request from the direct speech act of question is based upon rationality considerations of the Gricean sort, but the inference is short-circuited as a result of generalization and conventionalization (Bach and Harnish 1979)” Récanati (2010: 257-258).

To date there is no general agreement regarding whether politeness is inferred in discourse or constitutes anticipated behavior. The next section contrasts approaches, which view it as an intentional strategic way to convey a polite attitude in the form of a particularized implicature with the one where it is perceived as the normal (unmarked) way people talk – where politeness passes unnoticed in the form of a generalized conversational implicatures (Escandell-Vidal 1996, 1998; Jary 1998; Terkourafi 2001, 2003; Haugh 2003).

6.2 Politeness: inferred vs anticipated

Grice's CP and the maxims were formulated under the assumption that the common purpose of the talk exchange is maximally efficient exchange of information and do not include concerns of politeness. Although not developed in his proposal, Grice (1975) himself suggested that politeness could be behind such violations: "There are, of course, all sort of other maxims (aesthetic, social, or moral in character) such as 'Be polite' that are also normally observed by participants in talk exchanges, and these may also generate nonconventional (i.e., conversational) implicatures." (Grice 1975, 1989)

In an attempt to elaborate Grice's CP so as to account for politeness, Lakoff (1973) proposed a set of pragmatic rules that were said to be most often in competition with or subsumed under Grice's maxim of clarity:

1. Be clear.
2. Be polite (Lakoff 1973: 296)

In this model, politeness is viewed as avoidance of offense, which should most often supersede clarity since, according to the author, in most informal conversations, actual communication of important ideas is secondary to merely reaffirming and strengthening relationships (Lakoff 1973: 298). She further formulated three rules of politeness as follows:

1. Don't impose.
2. Give options.
3. Make (the addressee) feel good – be friendly. (Lakoff 1973: 298)

Leech's (1983) notion of politeness as a conversational principle parallels Grice's CP, which he supplemented by the six maxims of Politeness Principle (i.e., the tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims). Unlike Lakoff, who regarded politeness as superseding clarity, Leech considered that Politeness Principle interacts with CP at the same level, where the latter explains illocutionary indirectness motivated by the former.

As a representative the 'politeness as an implicature' view, Kallia (2004) proposes that politeness arises in the same way as (particularized) conversational implicature from the interaction of a 'maxim of politeness' with the other conversational maxims and Grice's Cooperative Principle. The maxim of politeness is formulated as follows:

"Be appropriately polite in form (choice of how) and content (choice of what).

Submaxim 1: Do not be more polite than expected.

Submaxim 2: Do not be less polite than expected." (Kallia 2004: 161).

Pfister (2010: 1275-1276) argues that the maxim of politeness is not general enough to be called a “conversational maxim” as conversational maxims apply independently of any conventions or social norms, i.e. rules prescribing a certain behavior, in a context. As one of such norms, politeness arises when an action is in congruence with a norm, while its opposite, impoliteness, arises when the behavior is to the contrary (see Fraser, 1990:219).

Haugh (2003) argues that if we expect a certain behavior to occur that does indeed occur, and this behavior gives rise to politeness, then politeness is anticipated. On the other hand, if we are not expecting a certain behavior to occur which nevertheless does occur, and this behavior gives rise to politeness, then this politeness must be inferred. This view is shared by Terkourafi (2001), who regards politeness as ‘anticipated’ when a particular linguistic form or pragmatic strategy is conventionally used in a particular situation and as ‘inferred by means of an implicature’ when the expression used by the speaker is not conventionalized for some use (Terkourafi 2001: 175).

Similarly to Terkourafi, Spencer-Oatey’s (2005, 2008) rapport-management approach also emphasizes that politeness can only be judged relative to a particular context and a particular addressee’s expectations and concomitant interpretations. Spencer-Oatey (2011) argues that prescriptive or proscriptive overtones can become associated with expected behaviour, and that as a result, people start perceiving rights and obligations (which she labels ‘sociality’) in relation to them and may feel annoyed if the expected behaviour is not forthcoming.

For Terkourafi (2005) politeness is an unmarked behavior because in her theoretical framework all acts are considered as face-supporting or face-constituting, and therefore face is there by default. This means that ‘face-threat redress’ does not need to be normally communicated via a particularized implicature (PCI) contrary to the view assumed by Brown and Levinson, but is often conveyed via a generalized conversational implicatures (GCI). The word ‘normally’ is key here, because GCIs occur only when an utterance matches the context in which it is regularly used according to the interactants’ expectations. The view is supported by Escandell-Vidal (1996, 1998).

In Terkourafi’s model polite behavior is intended as cooperative communicative behavior, i.e., as an integral element in Grice’s Cooperative Principle, rather than a deviation from it. The view of politeness as a deviation from norms of rationality has been criticized as counterintuitive by researchers who view politeness as the normal and expected (and therefore non-memorable) type of behavior, which often passes unnoticed and the breach of such norm

as salient in interaction (see Escandell-Vidal 1996, 1998; Fraser 1990, 2005; Jary 1998, Terkourafi 2001). Similarly to grammar rules, these authors consider politeness as a requirement of language, which we only notice when some form of (verbal) behavior does not comply with it. As Kasper (1990) notes, people normally “comment on absence of politeness where it is expected, and its presence where it is not expected”, which means that “politeness is more often anticipated than communicated” (Jary 1998: 1).

Since polite intentions are taken for granted and expected to be present in every conversation, they need not be made ostensive. Jary (1998) points out that sometimes a hearer can find that some aspects of the speaker’s verbal behavior “are not relevant enough to be worth the hearer’s attention” and therefore not processed in discourse. Unlike politeness, which normally passes unnoticed, perceived impoliteness constitutes marked behavior, which is commented on in a conversation.

Thus the politeness effects resulting from uttering *Could you please tell me what time it is?* are sometimes not relevant enough to be noticed by hearers, as politeness has become a default and anticipated type of linguistic behavior, or as Žegarac puts it:

“When I say to you: *Do you mind if I open the window?* I am certainly using a polite form. But am I communicating some polite assumptions? Hardly, provided you assume that I am generally a polite person. True, my utterance does provide evidence of my being polite, but you would not be justified in assuming that I intended it to be relevant in this way. An utterance can hardly be expected to be relevant to the hearer merely by virtue of confirming belief assumptions which are already held at maximal strength.” (Žegarac 1998: 353)

Watts (1989, 2003) calls such anticipated politeness ‘politic behavior’ and defines it as: “socioculturally determined behaviour directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group. It is behaviour, linguistic and nonlinguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction.” (Watts 1989: 135)

Watts (2003) argues that linguistic behavior which is perceived to be beyond what is expectable, i.e. salient behavior should be called *polite* or *impolite* depending on whether the behavior itself tends towards the negative or positive end of the spectrum of politeness (Watts 2003: 19).

There is a general agreement in research literature that sentences are not ipso facto polite and that linguistic structures do not in themselves denote politeness, but rather that they

“lend themselves to individual interpretation as ‘polite’ in instances of ongoing verbal interaction” (Watts 2003:168).

Among the earliest adherents of the view that politeness is not inherent in linguistic expressions are Fraser and Nolan, who argue: “[...] no sentence is inherently polite or impolite. We often take certain expressions to be impolite, but it is not the expressions themselves but the conditions under which they are used that determines the judgment of politeness” (Fraser and Nolan 1981: 96). A similar position is taken by Brown (1995) who writes that politeness “inheres not in forms, but in the attribution of polite intentions, and linguistic forms are only part of the evidence interlocutors use to assess utterances and infer polite intentions” (Brown 1995: 169). Holmes (1995) argues that not only is there an infinite variety of ways of expressing linguistic politeness, it is also the case that the same linguistic devices can express different meaning in different contexts: “There is nothing intrinsically polite about any linguistic form” (Holmes 1995: 10).

The erroneous view that there are intrinsically (im)polite forms stems from the code model of communication according to which speakers encode their messages into signals and the task of the hearer is seen as decoding them. In arguing that expressions “lend themselves to individual interpretation” Watts (2003:168) notes that the encoded semantic meaning does play some part in determining the interpretation of politeness in that it constrains interpretation by encoding procedural meaning (Blakemore 1987). Jary (1995) relevance-theoretic account suggests that linguistic forms used to perform illocutionary acts only achieve relevance themselves if they differ from what was expected.

In this respect, Culpeper (2011) argues that evaluations of uses of impoliteness formulae such as swearwords tend to be relatively stable because they are constrained by the conventionalized associations that interlocutors share. According to him, this is evident from:

“the commonplace fact that people have opinions about how different expressions relate to different degrees of politeness or impoliteness out of context, and often opinions which are similar to others sharing their communities. They must have some kind of semantic knowledge; or to put it another way, the pragmatics of these expressions must be semantically encoded in some way” (Culpeper 2011:124).

Drawing on Terkourafi’s (2008) research, Culpeper makes the point that this semantic knowledge is ‘schematic knowledge’ in that it relates to conventionalized (rather than conventional) meanings, that is to say, such meanings are arrived at through a process in

which “particular expressions are associated in one’s mind with particular contexts” Culpeper (2011: 129).

Applying the ideas from the above discussion to the analysis of euphemisms/PC, we can assume that, generally speaking, resorting to euphemisms/PC could be viewed as anticipated linguistic behavior when the behavior, which gives rise to euphemistic/PC interpretations is expected, while it could potentially be regarded as inferred when the behavior giving rise to euphemistic/PC interpretations does not meet hearers’ expectation regarding what is relevant provided the context.

Drawing analogy with politeness works for many instances of euphemistic communication as the choice between alternative expressions will always depend on context. However, unlike (im)polite forms, some expressions appear to be somehow intrinsically x-phemistic. For example, terms for *die* such as *pass away* and *sleep* are euphemistic and marked as such in dictionaries, whereas *croak* and *peg out* and *kick the bucket* are not.

6.3 X-phemisms/PC and (im)politeness

Allan and Burridge (1991:14-20, 27 f.) attribute euphemisms to face-saving and dysphemisms to deliberate face-threatening. Indeed, dysphemisms may be face-threatening to the hearer or to some third party, and euphemisms may be face-saving. However, face-threatening accounts for negative politeness in general, even without touching any taboo concept, and likewise face-saving accounts for positive politeness in general, even without touching any taboo concept. So, polite/impolite lexical expressions are not necessarily euphemisms/dysphemisms.

Unlike euphemisms, politeness enjoys a pre-theoretical status, i.e. people have an intuitive understanding of the notion of politeness as it is familiar to any competent speaker of a language since childhood. It is probably safe to assume that, unlike politeness assessments, during online processing of utterances containing euphemistic expressions, people outside of the area of linguistic inquiry may not be necessarily familiar with the technical notion of 'euphemism'. As a result, non-linguists or language users not familiar with the concept EUPHEMISM will not be in a position to infer information about the euphemistic status of an utterance as words and expressions do not carry a 'This is a euphemism' label in discourse. A specific euphemistic perlocutionary effect will, nevertheless, be generated leading to the hearer holding assumptions about speaker's evasiveness, his intention to avoid a stronger, riskier or more direct (saliently unexpressed) word/expression. The avoided lexical form has to be mentally represented in order for some lexical material to produce the euphemistic effect. Hearers will inevitably metarepresent the saliently unexpressed dispreferred content guided by the presumption of optimal relevance carried by all ostensive stimuli and utterances in particular.

By resorting to euphemisms or PC expressions, a speaker who utters the weaker version counts on the hearer to recognize that the stronger proposition was intended to be communicated (see Horn 1989: Chapter 5; Horn 2000). This intentional use of a weak proposition to communicate a related, stronger proposition depends on a hearer's ability to enrich the content of an indeterminate meaning. It thus both frees the speaker from full responsibility for what she communicates, and frees the hearer from undue strain on his credulity.

There are commonsense notions of what politeness and impoliteness are, which are distinct from sociolinguistic metadiscourse about what constitutes linguistic politeness. Watts et al. (1992) maintain that researchers into linguistic politeness frequently confuse 'folk', or

‘lay’, interpretations with the technical interpretation, and throughout his book on politeness Watts (2003) calls ‘folk’ interpretations of (im)politeness ‘first-order (im)politeness’ and (im)politeness as a concept in a sociolinguistic theory of (im)politeness ‘second-order (im)politeness’. Since there are no such ‘folk’ notions of euphemisms non-linguists are likely to talk about indirectness, avoidance or evasiveness rather than euphemistic language use.

Regarding the correlation between PC and politeness, Klotz (1999) observes that there is a clear link between politeness and political correctness because both govern communal life in every society and because we are hardly aware of them with their ideological, historical and cultural implications in our everyday life. Polite linguistic behavior indeed shares certain similarities with PC. Similarly to PC, politeness is not a kind of quality humans are born with. It is culture-specific and needs to be taught. However, unlike PC, politeness has a very long history and culture-specific linguistic forms associated with this type of behavior have become conventions of language – an evolutionary stage, which PC is yet to achieve. In my opinion, unlike fully conventionalized, already salient and unmarked politeness, at the current stage of its evolution, PC is still inferred (rather than anticipated) and therefore the perlocutionary effect consisting in the hearer holding a belief to the effect that the speaker is being PC in saying that P, will always be inferred, since interlocutors are still aware of the novelty of this kind of discourse.

Unlike euphemisms, PC expressions are not necessarily used to avoid mentioning a taboo and they are not always equated with politeness. Political correctness must be explained independently of politeness, as polite communicative behavior is not a necessary feature of political correctness: utterances may be interpreted as politically correct or incorrect irrespective of being polite or impolite.

There is indeed a clear link between politeness and euphemistic language. However, just because an expression is considered more polite than some other expression does not automatically make it a euphemism. I see the main difference between euphemisms and politeness in the fact that people indeed expect other people to be polite in conversation. This expected behavior is perceived as normal or “unmarked” and therefore it passes unnoticed, while impoliteness is marked in relation to what is expected as appropriate (linguistic) behavior provided the context. Novel euphemisms/PC, on the other hand, constitute marked behavior. Politeness consists in displaying awareness of another’s feelings, whereas euphemism consists in the avoidance of a word or idea whose direct expression is taboo.

There is some overlap between the two (it can be polite to be euphemistic, and both functions are served by indirectness) but they are not identical.

For the methodological purpose of distinguishing euphemisms from other strategies of (im)politeness and indirectness, a question can be posed whether anything that was said instead of something else, which could have been said but was not, can be considered a euphemism and following this logic, can *excuse me* be considered a euphemism for *get out of my way* and more importantly do hearers infer the *get out of my way* every time they hear *excuse me*? Following the same line of thought one may also wonder whether uttering the phatic token *Hello!* to greet someone is a euphemism for failing to produce a greeting, and whether uttering *See you later!* can be considered a euphemism for not saying good-bye where it is expected? Whenever a speaker thinks he or she is being euphemistic/PC, does the hearer think so too? In other words, if euphemisms are “telling it like it **isn’t**” (Time 1978), do hearers always attempt to discover the underlying “what **is**?”

Not saying *hello* to one’s acquaintance wherever a greeting is expected is certainly impolite and face-threatening. However, saying *hello* cannot be considered a substitute for failing to produce a greeting since euphemisms require a kind of expression-to-expression conventional mapping, which *hello* does not have. *Hello* does not *mean* any allegedly dysphemistic counterpart the way *pass away* means *die* in most contexts or *coffee* is metonymically broadened to *mean* ‘sex’ in example (9).

The paradox arising from the expression-to-expression mapping associated with dialectical nature of euphemistic language is that the underlying taboos are meant to be discovered if the euphemistic utterance is to be understood and recognized for what it is, while at the same time these taboos are meant to be concealed by the same very expression. It is as if the denotation were viewed from two opposing points of view: “Un certain mot ou nom ne doit pas passer par la bouche. Il est simplement retrancher du registre de la langue, effacer de l’usage, il ne doit pas exister. Cependant, c’est la` une condition paradoxale du tabou, ce nom doit en me^me temps continuer d’exister en tant qu’interdit.” [A given word or name must not be spoken. It is just removed from the register of the language, expunged from use. Nevertheless, that is the paradoxical condition of taboo, that name will at the same time continue to exist even though it is forbidden.] (Benveniste 1974)

From the above discussion, it follows that research into the domain of euphemisms/PC has a direct bearing on issues currently debated within the discipline of pragmatics, namely

the one concerning views regarding the stages along which comprehension of what people intend to communicate when they speak figuratively takes place (see section 1.4).

According to Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai (2001), a dynamic and flexible account of polite behavior needs to consider that “even though most choices reflect some societal pattern, speakers make linguistic choices as individuals. That is, choices ultimately lie with the individual and are rationally based” Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai (2001). According to the authors, what ultimately sets linguistic choices in motion is speaker intentions and calculations to optimize rewards. On their view, not the speech community nor even the social network, but rather individuals, necessarily “own” the linguistic choice of one way of speaking over another.

As rational beings, speakers make their linguistic choices as a result of cost-benefit assessments of the potential outcome of their communication as compatible, in relevance-theoretic terms, with their abilities and preferences. That is, rationality means cognitively based calculations: “When faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they believe is likely to have the best overall outcome. This deceptively simple sentence summarizes the theory of rational choice” (Elster 1989:22). In case of euphemisms and PC expressions, the benefits are social consequences gained from using these particular units in place of possible alternatives, rather than a pure exchange of propositional information.

Chilton (2004) views euphemism as part of the recurrent instances of what Habermas called ‘strategic’ use of language when interests distort communication. Chilton (2004: 46) names three such strategic functions: coercion, legitimization/delegitimization, representation/misrepresentation and claims that euphemism in discourse is the opposite of metaphor as far as ideology is concerned. Where metaphor replaces words and is coercive and legitimizing, euphemism is suppressive and dissimulating. He suggests that the linguistic strategies that effect euphemism include not only the sort of lexical replacement but also omission, passivization and nominalization. Chilton (2004) argues that euphemism has the cognitive effect of conceptually ‘blurring’ or ‘defocusing’ unwanted referents.

In addition to ‘defocusing’, euphemisms are certainly used with the purpose of ‘focusing’ hearers’ attention on positive aspects of what is said. Such focusing/defocusing function is achieved metonymically and according to Pauwels (1999: 272) metonymy often seems to function as a kind of ‘avoidance strategy’, for reasons of euphemism. As I show in section 3.3, metonymy also functions as a ‘focusing strategy,’ which, in cases where such focusing is irrelevant, can give rise to dysphemistic interpretations.

In political discourse x-phemisms are used for purposes of legitimizing some point of view/ideology or amelioration of meaning, while dysphemisms are used for delegitimizing purposes and pejoration of meaning (cf. calling someone a ‘terrorist’ vs. calling someone a ‘freedom fighter’) through connoting the respective associations.

The next chapter provides an overview of contributions made by research within the multidisciplinary discipline of Critical Discourse Analysis, whose stated goal is uncovering of implicit ideologies in texts, to analyzing the ideology-framing potential of PC and euphemisms. It also examines pragmatic mechanisms underlying verbal manipulation.

Chapter 7. X-phemisms/PC and ideology

After reviewing contributions from the field of Critical Discourse Analysis on the topic of PC, the chapter discusses that x-phemisms/PC can fulfil the function of framing the discourse through perspectivization or metonymic highlighting of some details while backgrounding others, hyperbolizing in case of euphemisms the positive aspects while diminishing the relevance of negative ones. By representing their referents as better (or worse in case of dysphemisms) than what the direct designations portray them like, these lexical units are used to trigger a positive (or negative) emotional response or ‘perlocutionary effect’ in the hearers and, therefore, can arguably be effectively used for manipulative purposes.

7.1 PC and Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary theoretical framework created with the purpose of analyzing ideological prejudices and the exercise of power in texts. The principal aim of CDA is viewed as uncovering the opacities in discourse, which contribute to the exercise, maintenance or reproduction of unequal relations of power (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258). The main concern of CDA’s agenda is to “educate people more broadly in the abuse of power by linguistic means, to reveal how language is used for deception and distortion and the fostering of prejudice” (Widdowson 2004: ix).

Researchers working within the CDA tradition try to uncover ideology, defined by van Dijk as “the basis of the social representation shared by members of a group” (van Dijk 1998: 8), in so far as it is expressed and influenced by language and discourse and aim to “investigate critically social inequality, as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use” (Wodak 2001:2).

While not being associated with any specific school of linguistic or discourse analysis, the umbrella term CDA unites methodologically and theoretically heterogeneous approaches, which share a common goal of answering such questions as whether social and political change can be implemented through changes in language, what is the relationship between them and how such change can actually be implemented.

PC is viewed and analyzed in this discipline from the point of view of theories of social constructionism – “theories of social life as socially (discursively) constructed as an effect of discourses” (Fairclough 2003: 22). Processes of cultural and discursive intervention, such as PC, are regarded as attempts to change discourses on the assumption that changing discourses will, or may, lead to changes in other elements of social practices through

processes of *dialectical internalization* (Fairclough 2003). Fairclough cautions against the possibly ‘the other way round’ effect of dialectical internalization, noting that discourses do not come out of nowhere. At the same time Fairclough (2003: 23) recognizes that discourse may construct and reconstruct social practices, social structures and social life, but there is no guarantee of such constructive effects as there can be a fair share of resistance to change among the target social groups.

Fairclough (2003) suggests that if people can be persuaded to talk of *partner* rather than *the person I’m living with* or *lover* (or even *mistress*), or if people being *sacked* is partly displaced in public discourse by organizations *downsizing*, there will (or may) be consequential changes in how non-marital relationships and economic restructuring are perceived, and how people act and react towards them (Fairclough 2003: 22).

The phenomenon of PC is analyzed at length from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis in the special issue of *Discourse and Society* (2003 vol.14) dedicated in its entirety to political correctness. All the researchers in the special volume converge that there is no homogeneous social movement of PC advocates out there and that ‘political correctness’ and being ‘politically correct’ are almost always identifications imposed upon people by their political opponents (Fairclough 2003).

Thus in his article Toolan (2003: 71) points out that the phrases *politically correct* and *political correctness* have become contaminated and stigmatized by their constant application, by conservatives, to reformist practices entailing, according to the conservative, a simulated concern or respect. One consequence of this stigma is that progressivist proponents of political correctness will be found acting or speaking in its spirit but never in its name. No progressivist, for entirely understandable strategic reasons, will say explicitly that they advocate a particular policy or naming ‘on political correctness grounds’. They must say they do so on anything *but* such grounds: self-determination, impartiality, inclusiveness, appropriateness, politeness, awareness of a word’s history or an audience’s sensitivities, and so on and so forth. The phrases *politically correct* and *political correctness* have simply acquired too entrenched a negative semantic for them to be used, in normal circumstances, without implied criticism of the activity so described (either criticism of others, or ironizing criticism of self).

Toolan distinguishes between two kinds of PC with no ‘in-between’ cases: tyrannical and trivial: “When in North American academia it is alleged that a particular teacher has been hired on the grounds of their gender or race over many more able candidates, this is implicitly

being characterized as tyrannical political correctness. When someone who has learned not to say *the girls in the office* is also advised not to say *the women in the office* but *the office staff*, they may respond, expressly or impliedly, that this is trivial political correctness” (Toolan 2003: 71).

The article by Suhr and Johnson notes that the use of ‘PC-related’ terms (i.e. ‘political correctness’, ‘politically correct’, ‘PC’, etc.) in three *British* broadsheets, more or less mirrors the rise and decline reported by Lakoff for the US. By contrast, the analysis by Johnson and Suhr of the German newspaper *Die Welt* and Toolan’s study of the French paper *Le Monde* show how the appearance of loaned and/or integrated variants of ‘political correctness’ did not really begin to gather momentum until the mid- to late 1990s. Seen in conjunction with Lakoff’s (2000) US survey, what these three articles clearly demonstrate is that in a quantitative sense ‘political correctness’ has not run its course to the same extent everywhere.

CDA researchers note that there have been a number of assessments of the political and philosophical implications of ‘PC’ from what might be broadly characterized as a sociolinguistic point of view. Nonetheless, they believe that much remains to be said about the topic from a specifically *discourse-analytical* perspective. In this regard, the articles in the special volume of *Discourse and Society* “look at ‘PC’ *discourse* (with a lower case ‘d’) in that they specifically examine stretches of language containing ‘PC’-related terms such as ‘political correctness’, ‘politically correct’, ‘PC’, etc.

However, despite this ambition *all* the articles look at ‘PC’ *Discourse* (with a capital ‘D’) insofar as they explore the broader discursive processes and social practices in which the phenomenon is embedded. Suhr and Johnson (2003) point out that:

“ <...> unsurprisingly, it has not always been easy – or, of course, desirable – to separate these two concepts of discourse in relation to ‘political correctness’ but it is worth noting here some potential ambiguities that we were forced to confront. Occasionally, for example, we struggled to separate the concept of ‘PC’ *discourse* in the sense of: (i) stretches of discourse data containing ‘PC’-related terms, and (ii) discourse which had been *labelled* ‘politically correct’ (and which may or may not contain ‘PC’-related terms). To complicate matters further, the latter process of *labelling* discourse(s) as ‘politically correct’ is itself an example of ‘PC’ *Discourse*, thereby exemplifying the kind of broader discursive processes and social practices which were simultaneously the object of study.” Suhr and Johnson (2003: 6-7)

Statements like the above-mentioned show that “*discourse approaches are more like tools for the analyst rather than explanation of natural language understanding procedures*” (Saussure 2007: 183, my emphasis, A.S.). In their ‘a posteriori’ analysis CDA researchers treat PC as a natural category, which enables them to conduct qualitative and quantitative analysis of its production and use.

Unlike the post hoc analysis of what PC is, offered by discourse-analytic approaches, a look at the dynamic process of interpretation of PC utterances can lead us to a significantly different understanding of this phenomenon as a continuum of cases, which includes novel, one-off uses, conventionalized PC metonymies understood via generalized pragmatic routines, and fully semanticized metonymies that have entered the lexicon.

In order to talk about anything, one has to ‘package’ the information she intends to convey by her utterances accordingly in order to prepare the appropriate utterances. The following section shows that implicit information regarding the value judgments associated with the use of certain linguistic units (e.g. as being ‘PC’ or ‘non-PC’) in particular contexts can be regarded as represented by cognitive frames, which can be described as the ways in which individuals understand and interpret portions of reality.

7.2 Framing the point of view in discourse

The notion of ‘frame’ was introduced by Goffman (1974) to mean a contextualizing perspective, an angle or point of view. Frames can be constituted of a variety of things, including cultural (meta)-representations, background assumptions or even “features of the talk itself that invoke particular background assumptions relevant to the subsequent interaction” (Duranti and Goodwin 1992). In Cognitive Semantics ‘frames’ are viewed as conceptual/perceptual *gestalts* which explicate the processes of perspectivization and “windowing of attention” in terms of “figure/ground” effects. (cf. Fillmore 1977; Dirven et al. 1982; Talmy 1996; Ungerer and Schmid 1996:205–249).

Such organized sets of knowledge are seen as having interconnected slots, which are “filled” with ‘default’ assignments capturing the typical features of the world. The default values can be displaced with new information that fits better the situation at hand. The slots of frames can be viewed within the RT framework as procedural instructions or requirements placing constraints on what variables can possibly fill them. The slots are filled with default-values and correspond to expectations of relevance, which hearers bring to the interpretation process, guiding them in making sense of ostensive stimuli. The ‘defaults’ with which the slots of a frame are associated, create expectations regarding how relevant certain types of discourse are for the hearers and consequently lead to various *depths of processing* of discourses.

According to Gibbs (1999) cognitive frames or knowledge organized and stored in long-term memory can be metonymically referred to by the mere mention of one salient subpart of such frames: “We see that mention of the subpart metonymically stands for the whole event. In some versions of script theory, the most salient part of the script (i.e., its metonymic representation) is explicitly encoded as a ‘script-header’ in memory such that activation of the header accesses all the information encoded in the entire script” (Gibbs 1999: 69). For instance, *go to bed* becomes a metonymic way of mentioning part of the scenario instead of another part of scenario, a euphemism for *have sex* just as a perfectly orthophemistic *wash up* receives a euphemistic interpretation in the following example from “The Big Bang Theory” (Season 5 Episode 12):

(37)

Penny: So are we ready to order?

*Amy: Gimme a minute, I’m gonna go **wash up!***

Sheldon: Well, that's odd, we both washed up when we came in...it's probably a euphemism for urination.

As seen from this example, lexical units possess the ability to activate cognitive and evaluative frames (alternatively referred to as scripts, scenarios, plans, etc. see Schank and Abelson 1977) in the mind of the addressee. As a result, addressees are led to regard reality in different ways depending on the lexical choices made to describe, or define, that portion of reality. In producing utterances, speakers choose their words in accordance with assumptions they hold in their cognitive systems regarding a certain model of the world (cf. Fillmore 1976: 26) and individuals generally understand each other because they are able to reconstruct the scenarios their interlocutors have in mind metarepresentationally by relying on the frame-activating power of words.

The use of lexical units for strategic framing can be regarded in terms of *selection* and *salience*: “To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described” (Entman 1993: 52; italics in the original). Framing practices are aimed at changing relative degrees of salience among different aspects of an issue or different considerations. In addition to this, framing involves reconfiguring the semantic associations among the relevant concepts stored in one’s memory (Higgins 1996). For instance, the aim of using such clichés as *national security* in official political discourse is to produce an effect upon the hearer, which consists in a positive perception of governmental activities and forming a positive attitude to, for instance, some piece of proposed legislation: e.g. to extend the term of the *Patriot Act* – a law that limits civil liberties in the US because of the issues of national security.

Lakoff (2004) argues that new concepts and ideas can only be properly understood when there is some point of reference against which to draw relevant inferences and that framing is about using language that fits a particular worldview. He explains that, since people think in frames against which new information is processed, “confronting someone with facts” may have little or no effect on the addressees, unless they have a frame that makes sense of the facts.

As previously discussed, RT postulates that human cognitive systems are hard-wired to process new information for relevance as a result of an evolutionary adaption. From the relevance-theoretic standpoint, the process of utterance interpretation involves the selection of

a particular subset of mental representations or assumptions, which can be (confirmed) strengthened, cancelled or combined with contextual information to yield contextual implications (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 117). Since new information is processed against the background of the one already available in our minds, a subset of our stored assumptions and concepts is likely to be active at any given point, with different subsets being activated at different points (see Vega Moreno 2007: 41). These assumptions are not totally independent of each other: information is usually stored as an organized set of related assumptions (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 87-88), which can be accessed to act as a context for interpretation.

Yus (2013) refers to the subsets of stored information against which interpretation of utterances takes place as ‘make-sense frames’. RT views human memory as organized in such a way that an activation of a certain concept in one’s cognitive environment immediately spreads over and activates related concepts, which themselves activate related concepts to different degrees. The pieces of co-accessed information that are likely to be simultaneously relevant tend to be co-activated in domain-specific chunks of stored organized experientially-based expectation-structuring knowledge or ‘make-sense frames’ (see Yus 2013).

Tendahl (2009) points out that the dynamic cognitive view of online construction of context in which utterances are processed adopted by RT suggests that when it is not immediately clear what the context for an utterance is, the addressee does not automatically incorporate a default context, but he will first of all search for a context that is available and that would make the utterance optimally relevant. It is not just the context which influences the understanding of utterances, but expectations of relevance together with utterances may also determine the context brought to bear on the interpretation process. The interpretation process is thus seen in RT as guided by a mutual adjustment of expectations of relevance, the context and the utterance (see Tendahl 2009: 161).

From the relevance-theoretic standpoint, Escandell-Vidal (1996: 641) argues that the fact that a particular frame is activated does not mean that this frame is the context: the frame only makes a pre-selection of a structured set of assumptions from which the specific context can be chosen; so the relevance-theoretic view that the context is the particular subset of representations used in the interpretation of a particular utterance can be maintained.

As cognitive constructs, frames explain how knowledge is represented in general and the role background knowledge plays in structuring the lexicon. Concepts, which conform to these schemas are easily internalized and remembered (Sperber 1996: 69) and therefore are

also easily evoked, which lowers the amount of effort needed for their processing. Minsky (1977) explains the way frames operate in the following way:

“When one encounters a new situation [. . .], one selects from memory a structure called a frame. This is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary. A frame is a datastructure for representing a stereotyped situation like being in a certain kind of living room or going to a child’s birthday party. Attached to each frame are several kinds of information. [. . .] Some is about what one can expect to happen next”. (Minsky 1977: 355)

The information stored in a particular frame interacts with information stored in adjacent frames. The current level of activation influences the salience and hence accessibility of a frame in one’s cognitive environment. Particular ‘triggers’ in an utterance open up particular frames and the more a frame is used, the higher its level of activation and the spread of activation causes the so-called *priming effects*: the exposure to a stimulus influences a response to a later stimulus. In other words, calling into action of specific frames or scripts works metonymically so that reference to one or more of the features of a script will ready it and call it to mindfulness.

Examples of framing practices, whose aim is to refocus attention on different aspects of reality by means of resorting to euphemisms include renaming *torture* to *advanced interrogation*, *domestic spying (eavesdropping)* which connotes breaking the law and taking away civil liberties to *anti-terrorist surveillance program*, connoting protecting the American people from terrorism as part of fighting the war on terror (cf. also *limited contingent* of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, *brotherly help* to the people of Afghanistan, *peacemaking operation*, *antiterrorist operation* in Chechnya). The scope of such words as *limited*, *brotherly*, *peacemaking*, *antiterrorist* applies to the entire expression and reframes the phenomena referred to by making them sound more positive to promote a certain agenda. Such euphemisms are used in an attempt to improve reality by manipulatively presenting it in a positive light through such structuring of symbolic representation that would set in motion a distinct train of thoughts in individuals’ reasoning (Price et al. 1997) and their ways of regarding an issue.

The following examples also illustrate such attempts:

(38)

American **spies** were exchanged for Russian **intelligence officers** (Russian Channel 1)

(39)

“US Marines cannot **engage** Taliban militants who **shoot** at them” (Fox News on ‘rules of engagement’ 17.02.10).

Lexical choices have significant framing effects as they encourage certain interpretations while discouraging others by selective influence over the individual's *perception* of the meanings attributed to words or phrases as, for instance, in the following statement:

(40)

Governor of Indiana Mitch Daniels: “We do not accept that ours will ever be a nation of **havs** and **have-nots**. We must always be a nation of **havs** and **soon-to-havs**” (quoted on “The Daily Show” 23.02.2012)

Here, *soon-to-havs* is positivizing poverty as having the potential of becoming rich. Similarly, referring to rich people as *job creators* can be used to argumentatively highlight exclusively the positive attributes of the rich.

Whenever an object or event is described in positive terms, e.g. *protectorate* for *colony*, *legacy drivers* or *devices* for *old drivers/computers*, it is likely to be evaluated more positively compared to the same object described in equivalent negative terms. Thus advocates for the right to abortion refer to themselves as *pro-choice*, which automatically makes their opponents *anti-choice* and hence opposed to freedom and un-American. At the same time anti-abortion activists refer to themselves as *pro-life* which makes their opponents *anti-life/pro-death*. The phrase *pro-life* (anti-abortion) emphasizes that fetuses and embryos are human beings, unborn children and therefore have a right to live, while *pro-choice* (pro-abortion) stresses the importance for women to have control over their fertility and the choice whether to continue a pregnancy.

Croft and Cruse (2004) argue that framing effect leads to a cognitive bias resulting in presenting the same option in different formats. They discuss the use of FETUS vs. UNBORN BABY by opposing sides of the debate on abortion, where:

“FETUS profiles the entity in question against a more general MAMMAL frame: any mammal’s unborn progeny may be called a *fetus*. This frame makes abortion appear less morally repugnant <...> The complex phrase UNBORN BABY exploits two frames: BABY profiles the same entity against the more specific HUMAN frame: we prototypically use *baby* only for human offspring. Both BABY and UNBORN profile the entity against its projected later lifestage, namely after birth. These frames make abortion appear more repugnant <...> and all agree that once a fetus is born, it is a

human being. The difference in framing the entity denoted by *fetus* or *unborn baby* therefore orientates (or biases, to frame it differently!) the hearer towards the political stance on abortion adopted by the speaker” (Croft and Cruse 2004: 19; italics in the original).

Examples of framing in PC-inspired discourse include the use of *senior citizen* instead of *old man*, as it focuses on experience, need for respectful attitude towards seniority, while also suggesting involvement in the affairs of society and all its processes including the right to vote granted to all citizens. The PC expression *senior citizen* is not as clear about the capability of the person in question to lead an independent life as *old person*, which strongly connotes dependence on others and general helplessness.

In a similar way, *illegal immigrant* focuses on the illegal status of the person while *guest worker* focuses on the fact that the person works in the country and puts them in the same line with people specifically invited because of their high qualifications. Each of these expressions *implies the validity of their particular ideological stance while discrediting the validity of the opposing one*.

I fully agree with Cameron who notes in her book “Verbal Hygiene” (1995) that the politics of discourse are about getting others to believe that the point of view embodied in this or that verbal representation is not really a point of view but just the plain truth of the matter, whereas alternative representations are biased. She argues that those who talk about ‘collateral damage’ and ‘the elimination of undesirable elements’ are engaged in this kind of politics. But so too are those who tell us that what should have been said in both cases is ‘murder’ and that referring to ‘murder’ as ‘collateral damage’ is a perversion of the English language. As instances of echoic interpretive use, euphemisms and dysphemisms do not describe some state of affairs, but rather provide evidence of how speakers uttering them intend the audience to perceive this state of affairs and thereby express their own attitude to it.

One of the founders of CDA, Teun van Dijk (2005: 736), lists euphemism as one of the principal categories of ideological discourse analysis and describes it as a semantic move of mitigation or hedging, which is part of the broader framework of the strategy of positive self-presentation, and the avoidance of negative impression formation. The capability of presenting/framing discourse participants as well as discourse subject as more or less positive ascribes these lexical units the function of ‘axiologemes’ or key words capable of framing discourse by establishing context against which subsequent utterances are to be processed. Such axiologemes declare speakers’ ideological stance and position them within the US vs.

THEM dichotomy, which is realized in discourse as a strategy of group identification through positive self-representation and negative other-representation. The positive US vs. negative THEM strategy is “very typical in the biased account of the facts in favor of the speaker’s or writer’s own interests, while blaming negative situations and events on opponents or on the Others (immigrants, terrorists, youths, etc.)” (van Dijk 2006: 373).

Generally speaking, x-phemisms always express subjectivity in language. The US vs. THEM opposition is viewed in CDA as the most fundamental social category hardwired in the brain’s organizing system (Tavris and Aronson 2007: 58) and the difference between euphemistic and dysphemistic communication can be viewed in terms of contrasting the framing of discourse euphemistically to represent the speaker’s point of view (US) vs. framing it dysphemistically to represent some opposing viewpoint (THEM).

The existence of frames as organized sets of stored experientially-based knowledge is regarded in sociolinguistic research as the psychologically real implementations of the “habitus” (Terkourafi 2005: 253), which is the sociological notion put forward by Bourdieu (1990). Habitus is the internalization of the external through recurrent exposure to the same or similar situations. It refers to the system of internal dispositions that enables, and at the same time regulates and limits, the individual’s thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions. As Bourdieu explains: “[T]he habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production” (Bourdieu 1990: 55). The past experience is actively present in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, that “tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms” (Bourdieu 1990: 54).

The “internalization through recurrent exposure” associated with the notion of habitus can lead to a situation in which euphemisms cause what Butler (1997) calls “unintended proliferation” of what they censor as, according to the Graded Salience Hypothesis, concepts-representations become salient and foremost on people’s minds due to conventionality, frequency, familiarity, or prototypicality: “while less salient meanings are slow, salient meanings are accessed rapidly and always first, regardless of contextual bias or speaker’s intent. Indeed, this sort of ‘reflex’ is pervasive, irrespective of the fact that it may, at times, be ‘stupid’ (Fodor 1983), ignoring or resisting sensible behavior” (Giora 2003).

Frames can be stored in the form of cultural metarepresentations⁶⁰ shared amongst members of a social group (Sperber 1996) as “organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate” (Feagin 2006: 27). As organized sets of related information, frames can be metonymically evoked with the purpose of constraining the context in which utterances are meant to be interpreted by the speaker, since subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation or an issue might affect how audience interprets the situation at hand. Scheufele (2000: 309) argues that such strategic framing can influence how audiences think about issues, not by making aspects of the issue more salient, but by invoking interpretive schemata that influence the interpretation of incoming information. Hence it can be regarded as an attempt to manipulate the audience by constraining the context of interpretation and effectively blocking access to any alternative contextual assumptions (see Maillat and Oswald 2011).

In order to be euphemistic it can be enough to use an NP utterance and let the hearer complete the missing propositional information by inferring it. Uttering ‘Iraq’ to mean ‘the US-led occupation of Iraq’ can be a successful communicative act if the hearer manages to derive the intended meaning of the utterance in his/her search for its relevance (cf. Carston’s 2002a claim that concepts are pointers to mental spaces). Having failed to find relevance the hearer can always ask what the relevance is explicitly by saying ‘what do you mean by X?’ or ‘what does that have to do with X?’

The main purpose of euphemisms/PC is to prevent certain implicatures from going through while encouraging others. Thus *lover* can be regarded as euphemism compared to a stronger expression *regular sexual partner*, as its use is aimed at stopping the most relevant inference associated with the “being lovers” frame, namely having sexual intercourse, from going through by refocusing attention on the “having feelings of love for each other” aspect of that frame.

As such discourse structures per se cannot be viewed as manipulative or non-manipulative, however, as has been correctly noted by CDA researchers (cf. van Dijk 2006: 373), some of the structures may be more efficient than others in the process of influencing the minds of recipients in the speaker’s or writer’s own interests.

⁶⁰ A metarepresentation (representation of another representation) involves a higher-order representation, usually an utterance or thought, with a lower-order representation, either in the form of a *public representation* (e.g. utterances), a *mental representation* (e.g. thoughts), or an *abstract representation* (e.g. sentences, propositions), embedded in it (see Wilson 2000: 411).

In their pragmatic analysis of cognitive manipulation, Maillat and Oswald (2011) discuss context selection in frames from the relevance-theoretic point of view. The authors point out that assumptions ‘mobilized’, in their words, to act as a context for utterance interpretation can include mental representations about all sorts of things, such as: social relationships, events, concepts, linguistic items, mental states, general knowledge, perceptual evidence, etc. They argue, from the relevance-theoretic standpoint, that what determines the order of inclusion of these sets of assumptions into the context of interpretation is their relevance towards the utterance at stake, i.e., the amount of cognitive effort their derivation requires and the effects they are expected to yield with respect to the efficiency of the comprehension procedure. Therefore, the order of inclusion of assumptions corresponds to the order of their accessibility (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 142): the more salient and hence accessible an assumption is, the more likely it is to be included within the context of interpretation. The next section addresses the manipulative potential of resorting to euphemistic/PC language.

7.3 The manipulative dimension of euphemisms/PC

This section argues that euphemisms/PC can be manipulatively used to conceal the true state of affairs by triggering neutral or positive connotations in the audience, which can subsequently lead to an approval or acceptance of, for instance, certain governmental policies or ideological issues, which were previously considered unacceptable or deplorable. Considering the information overflow in today's world, modern-day discourse recipients do not always have the time necessary to process information critically and identify manipulative euphemisms for what they are. This can sometimes put hearers in a situation where they are forced to 'shallow-process' certain contextual assumptions.

7.3.1 Manipulation and the depth of processing

The human cognitive system is rather selective, at least when it comes to perceiving, processing, memorizing and recalling information (Vega Moreno 2007: 7) and sometimes the conscious mindful processing of certain highly conventionalized expressions and their semantic components in discourse may not be necessary to derive the interpretation the speaker intended to convey by using those words on particular occasions.

Craik and Lockhart (1972) were among the first researchers to pay attention to the fact that a stimulus can be processed to different levels or depths in drawing the distinction between 'shallow' and 'deep' processing. 'Depth of processing' is taken here to refer to the amount of information that is considered in processing a stimulus (for discussion see Vega Moreno 2007: 6). Whereas in shallow processing people process structural or phonological information, deep processing involves the processing of semantic information about word meaning or the encyclopedic information made accessible by the use of a word. Allott and Rubio Fernández (2002), for instance, show that the interpretation of certain lexical items can lead to "cognitive shortcuts" whereby the addressee only activates the most salient conceptual assumptions related to a lexical entry. Such shallow processing can be responsible for the construction of occasion-specific ad hoc concepts that correspond to a contextually targeted interpretation.

Conventionalized cooperative euphemisms like *pass away* for *die* tend to blend and not stand out as 'marked' in discourse. Despite acquiring camouflage-like properties and being processed in a shallow way, they can nevertheless contribute to framing a discourse to speaker's advantage through connotations and specific associations they trigger in hearers, i.e.

by “inviting” the hearers to conceptualize of death in the reframed terms of a ‘journey to the unknown’ rather than the ‘end of everything’, associated with the direct nomination.

Interpretation of novel (perlocutionarily uncooperative) euphemisms achieves relevance in virtue of their ‘marked’ status in discourse as their processing requires additional cognitive effort/inferential work. Such euphemisms can be used as manipulative ‘spin’ to strategically disguise something negative as something positive and twist the vision of the world in the mind of the addressee (Rigotti 2005: 68), while pursuing some self-interest agenda. Thus in examples like the oxymoronic *friendly fire* or *smart bomb* the positive connotations of the first lexeme neutralize the negative connotations of the second while the use of *collateral damage* can lead to faulty reasoning: a sort of “red herring” fallacy in which an irrelevant topic is presented in order to divert attention from the original issue, i.e. one can declare that there was merely some ‘collateral damage’ rather than ‘people were murdered’, thereby deviating attention from lost individual human lives by altering the importance of mentioning it directly, allegedly with the purpose of sparing the hearer communicative discomfort.

Cognitive processing of various euphemistic abbreviations, contractions, circumlocutions and elliptical constructions requires a high degree of commitment on the part of the hearer, as he/she must invest considerable cognitive resources or ‘processing effort’ into their interpretation. Thus uttering *activity incompatible with the diplomatic status* is vague and euphemistic (it actually means *spying* in most cases), however the associations it gives rise to cannot be evaluated as either ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ with certainty. In cases where the link between the euphemism and the denotation is too vague to be recognized, one can possibly talk about the loss of a euphemistic hedging function since in cases like these a euphemism turns into a lie or disinformation.

Resorting to euphemisms/PC can be generally regarded as motivated by the need/wish to encourage certain interpretations while discouraging others, by intentionally presenting certain assumptions about a state of affairs as more relevant than others, or presenting as relevant assumptions previously held as irrelevant by the audience. In relevance-theoretic terms, such a linguistic tactic can be formulated as ‘making strongly mutually manifest assumptions which are different from the ones hearers currently hold at maximum strength in their cognitive environment’.

The new relevance of assumptions can be presented overtly as well as covertly⁶¹. Such communication fits very well with the definition of manipulative discourse given by Saussure (2005: 95): “...to manipulate is, firstly, to communicate the relevance of things that are not relevant, and/or retain actually relevant information”. This sort of manipulation is achieved by constraining the contexts of interpretation (see Oswald and Maillat 2011).

Strategically used euphemisms and linguistic⁶² political correctness may be regarded as a type of local linguistic manipulative strategy (Saussure 2005: 94) used with the purpose of achieving certain goals. The paradox with the manipulative use of euphemisms/PC stems from the fact that the tabooed denotations, which the use of a euphemisms is aiming to veil or conceal or dispreferred lexical units, which the use of PC expressions is aiming to replace, must be mentally (meta)represented in order for a linguistic unit to be ascribed euphemistic status via a higher-level explicature to the effect that the speaker is being euphemistic/PC in saying that P. This makes manipulative strategies employing euphemisms illocutionary suicidal (term introduced by Vendler 1976) as in order to ‘go through’ manipulation must remain covert or latent (for discussion see Maillat and Oswald 2009, Rigotti 2005).

Thus when speakers attempt to resort to euphemistic/PC language for manipulative purposes, one of the necessary conditions for the manipulative intention to be fulfilled is the absence of salient dispreferred direct nominations in the vernacular, which could disclose the true state of affairs. The availability of such dispreferred alternatives could potentially activate ‘epistemic vigilance’ – a mental module, responsible for checking credibility of information as well as trustworthiness and competence of speakers conveying it (see Mascaro and Sperber 2009, Padilla Cruz 2012, 2013, Sperber et al. 2010), which euphemisms are supposed to keep dormant.

⁶¹ The more covert an act of persuading is, the more manipulative it will become (see Taillard 2000).

⁶² Nominating Michael Steele who is an African-American as the head of the traditionally predominantly white Republican party is seen as a tribute to political correctness in the US and constitutes an example of *extra-linguistic political correctness*. Another example is making Santa Claus more PC by picturing him as a non-smoker and his coat as made of artificial fur in the current US media.

7.3.2 Manipulation and theory of mind

Cases of shallow-processing apart, the verbal manipulation of public opinion is not easily achieved in discourse due to the fact that human beings are endowed with metarepresentational capabilities (the so-called ‘theory of mind’), which enable the ones manipulated to ‘read the mind’ or recognize the intentions of manipulators. The theory of mind hypothesis is advocated by Sperber (1994; 2000), who argues for the existence of a genetically evolved innate ‘metarepresentational module’, which is a key feature of human intelligence, linked to communication. Metarepresentational⁶³ module is, according to this hypothesis, a second-order module with the ability to form concepts of concepts and mental representations of mental representations, one’s own and those of others.

As discussed in section 1.1, since Grice, the process of utterance comprehension has been viewed in pragmatics as involving recognition of intentions underlying the production of utterances. Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) recognizes different layers of metarepresentation involved in comprehension as part of recognition of speaker’s intention in producing an utterance, depending on hearer’s expectations of relevance: *Naïve Optimism*, *Cautious Optimism* and *Sophisticated Understanding*.

In the *Naïve Optimism* stage, hearers do not need to think about speaker’s thoughts since they expect actual relevance and accept the result if it is relevant enough. The only metarepresentation involved here is the attribution of the relevant-enough interpretation as the speaker’s meaning. The naively optimistic interpreters will be the ones most easily manipulated whenever a manipulative discourse string, camouflaged as benevolent or empathic, aims at evoking emotions that “give rise to the assumption, on the addressee’s side, that the speaker is *sincere* and that he shares the worries of the addressee” (Saussure 2005: 105), as the naively optimistic hearers tend to assume that the speaker is both competent and benevolent (Wilson 2000):

The metarepresentational abilities of healthy, adult interlocutors are those of a *Cautious Optimism*. According to this interpretation strategy, hearers are aware that what they see as most relevant in an utterance might not be what the speaker wanted to communicate.

⁶³ Sperber (2000b) distinguishes between different types of metarepresentation: mental representations of mental representations (e.g., the thought ‘John believes that it will rain’), mental representations of public representations (e.g., the thought ‘John said that it will rain’), public representations of mental representations (e.g., the utterance ‘John believes that it will rain’), and public representations of public representations (e.g., the utterance ‘John said that it will rain’) (Sperber 2000b: 3).

Consequently, an extra level of metarepresentation is added, because the addressee now questions whether his interpretation is not just the most relevant interpretation to himself, but also the interpretation that the speaker would assume to be most relevant to his addressee. If the addressee comes to the conclusion that it is not the interpretation that the speaker would assume to be most relevant, he will have to look for another interpretation that satisfies this requirement. Unlike a naïve optimist, a *Cautiously Optimistic* hearer assumes that the speaker is benevolent, but not necessarily competent.

For example, when the speaker makes a slip of the tongue and utters *penguins* instead of *pigeons* hearers will nevertheless be able to invert the signals and infer the ‘true meaning’ behind speaker’s words, as seen in the following example from Wilson (2000):

- (41) *I’ve been feeding the penguins in Trafalgar Square.*
 I’ve been feeding the pigeons in Trafalgar Square

Here hearers will be able and willing to repair the speaker’s utterance using available background knowledge and interpret it in a way in which the speaker had possibly intended her utterance.

Speakers can resort to some ‘wrong’ marked lexical forms, perceived by the audience not as proper names of the concepts they nominate, either because they simply have the wrong concept-form mapping in their lexicon, as a slip of the tongue or with a specific purpose in mind Carston (1999: 382). Interpretation of euphemisms and politically correct expressions can thus be regarded as bearing close resemblance to the way slips of the tongue like the following

- (42) *A. Where is the chicken?*
 B. You mean where is the kitchen?

are processed online, as hearers constantly form hypothesis about what the speaker could have meant by using some unusual, ‘wrong’ or otherwise marked in relation to the context of utterance (not meeting their contextual expectations of relevance/appropriateness) form rather than merely ‘decoding’ the linguistically coded message, while assuming the speaker to be rational and his/her utterances carrying the presumption of optimal relevance. The underdeterminacy thesis can thus provide an insight into the mechanism underlying the marked-in-relation-to-some-context euphemistic/PC language use: already at the level of the cautious optimism hearers manage to infer the correct interpretation by forming hypotheses regarding what the speaker could have meant by resorting to some marked in relation to the context of utterance linguistic form in search for the intended relevance of the utterance.

Trying to make sense of novel euphemistic language use is very likely to trigger epistemic vigilance already at the level of cautious optimism leading to the inevitable replacement of the new linguistic form by the more familiar one similarly to the way slips of the tongue or foreign accents are corrected.

Unlike the previous two interpretive strategies, the strategy of *Sophisticated Understanding*, is normally employed by adult hearers, and allows them to cope with the fact that speakers are not always benevolent: they may intend an interpretation to *seem* relevant enough without in fact being so (see Wilson 2000). By employing this interpretative strategy, hearers can cope with deceptive cases in which nothing more than the appearance of relevance is attempted or achieved. Sophisticated understanding involves hearers accepting an interpretation if speakers might have thought hearers would think it as relevant enough. Hearers then assume that speakers may be neither competent nor benevolent and only intend to seem relevant (i.e. purported relevance). This more sophisticated metarepresentational strategy allows hearers “to doubt and disbelieve, which involves representing a representation as being improbable or false” (Sperber 1996: 71).

When information regarding the speaker’s commitment becomes involuntarily relevant to the processing of a discourse string, it can be interpreted as ‘accidentally relevant’ (cf. Noh 2000: 66) by hearers. An utterance is accidentally relevant when the hearer finds an interpretation that is optimally relevant to him in a way the speaker manifestly did not foresee (Noh 2000: 66). According to Noh (2000), the reference to ‘the speaker’s abilities and preferences’ in the definition of the presumption of optimal relevance takes into account the fact that the speaker may be unable or unwilling to produce the most relevance possible utterance, even when she knows what that would be. The cases of accidental relevance take into account the fact that the speaker may not know what would be optimally relevance to the hearer.

Noh (2000) points out that the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance assumes that the speaker is benevolent enough not to deceive the hearer into thinking something is relevant when it is not: “it does not cover the case where the speaker says something she knows to be irrelevant, thinking that it will seem optimally relevant to the hearer and therefore deceive him” (Noh 2000: 66-67). Noh (2000) argues that the strategy of *Sophisticated Understanding* takes this case into account by showing how the hearer may still understand an utterance even though he realizes that it was only intended to seem optimally relevant to him.

An addressee who has got reasons to believe that the speaker is not necessarily a benevolent communicator will not uncritically accept the first relevant interpretation that comes to his mind. Sperber (1994: 194–8) describes the procedure in the following way:

“<...> the hearer should follow that path of least effort, but he should stop, not at the first relevant enough interpretation that comes to mind, nor at the first interpretation that the speaker might have thought would be relevant enough to him, but at the first interpretation that the speaker might have thought would *seem* relevant enough to him” (Sperber 1994: 196–7; italics in original).

Chilton (2005: 27) argues that the existence of the metarepresentational mental module suggests that humans naturally and automatically tend to look for interpretations of discourse acts in terms of what speakers are intending to convey and to do. This mind-reading ability is linked to the notion of ‘Machiavellian intelligence’ (Byrne and Whiten 1988) or ‘tactical deception’ caused by individual wants:

“Its workings follow from the ability to read the intentions of others, and to recognize the ability of others to read one’s own intentions, leading to the ability to mask one’s intention <...> the ability to verbally mislead, deceive and to lie is clearly closely related” (Chilton 2005: 27).

Chilton makes a very important observation shedding light on the possible mechanisms underlying verbal manipulation: “<...> if an individual A has an innate ability to read the minds of B and use deception for his or her own ends, then conversely, B must have the same ability and could in principle use it to read the intention to deceive” (Chilton 2005: 27). Chilton concludes that if individual humans are innately Machiavellian, they are also innately able to counter one another’s machinations. If language is crucial to this ability and associated activity, then they should have an innate ability not just to use language in Machiavellian ways but to detect and counter one another’s Machiavellian use of language (Chilton 2005: 31). It would make no sense to assume that some people have a Machiavellian module and some don’t. But if everyone has it, it is also necessary to assume that all individuals have the ability to counter it in others (Chilton 2005: 42).

In their discussion of manipulative discourse, Maillat and Oswald (2009) point out that communication, including manipulative communication, cannot take place unless the message conveyed is understood by the addressee. It follows that, in order for a word or expression to be interpreted in its euphemistic function, it is necessary to identify what this linguistic unit is attempting to hedge or conceal. From the point of view of its production, euphemistic

language, which has not yet become conventionalized, requires 2nd order metarepresentation or “theory of mind” in the form “speaker believes that hearer will find such and such expression axiologically disfavorable, therefore a substitute is required”.

Speakers can resort to euphemistic language for manipulative purposes, which, similarly to cases of cooperative euphemistic communication, functions as a strategy of mitigation ‘cushioning the blow’ that the more direct and therefore face-threatening designations may deal. However manipulative use of euphemisms aims to do so for a different reason than its cooperative counterpart. Manipulative discourse can be used for purposes of (self)-justification where speakers attempt to preserve their own or some third party’s positive self-image or ‘face’ by manipulatively resorting to such euphemisms as: *downsizing* instead of *firing*, *executive action* for *targeted assassination*; *pacification* for *punitive operation*. It is the so-called ‘diplomatic’⁶⁴ discourse used for construing reality as more positive while intentionally distortively describing and/concealing or ‘camouflaging’ the true state of affairs behind some inherently negative, illegal, immoral, deplorable, inappropriate or otherwise unacceptable phenomenon, behavior or event.

The strategic use of euphemistic substitutions is aimed at impeding the critical and objective evaluation of the situation at hand, which is supposed to happen not only due to their positive connotations, but also by means of creating a sort of inferential buffer between the interpreter’s mind and their stigmatized referents – increasing the inferential path with the purpose of morally distancing/disengaging the hearer from the referent(s). This sort of distortive hedging pushes the true meaning one or several inferential steps further thereby attempting to undermine the so-called ‘epistemic vigilance’ (Mascaro and Sperber 2009, Padilla Cruz 2012, 2013, Sperber et al. 2010) of their audience by presenting themselves as if being outside of the paradigm of concepts covered by the particular topic. As a result, whenever hearers fail to recognize the euphemistic nature of such expressions as, for instance, *collateral damage*, the manipulative effect of such a covert type of communication will be at its maximum.

In this respect Padilla Cruz (2012) notes that if an interpretation passes through the filters of epistemic vigilance and is found to be believable, reasonable and fault-free, the

⁶⁴ It is interesting to note in that the word ‘diplomatic’ itself acquires euphemistic overtones when it is used instead of ‘understatement’ or even ‘lying’ and the metalinguistic disclaimer ‘diplomatically speaking’ can be interpreted as a marker of an upcoming euphemism.

hearer may take it to be what the speaker intended to communicate in uttering the particular discourse string (or in relevance-theoretic terms, speaker's 'informative intention', the search for which is triggered by speaker's communicative intention) but, more importantly, he may add up the information that it makes manifest to his personal universe of beliefs (see Padilla Cruz 2012).

It is worth pointing out that 'Machiavellian' speakers engaged in 'tactical deception' can never fully predict and neither can they be held fully accountable for the inferences hearers derive during the interpretation process. Contrary to the picture painted by the code model of communication, there is no "duplication of thoughts" in communication as any utterance is only an interpretation of the thought speakers intend to convey, or in relevance-theoretic terms utterances bear 'interpretative resemblance' (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Carston 2002a) to thoughts they communicate. In inferential communication there is no one-to-one mapping from the concept encoded in a word to the communicated concepts. According to RT, the aim of communication is to increase the mutuality of cognitive environments and thereby the similarity of thoughts, rather than to guarantee a generally unreachable and psychologically unrealistic strict duplication of thoughts.

The fact that meanings encoded by concepts are always adjusted online by contextual assumptions means that there exist many more concepts in our minds than there are words in a language to encode them (see Sperber and Wilson 1998) and most concepts are not lexicalized. The contribution that a particular word makes to the overall intention of the speaker usually is not just a decoded concept. Instead, relevance-guided inferences on the basis of the linguistic trigger in a particular context may lead the hearer to the speaker's intention. Thus according to Sperber and Wilson (1998), words generally point to various concepts, all of which could theoretically be the word's meaning in the utterance, but only one of which is the word's meaning in a particular explication.

The following chapter analyzes how online processing of utterance containing euphemistic/PC expressions can be treated within the frameworks of various pragmatic theories.

Chapter 8. The online processing of utterances containing euphemisms/PC

This chapter applies the frameworks of three pragmatic theories to providing an account of the mechanisms responsible for semantically underdetermined utterances yielding interpretations labeled as euphemistic and politically correct. The inferential procedures are analyzed from three theoretical perspectives: 1) Gricean, on which euphemisms can be viewed as a CP-flouting weak form of lying, communicated as particularized conversational implicatures; 2) post-Gricean, represented by relevance-theoretic pragmatics, which views inferential pragmatic processes as not only responsible for the derivation of what is implicated, but also for determining what is said and 3) neo-Gricean, represented by Levinson's theory of Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCIs).

8.1 The Gricean perspective

In their theory of x-phemisms, Allan and Burridge (1991) adopt the Gricean presumption that interactants are rational and cooperative. Consequently speakers are regarded as not choosing the forms and style of the utterances randomly, but as normally having some reasons for selecting the particular ones used. In this framework, it is the task of the hearer to (not necessarily consciously) seek that reason when interpreting speaker's utterance (Allan and Burridge 1991: 5).

In Grice's framework, when a speaker appears to have failed to observe the Cooperative Principle, the hearer will search for the motivation and implicated meanings or 'implicatures'. From the Gricean perspective figurative language can be viewed as deliberate floutings of various Maxims of the CP since by resorting to it speakers don't tell what is literally true but implicate some related proposition, leaving it up to the hearer to infer the literal expression, which would make the utterance comply with the Supermaxim of Quality (try to make your contribution one that is true).

On the Gricean view, metaphorical euphemisms like *pass away* will be understood as generating particularized conversational implicatures arising from a flouting of the first Maxim of Quality: 'Do not say what you believe to be false' (Grice 1975/1989: 28). In this framework, a speaker uttering a euphemism makes a statement that represents a category mistake and the addressee will search for an interpretation that would explain why the speaker has obviously not adhered to the Maxim of Quality.

Euphemisms, however, do not violate Grice's maxim of truth the way metaphors do. Nobody can claim that such references as *friendly fire* or *collateral damage* are *not* truthful descriptions of some events. However some of them cannot be considered to be a form of cooperative communication since they don't tell the *whole* truth.

In discussing violations of Gricean Maxim of Quantity, Allan and Burridge write: "It would normally be dysphemistic to say things like *My neighbor, who is a woman, is pregnant*, because it contains an unnecessary relative clause; we know that if the neighbor is pregnant, it **MUST** be a woman" (Allan and Burridge 1991: 5). It is very likely, however, that uttering *My neighbor, who is a woman, is pregnant* will be interpreted as an ironic statement rather than a dysphemistic one as it conveys the background assumption that the neighbor is not (does not look like) a woman.

Davis (2007) argues that speakers frequently withhold information that would be offensive or disappointing to the hearer, violating the Maxim of Quantity. They exaggerate in order to please or flatter and utter "benign lies" in order to spare the hearer's feelings, violating the Maxim of Quality. Brown and Levinson (1978) and Leech (1983) observed that Gricean maxims can clash with the Principle of Politeness. People pick "safe topics" (e.g., the weather) to stress agreement and communicate an interest in maintaining good relations but violating the Maxim of Relation. Euphemisms avoid mentioning the unmentionable, but in the process violate Manner and Quantity (see Davis 2007: 93-94).

If euphemisms/PC are considered to be a weak form of lying (see Burkhardt 2010), then they should be regarded as more cognitively costly than 'telling it like it is'. Michaelian (2013), for instance, argues that formulating a lie may be more cognitively demanding and liars generally devote more resources to monitoring and controlling their own behaviour, since they are less likely to take their credibility for granted. The author notes that liars generally devote more resources to monitoring receivers, for the same reason; liars may have to remind themselves to roleplay; liars have to actively suppress the truth (which tends to be activated automatically); liars have to deliberately activate the lie (the lie tends not to be activated automatically) (see Michaelian 2013).

Fallis (2009) defines lying as saying something one believes to be false while believing that one is in a context where Grice's (1975) Maxim of Quality, "Do not say what you believe to be false", is in effect. Unlike lying, deceiving can be regarded as making a set of assumptions you believe to be false mutually manifest, hoping that the hearer will accept

them as true or possibly true. Considering this, euphemisms can be viewed as **“bald faced lies”, i.e. lying without the intent to deceive.**

Carson (2006) and Sorensen (2007) present cases of such “bald-faced lies”, which show that intending to deceive is not in general necessary for lying. A bald-faced lie is one that is obviously a lie to those hearing it (The phrase comes from 17th-century British usage referring to those without facial hair as being seen as acting in an unconcealed or open way). For example: a man on the witness stand in a courtroom has witnessed a murder. Because there is CCTV footage that clearly shows the man witnessing the murder, and this footage has been presented to the jury, everyone knows that everyone knows that the man saw the crime take place. But, for fear of reprisals, when asked whether he saw the murder, the witness says, *I did not see the murder.*

From the Gricean point of view euphemisms can be viewed as violations of various Maxims of the CP and hearers will be seen as inferring the more direct, saliently unexpressed dispreferred word or expression as part of derivation of particularized conversational implicatures. Such meanings will, on the Gricean processing model, be part of implicitly communicated content. Hearers may attempt to ‘correct’ the violations of the maxims of the CP associated with euphemistic language use by resorting to (public or private) metalinguistic negation/denial in constructing the conversational implicatures which speakers expect them to derive by violating the various maxims.

From the pragmatic point of view, words and expressions acquire meanings in certain contexts as part of hearers’ recognition of the intentionality underlying what the speakers say in the actual context of utterance. The next section shows that as instances of intentional ostensive communicative behavior, euphemistic/PC can be naturally explained within the post-Gricean cognitive-pragmatic model of ostensive inferential communication known as Relevance Theory.

8.2 The RT perspective

This section argues that from the RT-standpoint, comprehension of x-phemisms both of the conventional cooperative and the argumentative uncooperative kind, as well as PC-related lexical units, can be analyzed as part of the overall inferential process of constructing relevance-driven hypotheses about speaker-intended meanings on the basis of the manifest linguistic evidence and contextual assumptions to yield fully propositional speaker-intended meanings.

8.2.1 Euphemisms as optimally relevant inferences

Traditionally viewed as tropes or rhetorical figures used to disguise ‘unpleasant’ concepts with nominations which are not the ‘proper names’ of those concepts, euphemistic strategies are, according to Allan and Burridge (1991), present in all known world languages and thus constitute a linguistic universal. Brown and Levinson (1987: 216) also report evidence which indicates that euphemisms are a “universal feature of language usage”. Similarly, Malmkjær (2002: 241) observes that the avoidance of particular words for social reasons seems to occur in all languages and euphemisms arise in their place and Chamizo Domínguez (2009: 433) suggests that euphemisms have been used by speakers of all world languages since the ancient times.

Such claims made in research literature point in the direction of the need for resorting to indirectness in general and to euphemistic strategies in particular being part of the hardwired natural abilities of human beings. If people in all known world cultures resort to euphemisms, such strategies must be innately rooted in cognition. They transcend language and have to do with natural more fundamental meaning-processing abilities, which the discipline of cognitive-pragmatics was designed to explain.

As discussed in section 1.4, in Relevance Theory speakers are not constrained to say what is strictly speaking true and that’s why in many communicative situations euphemisms may very well turn out to be the best ways to achieve optimal relevance. The array of weak implicatures they generate can be assumed to best resemble the speaker’s thoughts about the particular subject and her commitment to what is said. A euphemism, in this respect, is a kind of economical concatenation of reference and attitude about naming. For instance, *residentially flexible* is used instead of *I express a positive attitude to the people who do not have a roof over their head by not calling them homeless*.

I would like to formulate this claim in the following way: *from the relevance-theoretic standpoint, using a euphemism/PC expression leads to weak implicatures about what is said and enables the speaker to express her attitude to what is said in a more economical than providing the full exposition explicitly.*

Understanding this range of weak implicatures may require additional cognitive effort on the part of the listener, but this is offset, according to the principle of relevance, by extra effects not achievable by orthophemisms (direct designations). Thus in RT, speaking euphemistically is just another way of satisfying the presumption of optimal relevance. Achieving optimal relevance involves producing the most relevant utterance compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences (such as the use of euphemisms/PC instead of some dispreferred expressions). The communicative principle of relevance implies that the most appropriate means of communicating a proposition is not necessarily one which fully encodes all of its constituents.

From the RT perspective, the general motivation for euphemism is the presumed fact that often a euphemistic utterance is more relevant than some dispreferred saliently unexpressed more direct alternative. This means that often the cognitive effects that the speaker intends his addressee to gain could not be achieved in any other way with less processing effort for the hearer. The additional processing effort incurred by the generation of a large array of weak implicatures is offset by the cognitive effects derived during the online processing of a euphemistic utterance. Unlike Grice's processing picture, on which inferring the more direct, saliently unexpressed dispreferred word or expression will be seen as implicatures of utterances containing novel euphemistic/PC locutions, Relevance Theory treats such meanings as achieving relevance at the level of explicatures (a combination of linguistic decoding and pragmatic inference), i.e. such meanings are pragmatic but belong to the propositional form of the utterance.

According to the traditional RT view, the gap between the utterance and the thought of the speaker is obvious to the hearer. Therefore, for example, conventional metaphors like *pass away* (*die*) are represented by at least one strong implicature (*die*) without which the utterance would not be accepted as being relevant, and an array of weak implicatures the derivation of which lies in the responsibility of the hearer. More figurative metaphors may communicate several weak implicatures or, as they are referred to in RT, 'poetic effects' (see Pilkington 2000). This original RT view was later amended by works in the field of Relevance Theory lexical pragmatics (see chapter 9), which now regards conceptual narrowing and broadening

responsible for the derivation of figurative meanings as part of explicature rather than viewing them as communicated via implicatures.

Once conventionalized, this type of language is used to optimize relevance, i.e. to achieve the adequate balance between processing effort and cognitive effects. The coded message here does no more than provide the right direction in which to channel the inferential process. The linguistically encoded element of an utterance is not geared toward achieving the highest degree of explicitness, but rather towards keeping processing effort down (no more than is necessary for the recovery of the intended cognitive effects), so information that is clearly already highly activated in the addressee's mind is often not given linguistic expression.

From the relevance-theoretic standpoint euphemisms are not uniform in their cognitive inferability but represent a continuum of cases from fully inferable lexicalized euphemisms (e.g. *pass away*), which have passed the test of time, became conventionalized in languages and are marked as such in dictionaries, through partially inferable semi-lexicalized (e.g. *collateral damage*) to possibly initially non-inferable novel euphemisms, as sometimes the discovery of the true referent behind a euphemistic expression requires an elaborate explanation as in *the internally displaced people meaning refugees who have been driven out of their homes but cannot leave their home-countries*⁶⁵.

Despite the differences in degrees along the continuum of cognitive inferability, in RT, comprehension of both familiar (conventionalized) and unfamiliar euphemisms is carried out along the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure according to which the hearer treats the encoded meaning as input to a pragmatic inferential process whose output is a hypothesis about the speaker-intended meaning. Speakers, resort to euphemisms for consideration of economy of expression, i.e. when such substitutes for direct nominations are the most economical and hence relevant ones compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

From the code-model point of view, where a hearer is taken to entertain a thought identical to the speaker's, euphemization would be pointless. Within the inferential model of communication, which RT advocates, the speaker produces an ostensive stimulus that provides the audience with evidence which resembles, and is capable of revealing, the content of that thought. Humans are cognitive misers and on the production side, the discourse string like *"The bombing of this military installation was accompanied by extensive collateral*

⁶⁵ Attested example: the National Public Radio broadcast 10.12.2005

damage” is the optimally relevant way of avoiding a longer uneconomical periphrastic description “*I am being euphemistic in saying that the bombing of this military installation killed many civilians*”, as it is an economical way to communicate the propositional attitude description “The speaker is being euphemistic in saying that P” which is a higher-level explicature derived using the background knowledge in assigning reference to *collateral damage* guided by the principle of relevance.

8.2.2 Processing effort as a criterion for markedness

The speaker may purposefully use a new marked linguistic form in place of a discarded dispreferred one with a certain type of intention. As discussed in the chapter on x-phemisms and (im)politeness, comprehension of unmarked language (e.g. anticipated politeness) is intuitive and unconscious (even though when asked, the judging subject can become aware of the conclusion of the inference), while in comprehending marked language hearers adopt a reflective stance towards the ongoing discourse (e.g. marked use of language, which signifies marked situations is inferred).

Packaging utterances into a (marked) euphemistic/PC form in order to convey a certain thought (e.g. some information along with an attitude to what is said) can serve the overall goal of ‘economy of expression’, representing an effort-saving convenience for the speakers who rely on the hearers’ pragmatic inferential abilities to arrive at the intended interpretation. In the example (9), for instance, the expression *come up for coffee* could be seen as a convenient shorthand for the fuller encoding *come up for coffee and a sexual intercourse*. Here what is actually said is a euphemistic understatement. The speaker’s commitment-attitude to the implicated proposition is very weak as he can plausibly deny⁶⁶ having implicated the ‘sexual intercourse’ part, since the words have not actually been uttered.

According to Levinson (2000: 135), in Sperber and Wilson’s (1995) Relevance theory, marked expressions require more processing effort and thus contribute to the estimation of relevance. The relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure imposes constraints on utterance processing, which guide the hearers to analyze contextual assumptions and interpretive hypothesis in order of their accessibility or ‘salience’. As previously mentioned, an important contribution of RT was the observation that assumptions can be communicated weakly and strongly. The strength or the degree of salience of assumptions in certain contexts is regarded as “a result of its processing history” and consequently “a more accessible assumption is one that is easier to recall” (Sperber and Wilson 1995:77), i.e. its retrieval requires less cognitive processing effort.

Admittedly, this suggests two ways in which some encyclopedic information can be more manifest to an individual at some moment. Thus Assimakopoulos (2014) points out that,

⁶⁶ In Gricean pragmatics, implicature cancellations are connected with the capacity to deny having implicated that Q by asserting P, but not the capacity to assert Q as a possible repair to having asserted P.

on the one hand, if an assumption has been recently used in an inference then it should be more manifest to the hearer than competing assumptions. On the other hand, the more frequently an assumption has entered the inference, the more accessible the frame in which it is included should be for future context selections with respect to the interpretation of an utterance that includes the relevant concept. This reflects the tendency we have to forget encyclopedic information that we rarely use in our cognitive processing (see Assimakopoulos 2014 for discussion).

In line with the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure (Wilson (2000), in order to recognize the intention which underlies the production of an utterance, addressees will follow the path of least cognitive effort in calculating cognitive effects, consider interpretations in order of accessibility and stop when their expectation of relevance is satisfied. The existence of the order of accessibility or relative salience of assumptions associated with the use of a particular word or expression means that the prototypical or default meanings of an expression or rather the ‘core’ encyclopedic features associated with the communicated concepts (see Rubio Fernández 2008) will be accessed first due to their salience on hearers’ minds.

The graded nature of salience of features associated with concepts is affected, according to Giora (2003) by such factors as their conventionality, frequency, familiarity, or prototypicality. The view put forward in her Graded Salience Hypothesis differs from the one adopted in RT in that it assumes that more salient meanings are accessed faster than and reach sufficient levels of activation before less salient ones, regardless of contextual information or authorial intent. Coded meanings of low salience, however, may not reach sufficient levels of activation to be visible in a context biased toward the more salient meaning of the word (Giora 2003: 11).

In order to achieve relevance, a certain contextual effect has to be achieved at a minimal processing effort. Schuster (2003) points out that if a certain utterance has a high degree of prototypicality in its context a contextual effect is given at a minimal assistance of processing effort:

“In the case of adjacency pairs prototypicality can be pointed out excellently in terms of preferred and dispreferred seconds. The first part of an adjacency pair can be accounted for as creating a micro-context against the features of which certain seconds are more or less prototypical in terms of classic markedness criteria as for instance frequency distribution and also more socio-culturally determined notions such as

expectations of the participants in regard to appropriateness and politeness. Negative expressions are thus avoided frequently and are replaced by disparaging antonyms or euphemism” (Schuster 2003: 148).

The existence of such adjacency pairs (the preferred and dispreferred seconds) means that markedness is a relational concept: the marked linguistic form necessarily presupposes the existence of its unmarked counterpart – the norm or “ground” in relation to which it is marked as “figure” in cognitive environments or contexts of hearers. Levinson (2000) notes that on the formal side, marked forms, in comparison to corresponding unmarked forms, can be more morphologically complex and less lexicalized, more prolix or periphrastic, less frequent or usual, and less neutral in register. On the meaning side, such forms suggest some additional meaning or connotation absent from the corresponding unmarked forms (Levinson 2000: 137).

According to Traugott and Dasher (2002: 18-19), what will turn out to be a marked expression will be very specific to a language or a community, but the effect of markedness, however it is expressed, will be consistent across these languages and communities.

In a functional-grammar framework the dichotomy marked vs. unmarked is explicated as follows: the marked format tends to be structurally more complex or larger, less frequent and thus cognitively more salient and cognitively more complex in terms of mental effort, attention demands, or processing time (Givon 1993: 179; Levinson 1983: 307).

A similar idea is expressed by a very general notion of markedness proposed by Levinson (1983): less effort is unmarked. The Gricean reasoning is that the speaker seems to have gone out of his way to avoid using the unmarked expression and so must be trying to avoid whatever the unmarked expression would suggest by making the hearer invest additional cognitive effort into processing the marked utterance. In RT additional processing effort incurred by the use of the marked expression generates a wider range of weaker implicatures (vis-à-vis their unmarked counterparts) as well as higher-level explicatures, i.e. embedding or metarepresenting the utterance under the propositional attitude/illocutionary force indicators.

Considering this, it is rather tempting to assume that the longer and the more indirect a euphemism is the more it is trying to conceal the underlying reality by diverting attention/increasing the effort necessary to process it. Dirven and de Mendoza Ibanez (2010: 16), for instance, argue that a more complex linguistic form usually carries a greater amount of meaning, and form is motivated by functional factors such as politeness, demands of

informativeness, and rhetoric, among others. The authors illustrate this by comparing the wording of the sign *No smoking* in a public place with that of *Customers are kindly requested to refrain from smoking, if they can* in the dining room of a chic restaurant.

Sometimes euphemisms are indeed longer than the dispreferred expression because, for example, in English the dispreferred Anglo-Saxon words tend to be shorter than the ‘learned’ substitutes of Latin origin, and partly because “it almost always takes more words to evade an idea than to state it directly and honestly” (Rawson 1981: 10). However, it appears that the relations of iconicity here are rather objectionable since according to Blum-Kulka’s principle of pragmatic clarity: “Lengthening the inferential path beyond ‘reasonable limits’ set by norms which are subject to situational and cultural constraints, constitutes an imposition in itself, which subtracts from the politeness of an utterance” (Blum-Kulka 1987: 141). In Blum-Kulka’s opinion, balance between two aspects of minimization (of the imposition, and of the length of the inferential path) is achieved by means of conventional indirectness, which is placed at the high end of the politeness scale.

The artificially introduced PC alterations of the naturally-evolved grammatical norms to the so-called ‘people first’ linguistic forms, discussed in section 3.3 (e.g. *people of color*), can hardly be considered optimally relevant as they require extra cognitive processing effort without yielding any additional positive cognitive effects. Thus the well-formed *normal people* is more relevant than the ill-formed *people of norm* on the processing-effort side, as *people of norm* yields no extra cognitive effects.

In order to render this utterance relevant, hearers are forced to access those contextual assumptions, which would render it relevant, for example that the speaker is not being serious (literal), etc. In other words, the greater effort involved in processing an ostensive linguistic stimulus must be offset or ‘rewarded’ by compensatory effects and so some (weak and indeterminate) implicatures can arise (Carston 1995: 237). In such cases, hearers start to generate numerous weak implicatures assuming that the speaker intended to communicate an array of non-propositional effects.

Unusual phrasings lead to extra inferences based on the assumption that the speaker would not have used the unusual marked linguistic form if he did not want those inferences to be drawn. According to RT (Sperber and Wilson 1995) the extra processing effort required for reanalysis often gives rise to additional inferences in the form of (mildly humorous) effects.

Thus processing *female sibling*, involves more effort than processing *sister*. *Female sibling* is longer and *sibling* is a less frequently used word than *sister*, and so less accessible. According to the definition of optimal relevance the hearer should be put to no extra effort in deriving the intended effects of an utterance. It follows from this that a speaker using *female sibling* intended the hearer to derive effects that he would not derive from *sister*.

From the RT standpoint, upon encountering a marked expression, the hearer knows that it is relevant enough to be worth processing and that it is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences and attempts to recognize the speaker's intention behind this particular linguistic choice – performs mutual adjustment of context, explicit content and implicatures. In their search for relevance, hearers inevitably metarepresent the 'default' (conventional, unmarked or salient in Giora's sense) linguistic choice underlying the use of the marked one and the speaker's attitude to it (e.g. endorsing, questioning, dissociative etc.).

In his work on poetic effects of weak implicatures Pilkington (2000: 111) argues that conventional metaphors require less time and processing effort since during their processing a metarepresented set of assumptions is accessed en bloc. I suggest that the same applies to conventional euphemisms as instances of figurative language. They may be processed faster because the time-consuming activity of retrieving contextual assumptions and generating many implicatures is not necessary. The implications of conventional euphemisms are assumed to be all ready-made by activating the corresponding 'make-sense frame'.

RT views the relationship between an utterance and a thought of the speaker as one of interpretive resemblance⁶⁷ between the propositional forms of the utterance and the thought. The hearer does not expect the speaker's utterance to be literal, but rather optimally relevant. This means that the general motivation for euphemisms is that utterances containing them will be more relevant relative to the context of use than their dysphemistic/orthophemistic counterparts and the cognitive effects the speaker intends the hearer to get could not be achieved otherwise with less processing effort for the hearer.

The next section shows that the processing of euphemisms involves the attribution of an utterance or thought and part of their relevance is achieved by means of the expression of

⁶⁷ As discussed in section 1.2.4, the idea of resemblance means that the relevance of the lower-order representation lies in its resemblance to another representation, rather than its being true of the state of affairs which it represents.

an implicit⁶⁸ attitude, as inferential processes enriching a linguistically encoded logical form or ‘propositional blueprint’ can also enrich the social or attitudinal message encoded by ostensive stimuli.

⁶⁸ Unlike explicit (overt) stance markers (obviously, unfortunately, I think/believe/doubt/hope/hate/love etc.), euphemisms express stance implicitly. This implicit information can be made explicit by embedding it under propositional attitude or speech act description or, in RT terms, constructing a “higher-level explicature”.

8.2.3 Euphemisms/PC as echoic interpretive use

In this section I argue that from the RT standpoint, the cognitive processing of euphemistic/PC neologisms involves metarepresentation of the saliently unexpressed in the context of utterance dispreferred content. I regard euphemisms and PC expressions as interpretive ‘echoic’ devices used to convey an attitude to the proposition expressed by utterances containing them rather than descriptive statements about some state of affairs in the world.

From the cognitive-pragmatic standpoint, euphemistic/PC language use is motivated by and results from human mind-reading capacity to attribute intentions and infer speaker meanings on the basis of not fully determined linguistic evidence. The processing of such language relies heavily on metarepresentations. In fact, labeling an utterance as ‘euphemistic’ is only possible after a decent amount of metarepresentational inferencing (considering the expression used against the possible salient alternatives) has been performed, since in understanding euphemisms, hearers need to think about the thoughts the speaker is thinking of in producing the utterance.

By means of resorting to euphemisms/PC language, speakers encourage their interlocutors to access assumptions that could be part of their informative intention. Assumptions made mutually manifest by this language use may include: “the word is used in place of some other dispreferred one, which is avoided because of its taboo status or because of its negative political or ideological connotations”.

Using the RT distinction between *descriptive* and *interpretive* uses of language (see section 1.2), I propose that:

Euphemisms and PC expressions as instances of interpretive use where salient dispreferred words and expressions are metarepresented/inferentially corrected during the process of enriching the sentence meaning to utterance meaning by metalinguistic means in cognitive systems of hearers.

Unlike such instances of interpretive use as reported speech, which are interpretive resemblances of attributed thoughts, I suggest that a euphemistic/PC utterance is an interpretation of a thought which is a representation of a thought which the speaker believes to be dispreferred, i.e. undesirable given more desirable alternatives, to someone (not necessarily herself) in certain contexts.

In their discussion of x-phemistic communication, Allan and Burridge (2006: 49) note that: “[I]t is quite possible to deny the applicability of one term while asserting what amounts

to a preference for the appropriate connotations of its cross-varietal synonym, as in He's not a lodger, he's a paying guest or They're not boobs, they're bosoms, or ... He's not a liar, he's just careless with the truth".

There is a term for this phenomenon, coined by Horn and widely used in semantics and pragmatics literature: *metalinguistic negation* (also referred to as *negation polémique* by Ducrot 1984, 1989). According to Horn (1989: 363): "[metalinguistic negation is] a device for objecting to a previous utterance on any grounds whatever, including the conventional or conversational implicata it potentially induces, its morphology, its style or register, or its phonetic realization." From the RT standpoint, Carston (1996) observes that the crucial property of metalinguistic negations is that "the representation (or a part of it) falling in the scope of the negation operator is implicitly echoic"(Carston 1996: 320-321).

In the following constructed example, the speaker is resorting to metalinguistic negation to express the attitude to the form of an attributed utterance, which he considers contextually inappropriate:

(43)

It isn't 'raining', we are experiencing "unfavorable weather conditions".

The opposite can also take place as in:

A: France is suffering from unfavorable weather conditions.

B: You mean it's been RAINING there for days?

According to Noh (2000: 93), even higher-level explicatures involving speech-act and propositional-attitude descriptions can be echoed:

(44)

A: Pass me the salt.

B: (critically) Pass you the salt!

B echoes A's utterance to express disapproval of the lack of politeness, suggesting that "Could you pass me the salt?" would be the preferred one to use in this context.

In the following dialogue from the show "Veep" (Season 1 Episode 2) one of the participants Dan is objecting to Amy's lexical choice without resorting to explicit metalinguistic negation:

(45)

Amy: That's lying!

Dan: Uh, creative semantics.

Amy: Well, that's creatively semantic way of saying we're lying.

Dan: Still creative.

The following exchange from the animated series “South Park” Season 16 Episode 6 illustrates how metalinguistic negation can be used to disagree with someone’s lexical choices as being representative of some state of affairs in the world:

(46)

Kyle: We could go to the city pool, they have a water-slide.

*Eric: No, no, no, I’m not getting in the pool with Kenny. He has **herpes**.*

Kenny: What?

*Eric: Look at his lip! You got **herpes**, dude!*

*Kenny: It’s not ‘**herpes**’, it’s a **cold sore**.*

*Erik: No, ‘**cold sore**’ is what girls call it, Kenny. It’s actually **herpes**.*

*Kenny: It’s just a **fever blister**.*

*Erik: Did you hear that, guys? Kenny says it’s just a **fever blister**. You sound like a chick Kenny. That’s **herpes**, dude, you got that shit till you die.*

In this example Eric is metalinguistically objecting to the use of the euphemistic forms *cold sore* and *fever blister* since what these lexemes connote is, in his opinion, not a truthful representation of the actual state of affairs.

In the following examples metalinguistic negation also targets connotations and objects to the focus assumed by euphemistic utterances:

(47)

Sheldon: You know, when my grandfather died, and Meemaw was alone, my mom arranged for her to visit a center three times a week where she could socialize with other lonely people. It’s very nice. They discuss current events, play bridge, get a hot meal.

Leonard: That sounds lovely.

Sheldon: It is if you like bridge. Do you like bridge, Leonard?

Leonard: Sheldon, I’m just not dating someone right now. I don’t need to go to a senior center.

Sheldon: Meemaw resisted at first, but now she loves it.

Leonard: Fine. If I don’t meet someone soon, you can put me in a home.

*Sheldon: It’s **not a home**. It’s a **senior center**. We’d never put Meemaw in a home!*

(The Big Bang Theory Season 4 Episode 5)

(48)

Leonard: I don't know, it's still a little weird since, you know...

Howard: She dumped you?

*Leonard: She didn't "**dump**" me, we were just **in different places in the relationship**.*

Sheldon: I fail to see how a relationship can have the qualities of a geographic location.

("The Big Bang Theory": Season 3 Episode 23)

(49)

*Watson: You **stole** a 50-million dollar painting!*

*Holmes: I didn't "**steal**" it, I'm just **delaying its return**.*

("Elementary" Season 1 Episode 10)

Having been recognized as interpretively used overtly echoic and the speaker's attitude towards their propositional content as dissociative, politically correct utterances can obtain ironic interpretation as witnessed in such cases as:

(50)

My guest Amy Farrell wants to end the persecution of fat people. I'm sorry... 'extra Americans' (from "The Colbert Report" 04.05.2011).

Sometimes the discrepancy between the lexical units used and the contextually expected language can trigger ironically euphemistic interpretations as illustrated by a situation in which a woman assaulted shoppers by spraying them with pepper spray to get a bargain at Walmart while shopping on Friday after Thanksgiving. The officials referred to this by rebranding *assault* into *competitive shopping* with the ensuing comment by Jon Stewart: "What a weird Sex and the City way of rebranding assault: I'm not a murderer, I'm a ghost creator" ("The Daily Show" 28.11.2011). In cases like *He's not "dead", he is metabolically challenged* the ironic 'special effect' is inevitably generated but only as a result or re-processing (one of the feature of echoic utterances pointed out by Carston 1996), i.e. increased processing effort.

What all these possible types of echoic use have in common and what they share with a wider class, including cases of mention, quotation and free indirect speech, is that a representation is being used not to represent an object or state of affairs in the world but to represent a representation. In such cases the relationship between representation and that which is being represented is not the truth-based descriptive sort but is one of resemblance (see Sperber and Wilson 1995).

Such mock-PC expressions as *motivationally challenged (lazy)*, *ethnically homogenous area (ghetto, barrio)*, *geological correction (earthquake)*, *uniquely coordinated (clumsy)*, *residentially flexible (homeless)*, *uniquely fortuneed individual on an alternative career path (loser)*, are necessarily metarepresented and processed as interpretive, echoic uses by the addressees. The echoic nature of utterances containing such expressions makes them akin to ironic use, which is accompanied by the implicit expression of a dissociative attitude.

Within Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995), verbal irony is explained as a case of *echoic interpretive (attributive) metarepresentational* use of utterances with which the speaker expresses an attitude of dissociation or disapproval of a proposition. Similarly to irony, euphemistic/PC expressions can be analyzed as echoic interpretive (attributive) metarepresentations, but the attitude expressed by the speaker is one of endorsement or acceptance of a proposition. Both types of utterances share some features but differ as regards the expression of attitude.

Novel euphemistic/PC expressions are thus not cases of descriptive use, but of *echoic interpretive use* of language. The target is inevitably pragmatically inferred and this inference is governed by considerations of optimal relevance. Recognizing the allusion costs a hearer a certain amount of extra processing effort, which is offset by extra cognitive effects. The cognitive effects would be considerably reduced if hearers failed to recognize the target of the novel metonymic reference.

To illustrate this point, let's consider the use of *pavement deficiencies* in contexts where *potholes* are expected as the salient default (example quoted in Burridge 1997). *Pothole* is more salient than the creative echoic *pavement deficiency*. Salience means that the expression is more accessible and hence less processing effort is required in interpreting *pothole* than *pavement deficiency*. In order to be understood, the new expression needs to be metarepresented as the salient *pothole*, which will be inferred along with the higher-level explicature "the speaker is being PC in saying that P".

The use of novel *pavement deficiency* in place of *pothole* puts the hearers to additional processing effort, which will be offset by extra (qualitatively different) cognitive effects based on the use of the "wrong" name. Comprehension of *pavement deficiency* involves two stages – metarepresenting the content of the utterance containing the word and its form, during which ad hoc concepts are constructed during explicature derivation – an inference guided by considerations of optimal relevance via the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure and the salient target *pothole* is evoked (inferred). *Pavement deficiency* mentally undergoes a sort

of metalinguistic correction. The source of the novel euphemism is inferred and the degree of interpretive resemblance between the two representations is determined pragmatically. As a result of extra processing effort in search for relevance, a higher-level explicature is constructed: The speaker is being politically correct in saying that P.

Understanding an interpretively-used utterance involves recognition on the part of the hearer of the fact that in producing this utterance the speaker is thinking not directly about a state of affairs, but about another utterance or thought. In order to do so hearers must (publicly or privately) ‘metarepresent’ those other utterances or thoughts. In doing so hearers inevitably evoke salient dispreferred alternatives, which the euphemisms/PC expressions were coined to replace, thereby dealing ‘collateral damage’ of reinforcing their salience in the vernacular by, for example, necessitating the retention of the *pothole* form in processing the novel *pavement deficiency*. It is interesting to note here that the personification and subsequent desire not to offend potholes demonstrates that humans possess an innate disposition to attribute intentions, beliefs and other psychological states not only to other people and animals, but also to inanimate objects.

The additional metarepresentational level incurs extra processing effort, which, as discussed in section 8.2.2) is viewed as the principal criterion according to which linguistic units are regarded as marked or unmarked by hearers engaging in their cognitive processing. In some cases speakers resort to euphemisms hoping that by increasing the level of effort necessary for processing a linguistic string they will succeed in hampering conceptual access to the disfavorable referents by introducing a new name for the referent.

For instance processing the marked *enhanced interrogation techniques* used in the context where *torture* is unmarked and expected as ‘default’ will result in the hearer metarepresenting the echoed salient *torture* in order to understand what *enhanced interrogation techniques* stands for along with the recovery of such higher-level explicatures, e.g.: *the speaker is being euphemistic (politically correct) in saying that P*. The inferred speaker’s attitude to the alluded dispreferred word *torture* will be that of moral disengagement while at the same time expressing the attitude of endorsement towards the proposition expressed by the utterance containing the euphemistic form. The utterance is tacitly expressing the idea that the speaker regards torture as a type of ‘necessary evil’ as evidenced by the euphemistic reference he resorts to with the purpose of highlighting the positive connotations of *enhanced* (better, sophisticated) and *techniques* (professional, skilled) or focusing on the end result *acquisition of evidence* as seen from the example below,

thereby obscuring negative connotations associated with the straightforward nomination *torture*.

Recognized for what they are, such instances of uncooperative argumentative euphemisms will be subject to ironic mockery:

(51)

*President: I've authorized a private interrogation team to **acquire the evidence**.*

*White House Chief of Staff: **Acquire the evidence?** (ironically)*

President: Once we have it, she will be irrelevant.

*White House Chief of Staff: Keeping the truth from Jack Bauer is one thing, but authorizing the **illegal detention and torture** of a prisoner ... how far are you willing to go to protect this lie?*

*President: **As far as necessary** to preserve this treaty. It's vital for the security of this nation and what I'm doing is for the greater good.*

(“24” Season 8 Episode 19)

In this example, the President is not denying that by *acquire the evidence* she (the US President is female in this episode of the show) means *torture* and expresses her benevolent attitude to it by attempting to reframe the underlying state of affairs through an even broader euphemism (going) *as far as necessary* for the greater good.

Similarly to euphemisms/PC, the main point in cases of verbal irony is to express the speaker's dissociative attitude to a tacitly attributed utterance or thought (or, more generally, a representation with a conceptual content, for instance a moral or cultural norm), based on some perceived discrepancy between the way it represents the world and the way things actually are (see Sperber and Wilson 1998; Wilson and Sperber 1992).

In classifying an utterance as ‘politically correct’ or ‘politically incorrect’ hearers use the assumptions conveyed by the utterance to construct higher-level explicatures, under which they may also embed other levels of metarepresentations (i.e. recognition of the lower-order communicative intention). This can be illustrated by an example involving the echoic use of the generic anaphoric he/she pronoun form:

(52)

*After the voter makes **his** or, from what I understand, in some states, **her** onscreen selection... (“The Daily Show” 03.11.2004)*

This ironic example is overtly impolite and parasitic on the PC version of the utterance *his or her*, to which a news anchor is supposed to adhere in covering presidential elections in

order to follow the new communication standard: “After the voter makes his or her onscreen selection”. The speaker directs the audience to the optimally relevant interpretation, by assuming a dissociative attitude towards the echoic interpretive *his/her* and by producing an Optimally Innovative utterance. The utterance is metarepresented as several higher-level explicatures:

the speaker is being ironic in saying that P

the speaker is being politically correct in saying that P

the speaker is pretending to be politically correct in saying that P

the speaker is informing us that he assumes **he** to be the standard pronoun form to be used in such contexts in saying that P

It evokes the previously used biased *his*, which is, presumably, still perceived as an unmarked default linguistic form by some hearers. At the same time it communicates a number of such weakly communicated implicatures as:

In some states, decisions male voters make are significantly influenced by the opinion of their spouses;

In some states male voters make onscreen decisions for themselves and their wives;

In some states female voters don’t exercise their right to vote;

The speaker does not like the new onscreen voting system, etc.

As we can see, there are many reasons why a speaker aiming at optimal relevance might decide to resort to echoic use. It may provide access to a wide range of contextual implications; it may enable the speaker to express a variety of attitudes, ranging from complete approval to complete rejection, towards the descriptive content of the utterance.

Euphemistic/PC utterances echo the undesirability of alternative or dispreferred expressions, which could have been used in place of the euphemistic/PC utterance and during their online processing in discourse, euphemisms inevitably evoke mental representations of the expressions which they were coined to replace. The echoic pointing to the undesirability of alternative dispreferred expressions reinforces the salience of the dysphemisms and leads to the constant turnover of euphemisms mitigating strongly tabooed as well as merely sensitive topics resulting in their ‘over-lexicalization’, which according to Halliday’s observation, is indicative of problematic areas in a society.

The echoic nature of some nominations can be witnessed in their pragmatic behavior, notably in terms of collocability and appropriateness across contexts. Notably, they prevent the intersubstitutability of the ‘cross-varietal’ synonyms or words sharing the same denotation

but differing in connotations (Frege's 'tone', Kaplan's 'expressive content') in certain contexts. Thus one can say *flowers died* while *flowers passed away* is not as appropriate and is likely to receive an echoic ironic interpretation. Similarly a driver can yell angrily at a careless pedestrian *Are you blind?* but not *Are you visually impaired?* because of the **clash of attitudes**: an angry driver cannot simultaneously combine his anger with a benevolent attitude towards the addressee. Similarly, while *visually impaired* can be used synonymously with *blind* as its politically correct substitute, it cannot be used in such idiosyncratic collocations as '*Love is blind – Love is visually impaired*' without generating humorous effects, because one is not supposed to express this kind of PC attitude to an abstract concept of LOVE but only to another human being. Thus a statement like *Love is visually impaired* can only be interpreted as echoing the PC attitude and expressing a mocking attitude to it.

Whenever processing of euphemisms and PC expressions involves (public or private) metalinguistic negation or correction, the attitude expressed by these echoic uses will be one of rejection. The implicit nature of this negation can be made explicit as in "It's not appropriate to mislead the audience by saying 'collateral damage' where one should say 'death of civilians during military operations'".

Once the veiling intention behind a euphemism is recognized, it can turn into its opposite, where the true meaning shines through, as in the following examples from the show "24":

(53)

Caller: I think he has become involved with radical groups.

O'brien: You mean terrorists?

Caller: Yeah...

("24" Season 4 episode 18)

(54)

JB: Mike, if we wanna procure any information from the suspect, we're gonna have to do it behind closed doors.

President: Are you talking about 'torturing' this man?

JB: I'm talking about doing what is necessary to stop this warhead from being used against us.

("24" Season 4 episode 18)

(55)

Also consider the following example from the movie "Shrink" (2009):

- *Is this an intervention?*

- *It's an 'opportunity'.*

- *You say that one more time and I'm gonna throw a fucking crab cake in your face.*

Uttering *radical groups*, *do it behind closed doors* and *opportunity* in the above examples is supposed to have positive connotations unlike such lexemes as *terrorists*, *torture* and highlight the more positive aspect of an intervention (an event when family and friends gather to help an individual suffering from, or rather 'living with', to be PC, an alcohol or drug addiction). However, those utterances produce the opposite effect as the hearers immediately manage to see through the euphemisms and the realization that one is being verbally manipulated can potentially make hearers angry.

As a result of such metalinguistic processing, the intended euphemisms are transformed into their opposite – dysphemisms as hearers consider their use to be contextually inappropriate. It is worth mentioning here that the use of 'inadvertent massacre', for instance, instead of 'inadvertent killing' in revealing the "true" meaning of collateral damage would be a connotative fallacy as *massacre*, along with *slaughter*, is situated on the far negative end of the axiological spectrum of killing: from euphemistic *damage* – through orthophemistic *killing* – to dysphemistic *massacre*.

In processing marked euphemistic locutions hearers inevitably resort to metalinguistic commenting on the new lexical unit by comparing/contrasting it with familiar ones through metalinguistic negation. One can speak of metalinguistic correction instead of metalinguistic negation in cases like the following example from the TV series '24' (Season 6 Episode 1):

(56)

Tom: Our country is under siege and you are the National Security Advisor, Karen. Frankly, I'm surprised by your resistance.

*Karen: These places that you keep building, they are nothing more than **concentration camps**.*

*Tom: **Detention facilities**. And the criteria for who should be detained are very reasonable.*

Here it is the linguistic form or packaging itself that is objected to and not the propositional content of the utterance. Ironical effect cannot be said to have been generated in this particular example by the use of *detention facilities* as apparently the use of this euphemism in place of an apparent dysphemism *concentration camps* does not produce such an effect.

Thus we can conclude that the processing of contextually inappropriate x-phemisms in discourse involves either public or private (mental) metalinguistic correction/negation as in “this is not the best DARN game in the world, this is the best DAMN game in the world” (from Fox news “Super Bowl” special report). Unlike descriptive negation, metalinguistic negation is truth-functional – the negated material is metarepresentationally (interpretively or metalinguistically) used and contributes to the truth-conditional content of the utterance via the proposition expressed (see Noh 2000: 212)

Uncooperative euphemisms are corrected by (public or private) metalinguistic negation and/or denial where a higher level explicature is derived to the extent that the speaker is being euphemistic in saying that P.

They are not *displaced people*, they are *refugees*.

Utterances with metalinguistic negation are sometimes created with the intention to entertain and mock the otherwise serious choice of words in PC language and its attempts at focusing on positive aspects of something through framing: I didn’t *trip*, it was a *random gravity check*; They are not *black people on welfare*, they are *inner-city government subsidy recipients* (The Daily Show 13.12.2011).

In some situations, the use of less familiar euphemisms can succeed in hampering conceptual access to the disfavorable referents. However, the marked status of such euphemisms makes them ‘stand out’ in discourse by requiring additional cognitive effort to process them. Such mindful (as opposed to ‘shallow’) processing mode inevitably leads to the (public or private) metarepresentation of the saliently unexpressed dispreferred alternatives in search for an optimally relevant interpretation and this reinforces their salience in discourse.

I now turn to the discussion of how conventionalization of meaning takes place by combining insight from relevance-theoretic and neo-Gricean GCI-theoretic pragmatics.

8.3 The conventionalization cline

In this section I examine the possibility of combining relevance-theoretic and GCI-theoretic inferential mechanics in an account of conventionalization of meaning. In analyzing the phenomenon Bach (1998) refers to as ‘standardization’ (also referred to as ‘conventionalization’ and ‘routinization’), Capone (2011) has recently proposed that once inferences become standardized, they are no longer processed through the Principle of Relevance, but become heuristic-based inferential shortcuts. Driven by the Principle of Relevance, inferences associated with certain inputs may become ‘cognitive defaults’.

The idea of conventionalization or (routinization) of inferences at the lexical pragmatic level is not foreign to RT, since Wilson and Carston (2007) argue that: “<...>(S)ome of these pragmatically constructed senses may catch on in the communicative interactions of a few people or a group, and so become regularly and frequently used. In such cases, the pragmatic process of concept construction becomes progressively more routinized, and may ultimately spread through a speech community and stabilize an extra lexical sense”. (Wilson and Carston, 2007:15). Capone (2011) quotes Mey (2004) in pointing out that this happens similarly to the way “<...> certain apt metaphors (e.g. ‘sharp’ for ‘intelligent’), due to their ‘success’, obtain near-lexical status” (Mey 2004: 113).

Euphemisms/PC expressions can be viewed in both frameworks as ways to optimize relevance (in RT) or processing (in GCI-theory) as they make it possible to infer some unencoded aspects of the speaker’s meaning from metalinguistic properties of the utterance such as the choice of a given word from among a set of closely related alternatives (but see Noveck and Sperber 2007).

Whenever it is possible for speakers to construct a novel sentence or a novel phrase to convey a particular meaning, they often choose to rely on formulaic language which they have used and processed repeatedly. Thus although, as Vega Moreno (2007: 218) notes, the English language allows speakers to form grammatical sentences such as ‘have a wonderful anniversary of your birth’ or ‘have a nice remembrance of the day your mother delivered you’, it is rather unlikely that native speakers would choose to congratulate a friend on his birthday by uttering these expressions. Instead they would prefer to use the very familiar string ‘happy birthday’. Repeatedly heard and repeatedly used constructions such as these are often preferred, among other reasons, primarily because they are easier for the speakers to produce and for the hearers to understand – for reasons of economy of effort. Vega Moreno (2007) explains: “On the language side, we often communicate by using fixed expressions

and formulae which save the hearer unnecessary processing effort in deriving the intended meaning. On the psychological side, there is a range of experimental evidence which suggests that our minds have the ability to allocate attention to potentially relevant stimuli and to the potentially most relevance-enhancing ways of processing these stimuli” (Vega Moreno 2007: 227).

From the point of view of their production, euphemisms can be viewed as an attempt at metarepresentationally *framing the content of what is said* against the background of something which could have been said (i.e. is among the options potentially expectable in the context, or a ‘saliently unexpressed proposition’ cf. Israel 2006), but wasn’t and the process of their understanding inevitably involves enriching the content of the sub-propositional meaning they express.

For example, when someone uses expressions like *blank*, *you know* or resorts to a “communicative pause” instead of uttering an actual word, he/she is claiming, or assuming, that hearers are capable of reconstructing inferentially the meaning of what was not actually uttered: “You are a piece of you know what”; “I need to use the, you know...”, or even “Where’s the *euphemism* around this house?”

The very unwillingness of uttering something indicates a sensitive area and prompts the hearer to employ all available encyclopedic information in their cognitive environments to fill in the blanks in search for relevance. What is needed is a heuristic that prompts hearers not only to look for what could have been said instead of all the euphemistic lexemes used, but also to fill-up relevantly the various *you knows*, hesitation pauses and blanks. This heuristic could explain how indirectness becomes conventionalized in use over time and how euphemisms become contaminated with negative connotations (see chapter 9).

There exist words and expressions whose meaning may be interpreted as euphemistic due to contextual factors. These are nonce inferences which are not euphemistic regardless of context. Some euphemistic strategies are nonce cases of framing or, to use a current buzzword, ‘spinning’ reality by linguistic means (where it is very difficult for the hearer to realize that a linguistic string is a substitute for something dispreferable) in a way that best serves the speaker’s purposes.

An option to consider is that euphemisms are processed by exploiting a heuristic, that is, a kind of non-strictly logical but stable type of information processing, a shortcut we are ‘hard-wired’ with. Heuristics are numerous and enable us to increase significantly the efficiency of information processing. One such heuristics, known under the names of *framing*

effect in Tversky and Kahneman (1986) foundational works and *quantity heuristics* (Q-*heuristics*) in other frameworks (cf. Levinson 2000) is a serious candidate for forming the grounds on which euphemisms are informationally processed.

Heuristics have a counterpart: whereas they lead to faster processing and to numerous gains in everyday life, they also lead to systematic errors in certain conditions. A type of systematic error caused by a heuristic is a *cognitive bias*. *Q-heuristic* marks the tendency to believe that *what isn't said is not the case* and is precisely defined by Levinson (2000) as follows: "For the relevant salient alternates, what isn't said, is not the case". It appears as a modified version of Grice's first Maxim of Quantity: "Make your contribution as informative as is required".

Q-heuristics, envisaged as a 'framing effect', consists in drawing different conclusions from the same information, depending on how that information is presented. This heuristic has been found capable of influencing decision behavior (Tversky and Kahneman 1986). The idea here being that the initial context will shape the following perceptions, experiences and behavior and any derogatory or unfavorable denotation or connotation within language expressions will dominate the interpretation in their immediate context.

Within this framework, the M-Principle is responsible for generation of euphemistic meanings:

Speaker's maxim: indicate an abnormal, nonstereotypical situation by using marked expressions that contrast with those you would use to describe the corresponding normal, stereotypical situation.

Recipient's corollary: What is said in an abnormal way indicates an abnormal situation, or marked messages indicate marked situations, specifically:

Where S has said "p" containing marked expression M, and there is an unmarked alternated expression U with the same denotation D which the speaker might have employed in the same sentence-frame instead, then where U would have I-implicated the stereotypical or more specific subset d of D, the marked expression M will implicate the complement of the denotation d (Levinson 2000: 136-137).

According to Levinson (2000: 15) conversational implicatures are motivated, not arbitrary – so the task of replacing arbitrary signs with motivated ones can also be accomplished by conventionalization of implicatures – by employing the mechanism of invited inferences (Traugott and Dasher 2002).

Meanings tend to become increasingly based in the speaker's subjective belief state/attitude towards the proposition (Traugott 1989: 35). At the same time speakers weigh up optimal understanding for the hearer against minimal effort on his/her own part.

Levinson's heuristic-based GCI-theoretic framework can be used to account for the way meaning become conventionalized along the following cline of conventionalization/subjectification (Traugott 1999; Levinson 2000; Traugott and Dasher (2002). From: **utterance-token meanings** (PCIs) which are knowledge- and situation-specific invited inferences that arise "on the fly" and have not been crystallized into commonly used implicatures through **utterance-type** meanings (Levinson's GCIs) which are cancellable preferred meanings and conventions of use in language communities or "generalized invited inferences" to (indefeasible) **coded meanings** (semantics), which is a convention of a language at a given time.

Terkourafi (2001) explains that this cline implies a gradual detachment of meaning from context: "inferences arising from speakers' intentions become defeasible inferences associated with properties of linguistic expressions which in turn become part of those expressions' coded meaning (hence indefeasible)" Terkourafi (2001: 152).

Terkourafi (2001) cites empirical evidence providing grounds for the hypothesis that, as part of becoming gradually detached from context on the way from PCIs to GCIs, inferences go through a stage at which (minimal) contextual input is still required and the corresponding inferences become presumed in virtue of general heuristics, rather than derived in virtue of the speaker's intentions. Her proposal differs from Traugott's (1999) in suggesting an additional layer of utterance-type meanings, which are presumed in minimal context and not in all contexts, *ceteris paribus*, as follows from the traditional Gricean and neo-Gricean view of GCIs.

The contextual variables constituting the 'minimal context' in relation to which an expression is considered euphemistic/PC, can be taken to include information along the lines suggested by Allan and Burridge's MCPC criterion (discussed in section 5.2) as well as other variables suggested by Terkourafi (2001: 153) in relations to politeness assessments, including information about the interlocutors' sex, age, the setting of the exchange, the timing of a particular utterance, explicit cultural assessments of specific behaviors, idiosyncratic factors, and further intonational and kinesic clues. Such contextual variables can include, according to Bach (1999b: 72), anything that the hearer is to take into account to determine the speaker's communicative intention.

Considering the above discussion, I propose that the unmarked status of a lexical unit, which has become conventionalized relative to the context of utterance in which it is assessed as euphemistic/PC, can be seen as licensing its processing via automatic I-GCIs, while the processing of lexical units marked as not conventionalized in their euphemistic use involves relevance-driven derivation of (speaker-intended) explicatures, which can subsequently become routinized as M-implicating the saliently unexpressed dispreferred alternatives.

In Terkourafi's (2001) proposal, once conventionalization relative to a context has taken place, markedness turns out to be a function not so much of the formal properties of a certain form of words alone, as of such properties in conjunction with the (minimal) context in which the words are used. The resulting inferences are considered generalized because they are independent from nonce context, however, they are dependent on a minimal context, and are therefore universal only inasmuch as the mechanism for their derivation is also universal (Terkourafi 2001: 154). Terkourafi (2001) points out that the view of GCIs as context-dependent is in accord with Barsalou's (1987) argument for the context-dependent nature of 'stereotypicality', which, as discussed in section 1.3, is the notion, fundamental to Levinson's views of the heuristics/principles and how they are applied.

According to Horn's (1984) division of pragmatics labor if two expressions share the same denotation, the marked one will pick up the interpretation complementary to the unmarked expression's. The use of a marked (relatively complex and/or prolix) expression when a corresponding unmarked (simpler, less "effortful") alternate expression is available tends to be interpreted as conveying a marked message (one which the unmarked alternative would not or could not have conveyed) (see Horn 1984:22).

According to Levinson (2000), the Gricean reasoning would have it that the speaker seems to have gone out of his way to avoid using the unmarked expressions and so must be trying to avoid whatever the unmarked expression would suggest. Two coextensive expressions differing in formal markedness tend to become associated with complementary subsets of the original extension (e.g. *kill* and *cause to die*) (see Levinson 2000: 137).

Depending on the degree of conventionalization of euphemisms and PC expressions relative to some context of use⁶⁹, they can be processed via I- and M-GCIs. If uttering a

⁶⁹ For Terkourafi (2001: 154-155), the expression most frequently associated with a particular communicative function relative to a context becomes the unmarked means of fulfilling this function in this context. The expression is at this stage the unmarked alternative relative to other expressions potentially used in that context.

euphemistic locution is perceived to be unmarked relative to a certain context, that is such an utterance conforms to the hearer's expectations about the way language is normally used, it will be presumed to be euphemistic/PC by way of an I-GCI. The expression *to go to the bathroom* can probably serve as an example of a fully conventionalized euphemism, no longer associated with its spatial meaning "to transport oneself to the bathroom", but which evokes the target dysphemistic sense automatically in such examples as "*The dog went to the bathroom on the living room rug*".

If uttering a particular linguistic form does not conform to the hearer's expectations and stands out as 'marked' in discourse, an M-GCI pertaining to the complement of the euphemistic I-implicature will be generated in the form of the automatic metalinguistic replacement/correction of the euphemistic/PC form by the saliently unexpressed dispreferred one. This is the type of euphemism Abrantes (2005) refers to as not being part of the lexical inventory, but rather the source of instant shelters, created to soften or veil a sudden event, according to the particular intention of the speaker.

In line with Giora's view that PC language is effective only when it is novel, we can assume that when PC expressions lose out on markedness, they gradually stop being PC. Their being PC depends on their being marked. In other words, an expression cannot remain PC if it catches on and the underlying dispreferred alternative becomes its M-GCI. It wears out, though semantically nothing has changed.

Novel PC language gives rise to a PCI of political correctness and the speaker's PC intention is meta-represented as part of the derivation of the higher-level explicature. In processing lexical units, which have not yet become conventionalized, hearers are invited to look for the intended referent, which is not readily available, but must be inferred online. As a result, the salient dispreferred alternative, instead of which the PC expression was used will also be inferred. There is also a possibility that when faced with an entirely novel and creative lexical unit, the hearer will fail to reach the intended referent, e.g. he/she may end up inferring that rather than *homeless*, '*residentially flexible*' refers to rich people who want to avoid paying too much tax and keep travelling for that reason. Thus in order to effectively fulfill its stated objectives, PC-related language needs to always be perceived as *marked*.

When hearers come across a marked PC expression, they may interpret it by expanding it to its compositional content as part of relevance-driven explicature derivation, e.g. inferentially fixing the reference of *collateral damage* to *unintended killing of civilians*.

With frequent use, this way of achieving relevance can become routinized and the dispreferred content will come to be derived by way of an M-GCI in an automatic manner.

Guided by the principle of relevance (trying to ascertain why a speaker resorted to this particular linguistic form), hearers may continue deriving other relevant (weak) PCIs on whether the speaker is being indirect/evasive/deceptive, etc. in saying that P. Following the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, they may then ratify the PCI to the effect that the speaker is expressing a certain attitude, or not ratify it, and decide that although the speaker was using an allegedly euphemistic/PC form, his attitude to what is said was ironic/mocking etc.

In case of novel/creative non-conventionalized expression, a strong PCI (or higher-level explicature) to the effect that ‘the speaker is being euphemistic/PC in saying that P’ may be derived in the process of relevance-driven hypothesis evaluation regarding why the speaker has resorted to this particular linguistic form, i.e. ascertaining the speaker-intended meaning online while considering contextual variables discussed above. Additional weaker higher-level explicatures/PCIs-conjectures of speaker’s (im)politeness/truthfulness/commitment to what is said, etc. may be derived by following the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure (trying to figure out what the expression means).

Conventionalization is taken here to be an individual-specific and culture-specific cline: from fully novel, requiring most processing effort, through marginal cases, to fully conventionalized requiring least processing effort *ceteris paribus*.

The likelihood that the hearer will automatically compositionally replace the figurative expression, e.g. *pass away* with its literal meaning *died* in trying to fix propositional content of the utterance containing this expression is proportional to the degree to which the expression is conventionalized for the hearer. It follows that, ironically, since the salient dispreferred alternatives are inevitably meta-represented in processing the novel euphemistic/PC expressions, they actually become literal conventional meanings of these figurative expressions as they become conventionalized. In order to be ascribed the status of a ‘euphemism’ (by way of a PCI or a higher-level explicature), the propositional content (explicature) of *pass away* - ‘die’ has to be mentally represented as the dispreferred alternative, which the euphemisms substitutes.

Thus the proposition expressed by uttering the novel “There was collateral damage” can only be understood by compositionally replacing it with its literal paraphrase “Civilians were unintentionally killed during the military operation”. Also “What does ‘collateral

damage’ mean?” can be explicated by “It means that civilians were unintentionally killed during the military operation” the propositional content of which cannot be further reduced to another “that”-clause, except, in this particular case, by saying that ‘*military operation*’ means (euphemistically stands for) *that* “*a country is waging a war*”: e.g. *War in Iraq – Operation Iraqi Freedom*.

Thus from the points of view of Levinson’s GCI theory, marked euphemistic/PC words and expressions, which have not yet been conventionalized, will always implicate a euphemistic/PC M-GCI, e.g. the GCI *He is homeless* will always be M-implicated by *He is residentially flexible* regardless of context or intention underlying its use. In relevance-theoretic terms, such inferences can be regarded as contributing to what is explicitly communicated by speakers in uttering sentences containing these words and expressions as a sort of reference assignment required for *residentially flexible* (as in: what does *residentially flexible* stand for/refer to?) and thus *homeless* happens to be part of what is said (explicated) by “*residentially flexible*”.

This explains why and how, diachronically, euphemisms can become ‘contaminated’ with negative connotations associated with taboo topics, which leads to their constant turnover in the vernacular or “euphemism treadmill”, as well as why political correctness is effective only when it is novel and hence capable of bringing people’s unconscious biases to consciousness. The biases are, arguably, brought to consciousness by metarepresenting the salient dispreferred alternatives as part of comprehension process.

The process of euphemism treadmill, discussed at length in chapter 9, can thus be regarded in Levinson’s (2000) framework as relying on GCIs. For example, *drink* is narrowed or, in Levinson’s own terms, “specialized” to *alcoholic drink* by way of I-GCI towards the stereotypical extension “egged on” by euphemism Levinson (2000: 138-139). He notes, following Horn, that unlike the “intoxicating” I-implicatures of *drink*, which are now long conventionalized and recognized in dictionaries as a separate sense, an autohyponym, the sexist I- implicatures of *secretary* or *nurse* are matters of social rather than linguistic conventions.

Levinson argues that by changing social conventions one can change linguistic ones:

“<...> in British English *vicar* and *vicaress* meant, respectively, male priest in the Church of England and his spouse, until the recent innovation of female priests. To avoid the connotations, chocolate-drink manufacturers extol the virtues of their *beverage* (historically, beverage was at least as contaminated!) ... (I)t is fairly clear

that the process of narrowing by I-implicature (as with *missile* to *rocket*) not only allows a new life for worn-out (marked) words but, by M-implicature (to the complement of the I-implicature associated with the unmarked term), trims their meaning too. “The dress is pale red” suggests (by M-contrast with *pink*) that the dress is not prototypical pink but somewhere between *pink* and *red*.” (Levinson 2000: 138-139).

The relevance-theoretic explanation of euphemism treadmill is provided in terms of the construction of the on-line contextual modulation of meanings due to pragmatic processes operating at the level of individual words, to the discussion of which I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 9. A lexical-pragmatic account of euphemism treadmill

The main focus of this chapter is the application of the relevance-theoretic account of lexical pragmatics (Carston 1997, 2002a; Sperber and Wilson and 2006; Wilson and Carston 2007) to analyzing how euphemistic/PC interpretations arise as a result of relevance-driven on-line construction of occasion-specific senses due to pragmatic processes operating at the level of individual words and expressions, within the overall process of forming hypotheses about the explicit content of utterances. I argue that the construction of ad hoc concepts involved in the processing of novel euphemistic/PC expressions is responsible for these locutions achieving new relevance in discourse.

9.1 Lexical pragmatics and semantic change

The section considers research in the area of relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatics, which suggests that conceptual encodings are not actually full-fledged concepts, but rather concept schemas, or pointers to a conceptual space, on the basis of which, on *every* occasion of their use, an actual concept (a constituent of the language of thought, see section 2.2.3) is pragmatically inferred (see Carston 2002b).

Recent research in the emerging field of lexical pragmatics (e.g. Blutner 1998, 2002; Carston 2002a, 2010b; Wilson 2003; Wilson and Carston 2007) has made it possible to analyze processes responsible for the resolution of semantic underdeterminacy by an interaction between decoding and inference not only at the level of what is explicitly communicated globally by whole sentences, but also at the local level of individual lexemes and phrases.

The use of a word on a particular occasion may express some conceptual meaning, which differs from the one encoded by the contextually-independent semantic meaning of that word. Whenever a word is used to express a concept different from its linguistically encoded meaning, the new meaning is constructed by drawing on encyclopedic information, and is required to make the utterance relevant in the expected way. This happens because, as Sperber and Wilson (1998) have argued, the mapping between the lexicon and the concepts repository is not one-to-one but one-to-many, a lexical item being therefore underspecified with regard to the actual conceptual meaning. The linguistically encoded sense of a word does not serve as its default interpretation because language users have more mentally represented concepts than there are linguistically encoded concepts.

Ariel (2002) illustrates this point by considering that, for instance, *cut* in *cut a cake*, is different from, and irreducible to, a general meaning of *cut*, which would also account for *cut* in *cut parsley*, etc. *Cut*, then, is associated with slightly different meanings, all of them equally literal, depending on the object being cut. Similarly to *cut*, *red* will be interpreted differently depending on what it modifies, e.g. *red skin*, *red hair*, *red potato*. These context-dependent meanings are all listed in our mental lexicon, which is an indication of the number of concepts we can represent in our minds and communicate exceeding the number of words available in any given language to encode those concepts. Ariel (2002) points out that the availability of multiple slightly different literal meanings associated with one concept renders the notion of ‘literal meaning’ itself obsolete. The author attributes the nuances of meaning partly due to the different “mental images” produced by *cut* and *red* in all of those collocations.

As already discussed in section 1.2, in RT, the presence of a word in an utterance serves as a starting point for a relevance-guided inferential process resulting in the construction of contextually appropriate sense. Words carry only meaning potential and the meaning is constructed online by building contexts in which they would be relevant. The overall interpretation process is guided by a mutual adjustment of expectations of relevance, the context and the (explicit and implicit) content of the utterance.

Recent work in the area of relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatics (RTLTP) advocates the view according to which lexical interpretation typically involves the construction of an occasion-specific sense or *ad hoc* concept, which is adjusted based on the interaction among encoded concepts, contextual information and expectations of relevance (Wilson and Carston 2007). Following seminal work on ad hoc concepts by Barsalou⁷⁰ (1983, 1987), RTLTP offers a unified account on which lexical narrowing and broadening are the outcomes of a single inferential interpretive process which fine-tunes the interpretation of almost every word. According to Carston (2002a: 322), in constructing an occasion-specific ad hoc concept, speakers can use a lexically encoded concept to communicate a distinct non-lexicalized (atomic) concept, which resembles the encoded one in that it shares elements of its logical and

⁷⁰ According to Barsalou’s theory of ad hoc concept formation, on which the current RT model is explicitly based, frames do not deliver ready-made and stable concepts: “instead of viewing concepts as invariant structures that are retrieved intact from long-term memory when needed, it may make more sense to view concepts as temporary constructs in working memory that are tailored to current situations” (Barsalou 1987:120).

encyclopedic entries, and that hearers can pragmatically infer the intended concept on the basis of the encoded one.

The way the encoded lexical concepts underdetermine speaker-intended concepts can be illustrated with the following example, in which Stephen Colbert (“The Colbert Report” 07.11.2011) discusses how Texas state representative Larry Taylor used the word *Jew* in a derogatory manner as an ethnic slur while addressing insurance companies who didn’t pay the claims of disaster victims in a timely manner at a hearing by saying: “*Your job is to pay the client. Don’t nitpick. Don’t try to **Jew** them down... That’s probably a bad term*”. Due to online pragmatic processes of occasion-specific (ad hoc) concept construction operating at the level of individual words, the meaning of *Jew* can be modulated (narrowed) in context to become an ethnic slur JEW*, which implies and endorses the stereotypical notion that Jewish people are greedy.

Regarding the compositionality of ad hoc concepts into constituent elements, which seems to be stemming from the paraphrases often provided in the RT literature (e.g. DRINK* is narrowed to mean ALCOHOL DRINK), Carston (2010b) points out that it might look as if they are being construed as compositional; for example, DANCE* has been glossed as ‘dance in an intense, focused, lively way’. However, Carston (2010) explains that the idea behind this is that ad hoc concepts are, generally, ineffable, in the sense that, as well as not being lexicalized, there isn’t a linguistic phrase that fully encodes them either, and the paraphrases are intended as just a rough indication to aid readers in understanding what we have in mind in particular cases (see Carston 2010b).

Applied to cases of euphemistic/PC language use, the ineffability of ad hoc concepts means that speakers infer, for instance, COME UP FOR COFFEE from examples (9) and (11) as some sort of non-typical broader kind of COME UP FOR COFFEE* by activating relevant encyclopedic assumptions, which are part of stored make-sense frames (scripts) of having coffee/dating. The *sexual intercourse* meaning is certainly defeasible and will not go through when processed against a different cognitive script/scenario, e.g. uttered to invite a colleague to come up to one’s office for a cup of coffee.

Processing of novel figurative language in general, appears to involve the inevitable metarepresentation of the direct ‘literal’ alternative. In order to make the meaning of a novel figurative discourse string relevant, hearers need to have manifest assumptions associated with the encyclopedic entries of the concept being processed. For instance, hearers processing example (57) will need to understand that the complex concept DEF LEPPARD 1987

metonymically refers to the album of the British rock band called “Hysteria” and is broadened here to include something that happened at the Parliament today:

(57)

The discussion of the controversial law caused a real “DEF LEPPARD 1987” at the Parliament today.

Only the hearers who have the necessary background assumptions manifest in their cognitive systems, will be able to make the necessary reference assignment to the speaker-intended concept HYSTERIA and derive it as part of the explicature of the utterance. Along with this, the hearers will derive an array of weak implicatures about hearer’s reason for substituting the direct nomination with the indirect one.

As instances of figurative indirect language, euphemisms/PC are used to refer not to referents themselves, but to other, saliently dispreferred in the context of utterance, names of those referents. Their processing thus involves reference assignment whose targets are other concepts the speaker intended by the particular use of a word, instead of direct references to something in the world. In other words, semantically, euphemisms have no meaning apart from ‘meaning’ the dispreferred counterparts, which they were coined to replace. The speaker-intended concepts they refer to contribute to explicatures of utterances containing them.

Concepts are regarded by RTLP as contextually constructed ‘ad hoc’ from a reservoir of encyclopedic information, the salience, and hence the level of accessibility of which, varies from individual to individual, and from situation to situation. The following example from “The Big Bang Theory” (Season 03 Episode 23) illustrates how a concept can be broadened to include assumptions in no way associated with its lexicalized sense:

(58)

Raj: I’m watching someone’s TV. “The Good Wife” is on. I tell you, this is my new “Gray’s Anatomy”.

Here the speaker means that “The Good Wife” is his new favorite show and that it replaced his previously favorite TV show “Gray’s Anatomy”. Thus THE GOOD WIFE shares the same encyclopedic property of being the speaker’s favorite TV show with GRAY’S ANATOMY*. Examples like this along with *smart* is the new SEXY* and Iraq is the new VIETNAM* (for the US) are instances of category extension or ‘broadening’. On this view, the metaphorical use of *chameleon* would be considered as involving an expansion from the category CHAMELEON to the category CHAMELEON*, which is lexically adjusted to

include both actual chameleons and people who share with chameleons the encyclopedic property of having the capacity to change their appearance in order to blend in with their surroundings (see Wilson and Carston 2007 for a discussion).

Cases of ad hoc narrowing of the meaning encoded by lexicalized concepts include such general-for-specific metonymies as PILL*, which can be used in a narrow sense to mean *birth-control pill* similarly to the way DINK* is commonly used in a restricted sense of *alcohol drink*. In uttering *I need to go to the bathroom* speakers are typically understood to have resorted to a euphemisms by referring to the specific concept *toilet* by narrowing the general meaning of BATHROOM to BATHROOM* (or broadening the BATHROOM to include the toilet in cases where the two facilities are located in separate rooms of the house).

Similarly, a speaker who utters *I wanted to be a Letterman but I was a Leno*, invites the hearer to select the subset of relevant salient assumptions about David Letterman from encyclopedic entries (confident, funny and admired) and *Jay Leno* (no so much admired after his return as The Tonight Show host replacing Conan O'Brien), which would produce positive cognitive effects in the search for relevance. The phrases *N-word* as well as the *F-word*, the *c-word* etc. can also be treated as cases of narrowing as they pick only one of all possible words in the English language that begins with the respective letters.

The lexical-pragmatic process of ad hoc concept construction is triggered and regulated by the principle of relevance, according to which hearers expect that the intended interpretation of an utterance will yield positive cognitive effects without extra processing effort. The broadening/narrowing takes place due to contextually constrained expectations of relevance. RT argues that it is the ad hoc concept constructed online and not the concept encoded by the word, which the hearer takes as a constituent of the explicature. It is therefore this ad hoc concept that contributes to the truth-conditional content of the utterance and which warrants the derivation of the intended implications (see Vega Moreno 2007).

The adjustment process may be a spontaneous, one-off affair, involving the construction of an 'ad hoc' concept which is used once and then forgotten; or it may be regularly and frequently followed, by a few people or a group, until, over time, the resulting 'ad hoc' concept may stabilize in a community and give rise to an extra lexicalized sense as witnessed by the use of coffee to mean 'sex' in the examples (9) and (11) above. Wilson and Sperber (2002: 247) note that stabilizing a word in the public language to encode such a concept involves coordinating cognitive dispositions in a community over time. The underlying lexical pragmatic processes endow underspecified words and expressions with

meaning in a particular utterance which gives rise not only to the construction of implicatures, but it can also be pragmatically enriched in order to get a full-fledged propositional form (or explicature in relevance-theoretic terms)

In her research Vega Moreno (2007) shows that the more a word is broadened or narrowed in a particular way, the less effort it will cost to follow the same route in the future, and hence the more likely it is to be followed by hearers using the relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristic, according to which hearers (a) follow a path of least effort in constructing an interpretation of the utterance (and in particular in resolving ambiguities and referential indeterminacies, enriching or adjusting the encoded meaning, supplying contextual assumptions, deriving implicatures, etc.); (b) stop when their expectations of relevance are satisfied (or abandoned). William of Occam⁷¹ in the 14th century already thought that the lexical fixation of concepts is due to repetition of successful experiences of denomination.

This observation, along with the fact that the intended concept is taken be part of the propositional content, has some important consequences for our analysis of euphemisms/PC. Following Vega Moreno's (2007) proposal, repeated processing of the same lexical unit will result in considering roughly the same contextual assumptions, then following roughly the same inferential steps to enrich the explicit content with the ad hoc concept and deriving roughly the same sort of implications. These assumptions and computations may become increasingly salient to the hearer, directing his attention to a familiar inferential route, thereby minimizing the processing effort invested in interpreting the utterance. This may lead to the development of a kind of pragmatic routine, by following the same inferential routes that have been successful on previous occasions.

When a euphemistic/PC expression become lexicalized, the ad hoc concept originally used to convey the speaker's meaning may be added as an extra-meaning to that word's lexical meaning. Repeated exposure to one particular broadening/narrowing of an encoded concept may result in the broader/narrower concept itself being stored in memory as a stable concept which the hearer may use thereafter as a shortcut to the construction of other one-off ad hoc concepts when interpreting further utterances. As we can see, stabilization of a lexical change originates from the semantic change related to construction of ad hoc concepts.

⁷¹ Modified Occam's Razor is Grice's principle that 'senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity' (Grice 1967/1989).

From the relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatic standpoint, the goal of some PC practices can be viewed as attempting to change the way such concepts as, for instance, DOCTOR, SURGEON, LAWYER, POET etc. are processed online by extending (broadening) their meaning, which has stereotypically defaulted to “white male”, by inviting inferences, which include non-white females (for instance, ASIAN FEMALE DOCTOR) by way of constructing a broader in denotation ad hoc concept DOCTOR*, the (prescribed) repeated use of which will enable its gradual lexicalization in discourse.

Processing *John is an African-American* as a novel coinage will involve bringing together the encyclopedic entries for AFRICAN and AMERICAN and constructing a complex ad hoc concept AFRICAN-AMERICAN*. This will be a non-lexical ad hoc concept merely resembling the concept linguistically encoded in the propositional form of the utterance. The entry AFRICAN will constrain the information selected from the entry AMERICAN by influencing the accessibility ranking of the information in the AMERICAN entry. Hearers will activate their encyclopedic knowledge about Africa and culturally attribute the quintessential feature of this concept to the constructed ad hoc concept – the continent, where predominantly black people live, who at some point of history were brought to the continent of North America as slaves.

This kind of “forced referencing” or “invited inferencing” arising on the fly in language use, which Traugott defines as a “cognitive <...> process by which pragmatic meanings come to be conventionalized and reanalyzed as semantic polysemies (Traugott 2002: 1), may, in turn, metarepresentationally activate the frame containing terms initially used for slaves in the past, which will be attributed as a cultural property of the neologism. The presumption of relevance does not show hearers how to make such connections, however, it stimulates hearers to seek and construct them.

The attributive ad hoc concepts generated by hearers in interpreting novel expressions, will later develop into a salient conceptual entry in their cognitive systems. In order to become such, the ad hoc concept relies on the activation of the salient conventionalized previously used terms, which are “copied” onto a new ad hoc concept and this generates extra rhetorical effects, not achieved by the use of the older term they were coined to replace. Following a path of least effort, hearers will start copying into the new concept logical and encyclopedic properties of the encoded concept until their expectations of relevance are satisfied, at which point they will stop. Considering this, it is probably safe to assume that at the stage of a neologism, constructing the ad hoc concept AFRICAN-AMERICAN*, will

involve all the negative connotations, associated with the previously used biased expressions, which will be literally “dragged” onto the new PC term, thereby making it truth-conditionally equivalent with the dispreferred one.

If we assume that the overall ‘idiomatic’ meaning of a particular PC or euphemistic expression is derived via decomposing its constituent parts, this can tell us much about the way their processing takes place. Interpreting a novel PC or a euphemistic expression such as *collateral damage* would involve metarepresenting and combining the meanings of *civilian* and *deaths* to derive the figurative interpretation. In this case *collateral* would be assigned the meaning of *civilian* and stored as such in cognitive systems of addressees and *damage* would be assigned the (new) meaning of *death* and stored as such as well. We can make a prediction that the reverse appears to be plausible, that is the word *civilian* would acquire a new meaning *collateral* and then be possibly applied as such in other collocations sometimes with the purpose of creating an ironic/humorous effect and the semantics of *damage*, which normally does not appear to include *death*, will be broadened so as to include this kind of *ultimate damage* as well. The entire expression *collateral damage* will thus be stored as a new semantic representation *civilian death*.

If the extra cognitive effort resulting from the need for reinterpretation, invested in processing novel utterances is rewarded by a wide variety of cognitive effects (thereby rendering the novel utterance relevant), this may promote the stabilization of a new item in the hearer’s semantic memory. According to Pilkington (2000), such effects are generated when certain contextual assumptions, made more salient through processing other utterances, guide the interpretation of figurative utterances: “The wider context causes certain assumptions within the encyclopedic entries that are explored to become more highly activated and, hence, makes them easier to process and use in the construction of further assumptions” (Pilkington 2000: 190).

Papafragou (1996) notes that after being extensively used, an expression that has originated as a product of metonymic naming may begin to lose its former descriptive content. Consequently, it can **gradually accept as its new descriptive content the referential content it has when used interpretively**:

“What the speakers initially did not endorse as a truthful description of a referent becomes the proper descriptive meaning of the expression and is registered in the lexicon. The empirical consequence of this is an increase in the accessibility of the referent, since the latter does not have to be computed any more but merely retrieved

from memory: the motivation of the whole phenomenon lies in referential cost-efficiency. The derivational link can still be intuitively felt but it is as weak as that of dead metaphors: in both cases, immediate and standard effects are yielded by minimized processing effort” Papafragou (1996).

It is possible to assume that upon hearing a novel expression, hearers immediately realize that the linguistically encoded meaning and the meaning communicated by the speaker’s use of this particular string of words differ and there are reasons why the speaker has not resorted to a familiar conventionalized term. Hearers will treat the whole string as a semantic unit (single concept) to which they are to assign some content (a token).

Only after hearers start accessing this token automatically as a result of frequent use on numerous occasions, does the new euphemistic/PC neologism become a cognitively stable, salient and well-understood concept. With enough exposure, the partially understood concept may develop into a well-understood concept-type (as opposed to a temporary token), which may be stored in the hearer’s mental lexicon. Thus the meaning of the euphemistic/PC neologism is only recognized and understood because the salient target concept is listed and activated in the hearer’s mental lexicon. In other words, as the word becomes more and more entrenched through repeated usage, hearers will get more and more used to selecting particular encyclopedic assumptions in order to form ad-hoc concepts.

According to the study by McGlone et al. (2006), the possible outcome of this process is twofold: either the newly entrenched word becomes ‘contaminated’ with all the taboo associations of the previously used dispreferred lexical units or it can acquire camouflage-like properties, making it hard to recognize the new lexical unit for what it really is, i.e. in its euphemistic functions.

Many researchers argue that the taboo-induced need for language change leads to a continuous turnover in vocabulary and as a result of this, linguistic innovations which are the products of this language change can be thought of as having ‘careers’ in the vernacular (cf. Bowdle and Gentner 2005). By way of an example we can take the phrase *juvenile delinquents* which from 1950s had been used to refer to adolescent criminals and recently was replaced by the allegedly improved value-free label *conduct-disordered youth*. I now turn to the analysis of the inferential mechanics underlying such ‘careers’ of euphemisms.

9.2 Euphemism treadmill as semantic change

In this section I analyze claims made in research literature to the effect that once euphemisms cease to be ambiguous, the euphemistic sense becomes their salient meaning and eventually they may become taboo terms themselves and as such, will be discarded by language users as dispreferred (e.g. Rawson 1995, Pinker 1997; Chamizo Domínguez 2009, Wałaszewska 2010). Such lexicalization of taboo connotations, allegedly, makes speakers continuously make up novel euphemisms in order to replace the terms, which have turned into taboos diachronically. Allan and Burridge (2006: 243) refer to this process as the Allan-Burridge Law of Semantic Change⁷², according to which: “Economics has Gresham’s Law: ‘Bad money drives out good’. Sociology has Knight’s Law: ‘Bad talk drives out good’. Linguistics has the Allan-Burridge Law of Semantic Change: “Bad connotations drive out good”.

The Allan-Burridge Law of Semantic Change appears to be a restatement of observations previously made by researchers, since, as Hughes (2010: 18) observes, the founding figure of semantics Michel Bréal noted back in 1900 in his seminal work that words often “come to possess a disagreeable sense as a result of euphemism” Bréal (1900: 100). Jespersen similarly observed in 1905 the “usual destiny of euphemisms; in order to avoid the real name of what is thought indecent or improper, people use some innocent word”, which eventually ends up becoming “habitual in this sense it becomes just as objectionable as the word it has ousted and now is rejected in its turn” (Jespersen 1962: 230). This is, of course, an ironic outcome, since the intention of euphemism is precisely to avoid the “disagreeable sense”. The point is that euphemisms seldom remain euphemisms over time, but can become contaminated by association with what they seek to disguise.

Among more recent mentions of this process are Rawson (1981: 4), who notes that “bad meanings or associations of words tend to drive competing ‘good’ meanings out of circulation” and Pinker (1994a, 1997), who refers to this process as ‘euphemism treadmill’ that ultimately wears out the term when it becomes ubiquitous in text and discourse (cf. also Allan and Burridge 1991, 2006). The “euphemism treadmill” refers to the process in which euphemistic neologisms acquire all the negative associations of the words they were coined to

⁷² Allan and Burridge (2006) name relative salience of taboo terms as the reason why languages abandon homonyms of taboo terms: “One possible explanation for the salience is that obscene vocabulary is stored and/or accessed differently in the brain from other vocabulary” (Allan & Burridge 2006: 37-41).

replace and this causes introduction of a serious of allegedly more preferable replacement units, e.g. *crippled* > *handicapped* > *invalid* > *disabled* > *differently-abled* > *physically challenged* > *people with disabilities and people who use a wheelchair*; *idiotic* > *retarded* > *challenged* > *differently abled*; *old people* > *elderly people* > *senior citizens*; *poor countries* > *undeveloped* > *underdeveloped* > *the Third World* > *less developed* > *lesser developed* > *developing*; *garbage collector* > *sanitation engineer*; *janitor* > *environmental hygienist*; *insane asylum* > *mental hospital* etc.

Pinker (2002) observes that people invent new words for emotionally charged referents, but soon the euphemism becomes tainted by association, and a new word must be found, which soon acquires its own connotations, and so on. Pinker makes a very important observation that the euphemism treadmill demonstrates that it is concepts, not words, that are primary in people's minds: "Give a concept a new name, and the name becomes colored by the concept; the concept does not become freshened by the name, at least not for long. Names for minorities will continue to change as long as people have negative attitudes toward them. We will know that we have achieved mutual respect when the names stay put" (Pinker 2002: 190-191).

A similar sentiment is shared by Bolinger (1980) who argues that a euphemism is: "most apt to be noticed if it is new <...> The cultivation of euphemism to paper over unpleasant reality leads – when the reality is truly unpleasant – to long histories of synonyms each of which started off as a euphemism and then, by intimate association with the unloved thing that it named, ended up as a dysphemism <...> The downgrading is so regular that it invites a domino theory of euphemism: the fall of each term leads to the fall of the next, and in some areas of meaning we find an endless series of terms each of which had its day of innocence and then fell from grace <...> The effect on the language is not only to multiply synonyms for the disagreeable, but to spoil a lot of otherwise good words. Like bad coin, bad meanings drive out good. Not bad intrinsically, since meanings are neither bad nor good, but bad in the sense that what is referred to is felt to be bad; linguists call this process PEJORATION" Bolinger (1980: 73-74).

The main function of euphemisms is generally agreed to be the formal softening of an axiologically disfavorable nomination and due to the formal nature of such a substitution it cannot fulfill its fig-leaf function for a long time. Novel euphemisms achieve relevance in discourse, in virtue of hearers' being able to metarepresent the salient dispreferred alternative. This way of achieving relevance may potentially disappear over time and the expression can

take its full place in the considered language and then cease to be euphemistic: because of the increasing use, this expression may become simply the usual one, replacing the old one, which is then perceived as dysphemistic.

The effect of this law is that many euphemisms become ‘contaminated’ over time, as the connotations reattach themselves and require a new euphemism to be found. Allan and Burridge (2006) illustrate the law by considering how the word *insanity* derived from Latin *in-sanus* ‘not-healthy’ and originally had a much broader domain, encompassing all bodily organs and their functions; but once pressed into euphemistic service, it quickly narrowed to *mentally unsound*.

A similar observation is made by Allan and Burridge (2006) with reference to PC-inspired language: “PC language tramps the same treadmill...*African-American* now replaces *black* which earlier replaced *Negro*⁷³ and *coloured*. And so it goes on; if society's prejudices continue to bubble away, the negative connotations soon reattach themselves” (Allan and Burridge 2006: 89). The most recent substitution of *African-Americans* for *people of color* as a preferred term by which to refer to this population group is highly questionable and is often ridiculed by members of this population group themselves.

Generally speaking, the treadmill phenomenon does not apply exclusively to euphemisms, but appears to be a tendency of pragmatic adjustment of meaning expressivity in general. According to Meillet’s (1921 [1912]: 140) observation, for instance: “Languages <...> undergo a sort of spiral development: they add extra words to obtain an intensified expression; those words weaken, wear out and are reduced to the level of simple grammatical tools; new or different words are added for expressive purposes; the weakening process begins anew; and so on without end.”

Euphemism treadmill represents the subjectification of meaning – a diachronic cline of semantic change⁷⁴: **propositional** > **interpersonal (expressive)** or from less to more personal

⁷³ The word ‘Negro’ is still used in the name of the educational organization “United Negro College Fund” <http://www.uncf.org> and in such word combinations as ‘Negro literature’ <http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-9399871>

⁷⁴ I’m using Traugott’s interpretation of the notion of subjectification (see Traugott (1982), Traugott and Dasher (2002: 19–20), Traugott (2003a: 125), which is based on Halliday’s (see Halliday (1985: 36–37; Halliday and Hasan 1976: 26–27) classification of the functions of language: the logical/experiential, textual, and interpersonal (Traugott 1982: 247–248). The notion of subjectification is found in research literature since early structuralist linguistics, see Bréal (1897). For a different interpretation of the notion see Langacker (1990, 1998, 1999), Nuyts (2001), Verhagen (2005).

meanings that express speaker-attitude (Traugott 1982: 253), where “more personal” is defined as “more anchored in the context of the speech act, particularly the speaker’s orientation to situation, text, and interpersonal relations” (Traugott 1982: 253).

The discussion of mechanisms underlying the phenomenon of euphemism treadmill can be traced to Larin’s 1977 paper, where the author in analyzing how taboo topics change diachronically and how different they are in various social groups argues that for euphemisms to enjoy a lasting career, it is important that they have a well-known dysphemistic counterpart in that vernacular. His argument is that the loss of a rude or unacceptable equivalent drives the euphemism itself into the category of direct nominations and in that case a new substitute is required (Larin 1977: 110). Larin also noted that the more often a euphemism is used the quicker it loses its ameliorating capacity and the sooner it will require another euphemistic substitute for itself. This is tantamount to saying that abbreviations, new borrowings from other languages and words of foreign origin in general are the best possible candidates for having the most euphemistic potential.

Neologisms coined through abbreviations and acronyms, however, are not immune to the contamination either. For example, «бомж» (bomzh), which started in Russian as a euphemistic abbreviation «без особого места жительства» (bez osobogo mesta zhitel’sstva — without a specific place of residence) used to refer to a homeless person, with time turned into a derogatory term used to refer to this category of people. The term subsequently lost its euphemistic status and currently functions in Russian as a dysphemistic insulting term whose initial abbreviation meaning is not transparent to most speakers anymore.

In this regard McGlone et al. (1994) point out that one’s beliefs and attitudes about words and phrases often depend more on their synchronic usage than the circumstances under which they were coined considering that the typical speaker is not a lexicographer and most speakers who refer to a ‘pay-your-own’ way lunch as *Dutch treat* without harboring any prejudice against the people of Holland are simply unaware that this idiom originated as an ethnic slur (see Siefring 2004).

It is also possible to imagine the situations where words are ascribed euphemistic functions even when no such intention was demonstrated on the part of the speaker, simply because of their ‘foreignness’ and the capacity to trigger in hearer’s cognitive environment associations which are more positive than those triggered by the more familiar direct designation.

If euphemistic senses of a lexical unit tend to wear off due to frequency of its use, the question naturally arises: does such a euphemism simply “blend in” as unmarked in discourse or do negative connotations associated with the taboo it is trying to hide, reattach themselves in time and the continued marked status of such nomination in discourse makes it stand out and constantly draw attention to itself, thereby gradually transforming it into a taboo term and requiring that further substitutions be coined?

According to the associative contamination hypothesis (see McGlone et al. 2006), a euphemism can stop fulfilling its euphemistic function once its meaning has become semanticized. Sometimes it is replaced by a new euphemism with the same denotational meaning which in its turn can acquire and become ‘contaminated’ with the negative connotations of the direct nomination of its tabooed or stigmatized referent, which it was coined to replace. According to this view, the more conventionalized a euphemism is the less likely it is to implement its euphemistic (or ‘face-saving’) function successfully. Many words suffer pejoration which often results from society’s perception of a word’s tainted denotation contaminating the word itself. The perceived contamination may have to do with, for instance, the unprestigious nature of some professions: *оператор машинного доения* (operator mashinnogo doeniya – automatic milking operator) instead of *дойрка* (doyarka – milkwoman), *технический работник* (technicheskiy rabotnik – technical worker) instead of *уборщица* (uborshchitsa – cleaning woman).

McGlone et al. (2006) note that all accounts of associative contamination in euphemism imply that the ‘face value’ of a euphemism depreciates as it becomes conventional in discourse, and thus communicators’ perceptions of a euphemism’s politeness and its familiarity in the vernacular are negatively correlated. Familiarity is, on this view, the principal source of contamination that precipitates a euphemism’s fall into disfavor. Unfamiliar euphemisms should appear less contaminated than their familiar counterparts and thereby enjoy an advantage in politeness.

In order for the euphemism to achieve its euphemistic purposes in discourse it must pass unnoticed similarly to the way true politeness passes unnoticed while impoliteness and over-politeness are noticed as deviations from the norm of (cooperative) communication. In this respect McGlone et al. (2006) note that even though conventionality may confer pragmatic stealth and mindlessness-inducing qualities to a euphemism, factors such as speaker status and prior message context also affect its discourse salience.

Apart from achieving unmarked status by aiming at maximum semantic generality, there is evidence indicating that the presence of cliché euphemistic expressions in discourse can trigger a rigid, “mindless” mode of information processing that favors stimulus generalization over discrimination and heuristic reasoning over deliberation (Burgoon and Langer 1995). The aim of resorting to such expressions can be regarded as attempting to keep hearer’s epistemic vigilance (Mascaro and Sperber 2009, Padilla Cruz 2012, 2013) dormant.

According to McGlone et al. (2006) cliché euphemisms are processed in an inattentive, mindless fashion, which enables them to operate ‘under the radar’ in a way that less familiar euphemisms cannot. Their unmarked status in discourse makes them easy to both understand and overlook, and thereby limits the attributional penalty hearers might impose on a speaker who chooses to raise the topic.

According to McGlone et al., (2006) the ‘associative contamination’ hypothesis is directly contradicted by the ‘camouflage hypothesis’, according to which conventionality only improves euphemistic potential of euphemisms and PC expressions. Indeed, if salience of euphemisms decreases as they become more and more conventionalized, the effort required for their processing will decrease substantially, enabling the addressees to process them in a mindless fashion. As a result, conventionalized unmarked euphemisms are more likely to be ‘shallow-processed’ in discourse (cf. Allott 2006: 147ff).

Similar to the way politeness conceived of as ‘politic behavior’ (Watts 2003) must have an unmarked status in discourse in order to fulfill its function (see section 6.2), McGlone et al. (2006) suggest that if a euphemism is to succeed in reducing the communicative discomfort associated with a distasteful topic, it is imperative that it not call undue attention to itself. The authors compare the success of euphemisms as a discourse strategy with the way camouflage succeeds in its military mission by rendering its subject as inconspicuous as possible in the surrounding context. The mindless shallow processing of a conventional euphemism can counteract the contamination it may have acquired from chronic association with its conceptual referent.

According to Vega Moreno (2007) relevance-driven comprehension of utterances generally involves the selective and relatively shallow processing of available information, so that only those activated assumptions which are likely to contribute to the relevance of the utterance would be processed. Since hearers often arrive at a satisfactory interpretation after processing the words in a relatively shallow manner they may not need to consider further information made accessible by these words, their homonyms or the words that they are

composed of. The extra effort invested in exploring the internal composition of expressions like *African-American* is, on other possible occasions, like debates over the issues of political correctness, rewarded with extra effects, not generally derived in normal conversations (cf. distinction between controlled and automatic processing discussed in Vega Moreno 2007). Controlled processing is characterized as a slow, conscious and voluntary process which requires high levels of attention and a considerable amount of time and effort, while automatic processing is fast, involuntary, unconscious, effortless and requires little or no attention.

The conventionalization of euphemisms may render them unmarked in discourse and they will no longer be felt to be euphemistic. However, as long as the corresponding reality remains status quo and the tabooed/stigmatized referent is in need of euphemization, other euphemisms will continuously be found or created by the speaker to replace the expression which is no longer felt to be euphemistic. This explains why political correctness can never be successful over a longer period of time (as long as the old prejudices and superstitions endure).

Allan and Burrige consider the term “x-phemistic recycling” to be a more accurate reference to the “constant turnover of vocabulary for words denoting taboo concepts” (Allan and Burrige 2006: 243), as dysphemisms and orthophemisms are involved in the euphemization process as well which, for them, resembles more a cycle than a (tread)mill. I believe that regardless of whether PC can be equated with euphemisms or represents something quite similar, however differing in important aspects of its meaning and underlying motivation, the same ‘cycle’ that applies to euphemisms will also apply to PC expressions. In the hope that attitudes towards stigmatized population groups will change if language is reformed, new PC nominations continually replace the allegedly biased politically incorrect terms. Yet, the assumption that the new coinages will simply replace the old ones is too strong, because the new PC vocabulary is subject to the diachronic process of associative contamination leading to their subsequent recycling.

A telling example of this process is the number of renamings of the currently named *American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, discussed as a case in point by Halmari (2011). Its former name (before 2006) was *The American Association on Mental Retardation*. This was its fourth name during its 130-year history. Between 1933 and 1987, the organization was called the *American Association on Mental Deficiency*. When it was founded in 1876, it was named the *American Association of Medical Officers of*

Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-minded Persons. In this instance, the premodified, concrete noun phrase (*idiotic and feeble-minded persons*) came to be seen as offensive, and it was first replaced by an abstract nominalization *mental deficiency*. The word *deficiency*, having acquired too many negative connotations, was replaced by *retardation*, which again soon underwent the same process: a former euphemism had become a dysphemism. The most recently adopted name, including yet another abstract lexical euphemism, *intellectual and developmental disabilities*, is unlikely to last either.

The word *retarded* coined as a euphemism for previously used terms like *slow*, *simple* and *feeble-minded*, allegedly due to it being of foreign origin and, therefore, not so easily decodable and free from negative connotations, very quickly became derogatory and started to be used as an insult synonymous with *stupid/dumb*, as in “This movie was retarded”, “Are you a retard?”. Interestingly, parallel to the various PC-inspired substitutes, e.g. *intellectually-challenged/impaired*, *special*, *differently-abled* etc., it has prompted the appearance of the euphemistic replacement ‘the R-word’, e.g. “He called me the R-word” (see <http://www.r-word.org/>). Scientific terms, coined as orthophemistic nominations of stigmatized referents, e.g. assessing the severity of intellectual disability: *idiot* (IQ of 0–20), *imbecile* (IQ of 21–50), *moron* (IQ of 51–70), as well as *coitus* (sexual intercourse), are also readily available for malign appropriation, as seen from the example (3), in which Penny declares “You’re just **coitusing** with me, aren’t you”.

From the relevance-theoretical standpoint, attempts of employing euphemisms/PC with the purpose of framing some state of affairs in the world as positive, do not and cannot achieve this goal as efficiently as those who resort to them hope to, since hearers are able to efficiently infer the saliently unexpressed dispreferred content and see the referents of euphemistic/PC expression in their “true light”, by following interpretive strategies based on the principle of optimal relevance. In other words, if *cognitively-challenged* (or any other suggested PC substitute) is imposed as a replacement of *retarded* in an attempt to oust the latter out of use as politically-incorrect, there is no guarantee whatsoever that the new term will not be picked up as an insult and used in a sentence like “Are you, cognitively-challenged?” or “The movie was cognitively-challenged”.

Research by Wałaszewska (2010) shows that one of such lexical-pragmatic processes, namely conceptual narrowing, can be responsible for giving rise to euphemistic interpretations in discourse. The author aims to explain the regularity and unidirectionality of the processes uncovering what euphemisms were supposed to veil and resulting in the

euphemism treadmill, in terms of lexicalization of such narrowed ad hoc concepts involving transfer of some connotations (namely, negative taboo associations) from the encyclopedic entry of the lexicalized concept to its logical entry, where logical properties amounting to a proper definition of a concept are stored. Since the negative taboo associations are more salient than other associations transferred to the logical entry, the meaning of a word employed as a euphemism narrows to the taboo sense alone and thus the contaminated word becomes regarded as a taboo term.

Wąlaszewska (2010) illustrates this process by discussing that the ‘general for specific’ metonymy-based euphemism *undertaker*, which originally had an axiologically-neutral meaning of “someone who undertakes odd jobs” and later started to be used in the narrower hyponymous euphemistic sense of “someone who undertakes to organize funerals”, the taboo associations, which need to be worked out by the hearer in contexts where the word is resorted to for euphemistic purposes, became stronger, more accessible and finally became lexicalized.

The same process is noted by Allan and Burridge (2006) without recourse to relevance-theoretic explanatory tools:

“English *undertaker* once referred to someone who undertakes to do things, i.e. an ‘odd-job man’; it was used as a euphemism for the person taking care of funerals, a *funeral undertaker*. Like most ambiguous taboo terms, the meaning narrowed to the taboo sense alone, and is now replaced by the euphemism *funeral director*... The once euphemistic [*going to the*] *toilet* is fading from euphemism to orthophemism and is being superseded by the euphemisms *bathroom* or *restroom* in American and *loo* in spoken British and Australian... There is a wealth of evidence that where a language expression is ambiguous between a taboo sense and a non-taboo sense its meaning will **narrow** to the taboo sense alone. This perhaps explains why dysphemistic language is often referred to as *strong language*” (Allan and Burridge 2006: 37-41)

The processing picture suggested in the thesis considers that on the one hand, as hearers people are hardwired, as a result of evolutionary adaptation, to process ostensive communicative behavior for relevance. On the other hand, communicators have certain expectations about the way language is normally used as witnessed by the use of euphemisms and PC expressions, which speakers resort to due to their **presumed** position on the positive end of the axiological x-phemistic axis, while avoiding other linguistic codes due to their **presumed** disfavorable meanings, which are expected to attract biased negative attention.

While acknowledging the relevance-seeking nature of the particularized conversational implicatures (PCIs), derived by constructing hypotheses about the speaker-intended meanings on the basis of manifest linguistic evidence and contextual assumptions, I suggest that the production and processing of euphemisms/PC expressions can take place in a heuristic-like manner along the lines of fast and frugal principles suggested by Levinson for the derivation of automatic default meanings presumed in the absence of contextual information to the contrary. Combining the relevance-theoretic and the GCI-theoretic principles makes it possible to account for routinization of pragmatic inferences.

Let's consider predictions such a hybrid model would make in terms of cognitive inferential procedures involved in the local lexical-pragmatic processing of the expression '*terminological inexactitude*':

If the utterance conforms to the hearer's expectations about the way language is normally used, it will be presumed to be euphemistic by way of an I-GCI. The unmarked status will aid in "camouflaging" the disfavorable referents by obscuring negative connotations associated with the direct dispreferred nomination *lie*. Failure to metarepresent '*lie*' due to contextually lowered expectations of relevance can enable manipulation/disinformation to go through. If the utterance does not conform to hearer's expectations about the way language is normally used, faced with a new signal, guided by the principle of relevance, the hearers will use their background encyclopedic assumptions in interpreting it and broaden INEXACTITUDE as part of explicature derivation to include that, which it is trying to conceal, namely, *lie* as a reference assignment necessary for compositionally fixing the truth-conditional content of '*terminological inexactitude*'. The ad hoc concept INEXACTITUDE* will be understood as some general (only partially-inferable) and abstract kind of '*inexactitude*' and will not be equated with prototypical '*lying*'. The hearer may object to such an alleged mistaken concept-to-word mapping by publicly or privately metalinguistically correcting the perceived discrepancy between the two concepts INEXACTITUDE and LIE and declare: That's not '*inexactitude*', that's *lying*!

This metalinguistic mode of processing explains why and how, diachronically, euphemisms/PC expressions can become 'contaminated' with negative connotations associated with taboo topics, which can lead to their recycling in the vernacular or "euphemism treadmill", as well as why political correctness is effective only when it is novel and hence capable of bringing people's unconscious biases to consciousness.

This way of achieving relevance can become routinized relative to some context of use and the marked status of the utterance will, in Levinson's terms, M-implicate a non-prototypical form of *lie* (since the word *lie* itself has not actually been uttered) in an automatic manner in the absence of contextual information to the contrary. This GCI is cancellable, as the speaker can always (plausibly) deny having intended *lie* to be communicated.

The defeasible nature of such inferences can be illustrated by the following example in which Winston Churchill uses the phrase 'terminological inexactitude' during the 1906 election campaign in its literal sense of 'inexact terminology' rather than euphemistically meaning 'lie':

The conditions of the transvaal ordinance ... cannot in the opinion of His Majesty's Government be classified as slavery; at least, that word in its full sense could not be applied without a risk of terminological inexactitude.

With frequent use, the conventionalized pragmatic meanings can be reanalyzed as semantic meanings as "in the course of time inferences do become references" in language use (Bolinger 1971: 522).

In addition to the GCIs, which are inferential routines with which a particular linguistic form can become associated due to being frequently used in a particular way, higher-level explicatures can be derived to the effect that *the speaker is being euphemistic/indirect/misleading/deceptive in saying that P*

An array of relevance-seeking non-automatic strong and weak particularized conversational implicatures can also be derived depending on the context of utterance and the speaker's intention underlying its use. The hearer may draw inferences that the speaker is *endorsing the proposition expressed by the euphemistic form, expressing the attitude of moral disengagement towards the proposition expressed by the dispreferred form, regards lying as 'necessary evil' and tries to cushion the blow.*

The following section considers the possible sources of the alleged associative contamination of euphemisms/PC.

9.3 The sources of associative contamination

This section looks into the possibility of linking research findings in the area of negativity bias with the phenomenon of associative contamination of euphemisms to explain the mechanism underlying this process from the cognitive-pragmatic standpoint.

Wałaszewska (2010) emphasizes that the repeated use of euphemistic expressions is not the only explanation of the fact that taboo associations typically grow so powerful as to cross the boundary between the encyclopedic and logical entries. In discussing the importance of relative salience of taboo concepts for this transfer of assumptions she quotes research by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) who discovered a general tendency for any derogatory or unfavorable connotation within a language expression to dominate the interpretation of its immediate context due to the much higher emotional effect their use produces, or as Allan and Burridge (2006: 244) put it, taboo sense are so salient that they will dominate or even suppress other sense of a language expression employed as a euphemism.

Regarding the possible source of taboo contamination of euphemisms we can list evidence collected by Baumeister et al. (2001) from multiple areas including reactions to events, close relationships, social interactions in general, emotions, learning, neurological processes, child development, social support, information processing, memory, etc., according to which “bad is stronger than good”. The authors reason that the pattern is so pervasive that it cannot be maladaptive at the evolutionary level. They argue that *bad* is stronger than *good* because bad signals the need for change which generally enhances evolutionary fitness. This idea of the negativity bias as an adaptively meaningful mechanism has been expressed by Pratto and John (1991) (among others). They argue that it is of evolutionary advantage that our attention is selective and is directed toward negative information. They consider this attention bias towards the bad an “automatic vigilance strategy”, i.e. a type of cognitive vigilance that directs us to pick up with more attention certain types of information which are essentially negative in the sense that they bear undesirable consequences; thus this particular cognitive vigilance driven towards handling negative information constitutes a kind of negativity heuristic or *bias*.

A number of studies have noted various manifestations of the cognitive vigilance induced by the negativity bias. Zhuo (2007), for instance, shows that the lexical semantics of emotive intensifiers in German, English and Chinese can be best explained in a cognitive-affective model of negativity bias. The author quotes empirical evidence confirming that the negativity bias is an automatic tendency to pay significantly more attention to unpleasant than

pleasant information. Negative events have, so to speak, a greater impact on people's behavior than positive events. The author concludes that threat-relevant negative emotions, including fear, anger and disgust, exercise greater power on our cognition and linguistic behavior: "Given the role played by emotions in selective attention, the negativity bias logically boils down to the asymmetrical entrenchment of emotions: threat-relevant negative emotions are more entrenched than positive emotions" (Zhuo 2007: 421).

The negativity bias is about the special attention paid by humans to negativity on the occurrence of specific negative informational events. This goes, however, well with another feature of cognition which is about humans mostly focusing on 'good things' at a more general level (i.e. in the absence of negative specific informational events). This cognitive bias oriented towards the positive is manifest, again, in the use of language itself. Boucher and Osgood (1969) claim that there is a universal human tendency to use evaluatively positive words more frequently, diversely and facilely than evaluatively negative words or, as they put it more simply, that "humans tend to 'look on (and talk about) the bright side of life.'" This hypothesis, which they named *Polyanna hypothesis* after the 1913 novel *Pollyanna* by E.H. Porter describing a girl who always tries to find something to be glad about in every situation, has been echoed by subsequent research concerned with more specific asymmetries in the use of positive and negative words (Cooper and Ross 1975; Kelly 2000).

Interestingly, the Polyanna effect does in fact provide an explanation for the general principles behind the pragmatics of euphemistic and politically correct communication. Crucially, the central mechanism underlying these verbal strategies is the avoidance of some dispreferred alternatives. That is, these positive strategies are based on the presupposition of the negativity of certain codes that are considered derogatory, offensive etc., and which as such are expected to attract biased negative attention.

Speakers give preference to positive topics and to linguistic units with more positive connotations. In the sense that universally verbal choice is shaped by an awareness of *wordrisks*, to adopt Crystal's (2006) concept, and a desire for auspiciousness, harmony and other things along similar lines, the Pollyanna effect, very much like the euphemism treadmill, is ultimately motivated by fear and avoidance of the negative, which amounts to saying that it is ultimately motivated pragmatically by the need to control the cognitive vigilance intervening in the processing of negative topics and words, that is the negativity bias.

Zhuo (2007) argues that while the Pollyanna effect does mean that humans tend to talk about the bright side of life, this is not the same as *looking to the bright side of life*. Positive words help us construct the bright side of life and protect us from the uncomfortable truth and we use positive words rather than negative words to stay out of trouble. On this risk avoidance view, our aversion to negative words in language use is best understood as being motivated by our instinctive vigilance towards potential threats. Therefore, Zhuo (2007) suggests that the positivity bias must be thought of as derivational from the negativity bias and inexplicable without reference to it.

Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) identify a general tendency for any derogatory or unfavorable connotation within a language expression to dominate the interpretation of its immediate context. Taboo senses are so salient in discourse that they will dominate or even suppress other senses of a language expression employed as a euphemism (Allan and Burridge 2006: 244). Wałaszewska (2010: 71) relates this phenomenon to the fact that the emotional impact of words fleshing out taboo concepts is much higher than that of words realizing non-taboo concepts: “The special nature of the taboo contamination process results from the nature of the taboo concept, whose associations pervade the meaning of the general, underspecified expression selected as a euphemism for that concept”. Wałaszewska (2010: 72) concludes that this way the axiologically-neutral, underspecified expression is narrowed to the taboo sense, whose psychological salience drives out positive implications beyond the boundaries of the logical or even encyclopedic entry.

Conceptual narrowing, regarded by Wałaszewska’s (2010) as responsible for the construction of euphemistic meanings and euphemism treadmill, is not the only lexical-pragmatic process, viewed in RT as responsible for the construction of ad hoc concepts. As the examples below show, euphemistic/PC interpretations can also arise as a result of conceptual broadening, i.e. by sense developments resulting in polysemy:

(59)

Renee: Why are you so uptight?

*Bree: Well, compared to you, a woman who paid for our drinks by showing off **the Bronte sisters**.*

Renee: The Bronte sisters? Geez, even your boob jokes are repressed.

(“Desperate Housewives” Season 8 Episode 11)

(60)

Kate: How are you feeling?

Charlie: *Sad.*

Kate: *Do you want me to take you to **Carlsbad Caverns** (A National Park in New Mexico, USA – A.S.)?*

Charlie: *Is that a euphemism for **something else**?*

Kate: *Yes.*

Charlie: *Then yes.*

(“Anger Management” Season 1 Episode 3)

Wąlaszewska’s (2010) seminal analysis of ‘general for specific’-based euphemisms from the point of view of relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatics covers cases where SOMETHING ELSE is narrowed to SOMETHING ELSE* meaning ‘sexual intercourse’, although it is highly doubtful that this particular substitution will ever become so lexicalized as to be subject to taboo contamination and euphemism treadmill.

Wąlaszewska’s analysis, however, does not cover the lexical pragmatic process of conceptual broadening and, therefore, could not be extended to, for instance, the case where THE BRONTE SISTERS in the example (59) and CARLSBAD CAVERNS in the example (60) are broadened to THE BRONTE SISTERS* and CARLSBAD CAVERNS* and acquire the emergent properties of ‘female reproductive organs’.

It is tempting to make an assumption here that these particular euphemistic metaphorical interpretations come to life as a result of a very strong non-propositional imagistic component⁷⁵ of its meaning, while its euphemistic nature allows for plausible deniability, i.e. the speaker can always deny having suggested sexual intercourse in the example (60). Kate uses “Carlsbad Caverns” to test whether Charlie is expecting this kind of innuendo from her. When Charlie readily interprets that expression as an illicit invitation to a sexual intercourse, he is still not sure whether his interpretation is correct, which prompts him to resort to a euphemism of his own *something else* in order to reserve some plausible deniability for himself.

Comparing the cases of narrowing and broadening, a conclusion can be made to the effect that *since broadening actually increases the number of weak explicatures derivable from the utterance containing a novel euphemistic locution, only the relevant assumptions from encyclopedic entries of ad hoc concepts formed as a result of narrowing the original*

⁷⁵ As previously discussed, Recanati (2004) suggests that the so-called primary pragmatic processes responsible for the derivation of explicit content of utterances or ‘what is said’ are of associative-imagistic nature rather than inferential. See also Carston (2010) and Wilson (2010).

lexicalized concept to its tabooed sense will carry over to their logical entries, thereby inviting the subsequent treadmill.

As a consequence, the x-phemistic explicatures of ad hoc concepts formed as a result of broadening the original lexicalized concept *will not become conventionalized* and euphemisms formed this way *are not subject to treadmill*. Thus the repeated use of the *Bronte sisters* for breasts, or *Carlsbad Caverns* for female genitals, is not likely to result in the conventionalization of the polysemous euphemistic meaning.

The assumption that only certain cases of euphemistic/PC use, namely interpretations derived as a result of narrowing the lexically encoded concept to the speaker-intended ad hoc concept, are subject to treadmill converges with the fact that many synonyms manage to coexist synchronically. It is striking, in particular, to notice, that many of the “chains of euphemisms” mentioned by Wałaszewska (2010: 66), e.g. the replacement of dysphemistic *mad* by *crazy, insane, lunatic, mentally deranged* and *mental*, simply do not reflect the true state of affairs in the English language. All the words from this chain, for example, successfully coexist synchronically in discourse and can be found in texts of many different stylistic registers. For example, “*umad bro?*” is a very popular current expression used in social media/online gaming communities to express strong feeling of dislike towards some piece of online communication. Additionally, there exist words and expressions, which endure for extended periods of time in their PC function as seen in the example of *black* used interchangeably with *African-American* in the media. Encyclopedic entries of concepts contain subjective assumptions such as those connected with personal feeling evoked by the concepts. That’s why *African-American* is used interchangeably with *black* by some speakers, contrary to the associative contamination view of euphemism treadmill. Some speakers do not have any negative connotations attached to the lexeme *black*.

It is interesting to note in this respect that the fact that the term ‘political correctness’ perseveres despite such associative contamination, points against the treadmill being an exceptionless rule applicable in all cases where negative connotations attach themselves to lexical units, thereby causing the need for subsequent onomasiological lexical change.

The vast number of terms for *toilet*: *lavatory, w.c., toilet, restroom, loo, little boys/girls room, cloakroom* and euphemistic phrases for using it such as: *powder one’s nose, pay a visit, freshen up* and many more all seem to co-exist synchronically in the English language. It is also interesting to note in this respect that direct nominations of stigmatized referents endure unchanged in the vernacular far longer than their euphemistic counterparts

and are not subject to the process of treadmill the way euphemisms are. Chances for dysphemisms to be subject to some sort of treadmill are infinitesimal as, according to the OED, one of the strongest invectives in the English language, ‘cunt’, has endured in the language since 1230.

Unlike PC proper, mock-PC expressions are not likely to be subject to the ‘treadmill’ either, as they don’t *mean* (or invite inferences of) any dispreferred non-PC counterpart that required substitution and, therefore, will have nothing to be “associatively contaminated” with during the course of their career in a vernacular. Thus it is probably safe to assume that the suggested introduction of *localized capacity deficiencies* instead of *traffic bottlenecks*, will be interpreted as mock-PC and will not require that further substitutions be subsequently coined.

The fact that many cooperative euphemisms endure in languages for a long time testifies in favor of camouflage hypothesis (see McGlone et al. 2006) and against the associative contamination one. Unlike the conventionalized cooperative euphemisms, the argumentative uncooperative euphemisms make use of any word or phrase and combines it in a particular way to convey the intended effect. I suggest that the euphemistic potential of expressions like, for example, *friendly fire* (accidental killing of one’s own troops) or *surgical strikes* (precise bomb attacks) hardly resides in the particular lexemes, but rather results from the paradoxical combination of a negative noun with a positive adjective: fire is a terrible thing, but qualifying it as ‘friendly’ makes it somewhat less dangerous or harmful, and describing bomb attacks as ‘surgical’ suggests that they are the necessary ‘bad thing’ to prevent a bigger evil. In expressions like these, less immediate and more reflective knowledge is required, if one wishes to understand their true implications.

Conclusions

Modern pragmatic theories agree on (actually built around) the fact that languages do not fully encode thoughts. They disagree however on the particulars of the processes responsible for bridging the gap between the meaning encoded in sentences by semantics and the meaning communicated by speakers uttering these sentences on particular occasions. They also disagree on what should count as explicitly and implicitly communicated meaning.

In his seminal work on inferential communication, Grice viewed pragmatic contribution to the determination of what is said as only responsible for reference assignment, resolution of ambiguities and indexicals, leaving pragmatics mostly in charge of derivation of conversational implicatures. Grice's views received subsequent revisions in both neo- and post-Gricean theories. Thus RT has reduced all the maxims of the CP to one overarching principle of relevance, questioned the cooperative nature of communication and the fact that speakers aim at maximum explicitness/literalness and showed that there is much more pragmatic intrusion into what is said than Grice had originally envisaged. Unlike RT, neo-Griceans kept Grice's distinction of conversational implicatures as generalized (going through unless there are contextual assumptions serving as evidence to the contrary) and particularized (going through only in specific contexts).

The two views differ in that neo-Griceans suggest that there are default meanings associated with the use of certain linguistic forms, while RT acknowledges the existence of default contexts of interpretation whereby certain contextual assumptions become associated with the use of some locutions. The degree to which euphemistic/PC meanings of lexical units become conventionalized relative to the context of use is therefore an important factor in their production and interpretation. I have suggested that consistency of the proposition expressed by the utterance with background assumptions about reality and about the desirable states of affairs are also crucial factors determining whether the utterance will receive a euphemistic/politically correct interpretation.

The theoretical significance of the approach presented here stems from the fact that it represents an attempt of combining theoretical insights from competing pragmatic theories to account for the phenomena of euphemization and political correctness. While RT is best equipped to explain the derivation of conscious explicatures and PCIs, which have to do with the recognition of speaker's intention, Levinson's GCI theory provides heuristics responsible for the derivation of the routinized automatic default inferences.

I have attempted to present further theoretical evidence against the charges of RT as being unable to account for such traditionally social aspects of communication as (im)politeness, face and x-phemisms/PC. In RT there is a claim that utterances are used not only to convey thoughts but to reveal speakers' attitudes to, or relation to, the thoughts expressed; in other words, they express propositional attitudes, perform speech acts, or carry illocutionary force (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 10). From the sociolinguistic point of view, euphemisms certainly have to do with establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, what in the realm of sociolinguistics is referred to as 'face-work', and their use reflects the social aspect of communication. Their use, however, is cognitive-based since the recognition of a lexical unit as a euphemism presupposes **knowledge** of what it is used instead of or, in other words, knowledge of what could have been said otherwise but was not due to considerations of face. In communicative situations this easily accessible knowledge is used for cognitive online processing of discourse. Thus it can be considered that the sociolinguistic concept of face is in itself a cognitively-based notion.

In the study euphemisms/PC expressions were regarded as representing a special kind of cross-varietal synonymy whereby the lexical units, dispreferred due to linguistic and socio-cultural considerations, are replaced by the more preferred ones having identical descriptive denotational meaning, but differing in the expressive connotational one. It was suggested that, based on the preference for one expression over another, x-phemistic synonyms can generally be conceived of as located along an x-phemistic continuum (dysphemisms, orthophemisms and euphemisms) where the replacement of one term by the other does not change the truth-value of the sentence containing it. These expressions differ in connotations due to differences in the way their production is framed. The use of *collateral damage* for *civilian deaths*, for instance, abstracts/backgrounds the loss of individual human lives. While *black* focuses on the skin color, *African-American* emphasizes the historical origin of this racial group as well as present citizenship. The 'intensional' meaning (as opposed to extensional) meaning of *blacks* is different from *African-Americans* as citizens of the USA of African descent.

Contrary to Cameron's (1995) opinion regarding the "insulation" and "disassociation" of hearers by resorting to euphemisms, from the point of view of their cognitive online processing, euphemistic use is not likely to have the intended "verbal hygiene" effect. Indeed, certain linguistic signs or "ostensive stimuli" produced by speakers can lead to making adverse inference about the type of the speaker and thus speakers have an incentive to alter what they say to avoid that inference to preserve their public self-image or "face". When

speakers produce ostensive stimuli to convey their meaning (to avoid the adverse inferences), hearers are nevertheless able to invert the signals and infer the “true meaning” lurking behind one’s words.

The study has determined that from the point of view of their production, lexical units – ostensive stimuli meant by speakers uttering them to receive euphemistic/PC interpretations, represent an attempt to *frame the content of what is said* in such a way so as to produce a specific perlocutionary effect of a ‘cushioned blow’, which can result in hearers drawing inferences to the effect that the speaker is being euphemistic/PC in saying that P, as well as potentially also leading to the hearer holding assumptions about speaker’s intentional evasiveness, manipulation and generally evoking the feeling of ‘not saying it all’.

At the same time, from the point of view of their cognitive online interpretation, the propositional content framed in such a manner will inevitably be processed against the background of the cross-varietal dispreferred member of the x-phemistic adjacency set of synonyms, which could have been resorted to, but was not. Thus euphemistic/PC language use is fundamentally grounded in the metarepresentational ability that allows us to infer speaker meanings from encoded linguistic meanings. The mechanisms underlying the (distinct) linguistic phenomena of euphemization and political correctness can be explained by on-line contextual modulation of meanings due to pragmatic processes operating at the level of individual words.

Linguistic meaning encoded in utterances containing locutions, which trigger euphemistic/PC interpretations in their audience, just like any other utterance, underdetermine speaker-intended meanings since languages do not fully encode thoughts. These interpretations constitute a specific euphemistic effect to the effect that the speaker is being indirect and is avoiding some stronger saliently dispreferred expression in saying that P.

As an account of ostensive communication, Relevance Theory sheds light on the way the ‘saliently unexpressed proposition’ is metarepresented in the processing of utterances receiving euphemistic/PC interpretations due to the naturally-evolved relevance-seeking nature of human cognition and the presumption of optimal relevance carried by all utterances. The paradox of the situation is that people are constantly encouraged to reinforce the salience of dysphemistic/politically incorrect words and expressions on their minds, by the very establishment that insists that such verbal hygiene practices be undertaken.

The choice not to resort to the salient dispreferred alternative explained by the ‘abilities and preferences’ clause of the presumption of optimal relevance is very important

for the discussion of euphemisms/PC as it explains that speakers do not always produce utterances which would be the most relevant ones at that time to their addressees. Thus speakers can, on the one hand, be motivated by such considerations as politeness, negative and positive face-concerns and resort to conventionalized cooperative transparent lexical units, whose euphemistic meanings are listed as such in dictionaries and the desire to adhere to verbal practices collectively known as ‘political correctness’. On the other hand, the decision not to resort to the salient dispreferred alternative from the x-phemic set of cross-varietal synonyms, can be the result of the speaker harboring a hidden agenda to resort to novel uncooperative euphemisms, jargon and doublespeak for argumentative and manipulative purposes, i.e. concealing or distorting some state of affairs on account of their not being advantageous for the speaker.

The relevance of euphemisms along with many of the ‘off-record’ communicative strategies, which are not meant literally, such as irony, sarcasm and hyperbole, lies in the fact that the speaker encourages the hearer to entertain a thought or proposition using encyclopedic information about their senses and contexts of occurrence. With respect to euphemistic/PC language, it appears that the dispreferred expressions, which the new language was coined to replace will inevitably be made mutually manifest along with other assumptions communicated by speakers during the recognition of the informative intention by hearers. These contextual assumptions can become conventionalized relative to some context of use.

The capacity of a neologism to be ascribed a euphemistic/PC status is contingent on the discovery of the underlying veiled or concealed taboos and politically incorrect/biased expressions during the process of interpretation since the labeling of certain expressions as ‘euphemistic’ or ‘PC’ carries the presupposition of the existence of dysphemistic and politically incorrect ones. The hearer must inevitably incorporate these presuppositions (e.g. mentally represent the politically incorrect expressions underlying the use of the novel terms) in order to arrive at the intended interpretations. In this, the use of euphemisms/PC expressions is not unlike ordering somebody *not* to think of big white elephants – while it is possible to incorporate selected elements by deliberately thinking of them, one cannot exclude the salient ‘*features of the norm*’ just as one cannot order someone *not* to think about

elephants⁷⁶ (Kahneman and Miller 1986: 141) since “when we negate a frame, we evoke the frame” (Lakoff 2004).

By resorting to a euphemism speakers show their attitude to the discourse subject and engage into a sort of mind-reading game as they try to predict or ‘metarepresent’ the sort of reaction mentioning a taboo subject or using a dysphemism will arouse in the hearer and thus attempts to avoid the negative emotional response by preemptively metarepresenting it. According to R. Giora (personal communication), there is experimental evidence that, ironically, for novel language to succeed, in the sense that people will start using it and adhering to it, the novel language must exploit evocation of the (salient) dispreferred representations it was coined to replace. This point is expressed in her Optimal Innovation hypothesis.

The conclusion drawn here converges with the idea put forward by Carston regarding the lingering of the literal. Carston (2010) proposes processing of figurative expressions on two levels, whereby the literal meaning is held mentally on a metarepresentational level during the course of comprehension, with the function of informing the outcome of figurative interpretation. Similarly, in processing euphemisms the dispreferred expression must be held mentally (serves as a reference point) in order for an utterance to be able to receive a euphemistic interpretation. Carston refers to this as “the lingering of the literal” (Carston 2010), a case of continuous activation of the literal meaning during processing, past the point of its contribution to the propositional meaning outcome as shown in a psycholinguistic study by Rubio Fernández (2008). Here the encoded meaning of a metaphorical expression is ‘mentally held’ in front of the ‘inner eye’ and can thus accompany the proposition expressed without interfering at the explicit level.

The very act of resorting to euphemisms/PC is evidence of the speaker’s desire to alter the hearer’s cognitive environment in such a way as to make strongly manifest to the hearer a new set of assumptions about, for example an event, a state of affairs, etc., which would normally be considered dispreferred, offensive, axiologically negative etc., framed as more positive than it really is, so that the hearers accept the new representation as true or possibly

⁷⁶ Such an effect is explained by the theory of *ironic processes of mental control* (Wegner 1994, 2002): “The mind appears to search, unconsciously and automatically, for whatever thought, action, or emotion the person is trying to control. A part of the mind, in other words, is looking surreptitiously for the white bear even as we are trying not to think about it.” (Wegner 2002: 141) The theory suggests that this *ironic monitoring process* can actually create the mental contents for which it is searching. This is why the unwanted thought comes back to mind.

true. The speaker aims at getting the hearers to conceptualize of something in euphemistic terms, as more positive than it really is, thereby attempting to institute the desired resulting change of perspective on something, which the hearer can accept as true or probably true.

Having reviewed the role of intentionality in the production of euphemisms, the study established that despite the view that utterances are interpreted as euphemistic/PC due to considerations to linguistic content, context and speaker intentionality, which stems from the RT model of processing, certain conventionalized lexical units are likely be interpreted as x-phemistic in most contexts regardless of the speaker's intention underlying their use, as the neo-Gricean view suggests. As a result, the x-phemistic values of some lexical units are established *only* in a special context, while the value of other units is always established *unless* a special context is present (cf. the appropriated use of slurs discussed in section 5.2.1). Clearly, if the latter weren't the case, lexicographers who compile dictionaries of euphemisms and dysphemisms would have nothing to base their collections on, as there would be no possible way to ascribe a euphemistic/dysphemistic status to a word or an expression outside of the actual context of use.

Assuming a pragmatic stance to the investigation made it possible to show how speakers invite hearers to draw inferences based on the linguistic evidence provided along with contextually available premises and existing background knowledge. It also provided an insight into what forms those inferences may take and what types of output they yield. In other words, the main focus of the analysis undertaken in this study has been the meaning-making process itself.

Embedding euphemisms within the scope of logical operator (negation, modals, counterfactuals) and propositional attitude operators shows that euphemistic meanings are part of what is said rather than what is implicated since conversational implicatures are not embeddable under logical and other operators (cf. Récanati 1989; 2003).

(61)

Peter believes there was collateral damage.

Peter believes that civilians were killed during military operations.

The content (truth values) of euphemistic assertions is not different in kind from their literal paraphrases. It is the manner in which they are presented that is different.

Responses to euphemistic utterances containing metalinguistic negation indicated that expressive meanings are part of what is said. Metaphorical meaning of metaphor-based

euphemisms is also part of what is said, explicitly communicated content and can be denied directly:

(62)

*Cf. also: He didn't **pass away**, he **died**.*

Did he pass away? No he didn't die.

Was there collateral damage? No, civilians were not killed.

In the example (62), it is the form that is denied by metalinguistic negation, not the content. At the same time, when speakers deny “There was no collateral damage” (or affirm “True, there was collateral damage”) they deny that civilians were killed, thus the expressive content can be regarded as part of what is said (truth conditional content) of utterances rather than what is implicated. The speaker cannot retort “That’s not what I said”.

Attempting to gloss over some dispreferred expression with a new coinage does not guarantee that the new lexeme will become the newly established convention of language and use. In some cases new units very soon become contaminated with the taboo topic they refer to and thereby the process of euphemism treadmill will be launched. I have shown that from the relevance-theoretic standpoint, the likelihood of this process taking place is increased in cases of narrowing the lexicalized meaning of a concept to its taboo meaning while suggesting that the treadmill is less likely to happen in cases of conceptual broadening involving ad hoc concept construction.

Euphemisms and PC expressions can be regarded as motivated by the economy of expression. However, at the same time they can be viewed as hampering conceptual access to the referent with the purpose of, for example moral distancing or disengagement where the hearer, guided by the principle of relevance, has to explore the activated frame in order to derive an array of weak implicatures in order to infer the saliently unexpressed dispreferred content. The use of some euphemisms can also “interfere with the order of accessibility of contextual assumptions to ensure that the hearer’s interpretation of a manipulative utterance only accesses a sub-optimal set of contextual assumption, crucially preventing her from accessing a dissonant, although optimal, set” (see Maillat and Oswald 2009).

The speaker may exploit the cognitive principle of relevance to manipulative predict what the hearer will make of his/her utterances. The speaker can *metarepresent* a non-verbalized thought or proposition that she expects and intends the hearer to entertain in a certain communicative situation. By recognizing mental states of others, speakers may be able to predict, for instance, which stimulus is likely to attract attention of the hearer at a given

time, which background assumptions will be likely considered in processing the ostensive stimulus and which inferences will be derived.

Manipulation can go through due to hearer's inability to choose the dominating interpretation to focus on (civilians killed) and instead he deals with multiple weaker implicatures (some unspecified kind of DAMAGE* (physical, moral?) happened which was necessary and inevitable). Ad hoc concept DAMAGE* here is broadened to include *killing* (Merriam Webster's definition of *damage* is loss or harm resulting from injury to person, property, or reputation) just as in the case of oxymoronic *friendly fire* (accidental shooting of own troops), two opposite interpretations of *friendly* and *fire* are blended into broader *friendly* fire** - a misused concept - an empty metaphor or simulacrum with multiple possible interpretations which has no referent. In friendly fire, FRIENDLY* is broadened to include DEADLY and therefore this constitutes a case of concept misuse or 'glittering generalization' – using words with positive connotations to denote axiologically disfavorable phenomena.

Experimental work of Rubio Fernández (2007, 2008) points to the conclusion that no matter how powerful the context may be, there are some context-independent aspects of conceptual meaning that remain activated during interpretation. From the GCI-theoretic standpoint, dysphemisms are such aspects of meaning and will be inferred regardless of speakers' intention by way of M-GCIs.

From the relevance-theoretic standpoint, there is nothing special about the way euphemisms/PC are processed online. Just as it happens during online processing of any utterance, following the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, hearers will test the presumption of optimal relevance communicated by an utterance containing a euphemistic or politically correct word or expression, considering whether its most accessible interpretation achieves a level of relevance that satisfies his own expectations of relevance, i.e. enables him to obtain the maximum amount of contextual effects that offset the cognitive effort he has to invest. In order to do so, the addressee will follow the path of least effort and expand her cognitive context against which the input is interpreted in various directions by including cultural metarepresentations manifest to him/her into the interpretation process – checking whether the proposition expressed by the utterance is consistent with her cultural/moral assumptions about reality and the desirable states of affairs.

Thus proponents of *collateral damage* or *friendly fire* can be justified in their expectations that in processing these linguistic strings hearers will follow a path of least effort and infer sufficient meanings and implications that make a speaker's utterance optimally

relevant for them. Following the path of least effort in deriving implications hearers will activate only some highly accessible assumptions from the encyclopedic entries of encoded concepts. The more familiar one is with an expression, as a result of it being conventionalized in a vernacular or due to it being salient on that particular individual's mind, and the greater the contextual cues, the less processing effort will be needed to understand it.

Thus the relevance of utterances containing euphemistic/PC words and expressions lies in communicating the attributed dispreferred content, as part of explicature derivation along with evoking a broad array of weak implicatures. The content of these implicatures can include reasons for choosing the particular linguistic form to communicate the meaning, i.e. referring to X by resorting to some alternative lexical form would be: biased, impolite, dysphemistic, politically incorrect or otherwise inappropriate. Along with this, hearers may derive higher-level explicatures to the effect that 'the speaker is being indirect/euphemistic/polite/politically correct etc. in saying that P.

Combining the relevance-theoretic and GCI-theoretic approaches, I suggest the following cognitively-based theoretical formulation of the euphemistic effect:

We have a euphemistic effect whenever it is strongly mutually manifest to interlocutors that the main relevance of the utterance containing a linguistic form (trigger) is achieved by pragmatically adjusting the meaning encoded by the concept associated with this particular linguistic form to include the saliently unexpressed in the context of utterance dispreferred conceptual content P as part of explicature derivation. The locution is perceived to be euphemistic by way of an automatically derived I-GCI when it is unmarked in the context of utterance, which can result in its being processed in a shallow manner. An M-GCI to the complement of the I-GCI will be derived when the locution is perceived as marked in the context of utterance. The euphemistic locution-trigger interpretively echoes P as "non-typical P" through an array of weak PCIs (thereby allowing for plausible deniability), while at the same time expressing the attitude of endorsement towards the proposition expressed by the utterance containing the euphemistic form. The derivation of P in the process of enriching the semantically underspecified content of utterances containing the locution-trigger subjects it to associative contamination resulting in subsequent euphemism treadmill.

Given the right context, even such unlikely candidate as *debate preparation* can be interpreted as non-typical DEBATE PREPARATION*, contextually broadened to include *sexual intercourse*, as seen from the following example from "Totally Biased with W. Kamau Bell" (Season 1 Episode 8):

(63)

Woman: I think the first lady did a great job of doing debate prep for the President.

W. Kamau Bell: So I am right that the “debate prep” is a euphemism for a...?

Woman: No-no-no-no-no-no-no-no....

Euphemisms/PC have to do with ‘how’ not ‘what’. They don’t constitute behavior, they are evaluations of behavior. Unlike metaphors, in euphemisms the speaker’s primary communicative purpose is to express her attitude. The focus is shifted from representing reality per se to the way reality is framed and the particular state of affairs is represented.

From the above discussion it follows that conventionality can improve euphemism’s concealing capacity since the more conventionalized a euphemism is the less effort is required to process it. Conventionality leads to shallow processing of euphemisms in discourse. Less familiar euphemisms require more attention and processing effort and such mindful processing inevitably triggers the underlying dysphemisms.

The use of novel euphemistic and politically correct language, paradoxically, reinforces the salience of dysphemisms or politically incorrect/biased language in the vernacular as the search for relevance inevitably evokes the dispreferred assumptions, which are part of the same frame as the preferred ones, as constituents of cognitive contexts constructed during the online processing of the novel ostensive stimuli.

This doesn’t happen in cases of shallow processing of conventionalized euphemisms and pc-expressions due to contextually lowered expectations of relevance. In such cases the content of the representation formed by a hearer may lack some of the implications of the logical entries of the lexicalized concepts in the utterance (cf. Allott in Saussure 2005: 147ff). That is hearers may fail to identify the axiologically disfavorable denotation behind the euphemism, i.e. the corresponding implicature will not be derived. Thus conventionality may confer camouflage-like properties to euphemisms as the more conventionalized a euphemism is relative to some context, the less effort is required to process it. Less familiar euphemisms or conventionalized for some use but used outside of the context relative to which they are conventionalized can also succeed in hampering conceptual access to the disfavorable referents. However these euphemisms require more attention/processing effort and their mindful processing inevitably leads to the (public or private) metarepresentation of the underlying dysphemisms in search for an optimally relevant interpretation and this reinforces their salience in discourse.

For example, as ‘collateral damage’ becomes more conventionalized, its efficiency at camouflaging ‘death of civilians’ increases. In other words, the more marked a euphemism is in discourse the lower is its euphemistic potential (it is interpreted by way of Levinson’s M-implicature). On the contrary the more the PC expression stands out, the better it performs its function of bringing people’s unconscious biases to consciousness.

The goal of bringing people’s unconscious biases to consciousness cannot be limited to challenging salient biased expressions as it is achieved by replacing them and can only have a higher-order objective - disposing of these terms thereby stopping their effect on thought. The change in underlying social context and stance is a condition for salient meanings not to continue to be evoked.

Euphemisms/PC become relevant to hearers when they are incompatible with hearer’s existing assumptions regarding some state of affairs. More generally, only when assumptions made manifest by the euphemistic utterance are incompatible with the mutually manifest assumptions, are euphemisms/P relevant. In other words, there is always a point of view in language, but we are apt to notice it only when it is not one we share (Cameron 1995: 73-74).

I would like to conclude my discussion by succinctly summarizing the above analysis with a quote from a recent TED talk by an etymologist M. Forsyth (2012):

“Reality changes words far more than words can ever change reality”.

The account presented in the thesis can be extended by considering the sources of information that feeds the two types of pragmatic inference and the interaction between them. In addition to strategies of indirectness reflecting the lexical choices individual speakers make, further research could consider cases of passivization, omission, nominalization as well as discursive indirectness, which may not necessarily make use of euphemistic/PC locutions.

The thesis focused on euphemisms and PC-related language in the English-speaking discourse as instances of intralingual interpretive use. It would also be interesting to provide a relevance-theoretic account of the “interlingual interpretive use”, that is of translation of euphemisms (taboos, euphemisms, PC words and expressions as well as slurs) into different languages.

Investigations of the nature of metaphoric and metonymic mappings responsible for the derivation of euphemistic and PC meanings, could benefit from combining relevance-theoretic and cognitive linguistic approaches to account for the so-called emergent properties, following the recent trend pointed out by researchers working within the frameworks of the two theories (for example, Tendahl, Gibbs and Wilson).

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