“Sociolinguistics Analysis of Euphemism in Maare Fulfulde”

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Abstract: Euphemism is an issue of sociolinguistics used in both past and contemporary society because it is the language behaviour of a group of people. Euphemism is a word or series of words which replaces sad, unpleasant or shocking ideas with softer and nicer expressions. But in fulbeaare euphemism is unique, it has been categorized into domains e.g. religious, excretion, death etc. another uniqueness of it is that, it’s not just replacing of unpleasant and what have you, even the accepted and pleasant words/phrases will be euphemized because of its(fulbe) doctrine called Pulaaku. Pulaaku is a fulbe code of conduct related to shame or shyness which they are known with, and this sometimes makes them to use pleasant and accepted words/phrases in indirect words or phrases for a leisure and style in the use of their language.

Keywords: Euphemism, sociolinguistics, domain, word(s), phrase(s) and fulbemaare

I. INTRODUCTION

The word "euphemism" comes from the Greek word "euphemos", meaning "auspicious/good/ fortunate speech" which in turn is derived from the Greek root- words "eu", "good/well"+"pheme" "speech / speaking". The "eupheme" was originally a word or phrase used in place of a religious word or phrase that should not be spoken aloud especially the taboo words (Wikipedia, 2006: 1).

Within any society, people are organized into groups. These groups can be characterized in terms of shared attitudes and beliefs, which are expressed by the accepted behaviour of the members of the group, including, of course, their language behaviour. Thus, common attitudes, beliefs and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language. For example, what they choose to say and how they say it. However, certain words in all societies are unacceptable for social or cultural reasons; they are considered taboo-words. What acts or words are forbidden reflect the particular customs, beliefs, attitudes and views of the society. In addition, some words may be used in certain circumstances and not in others. In certain societies, words which have religious connotations are considered profane if use outside the formal or religious ceremonies. Another type of words which are related to death, sex and natural bodily functions, make up a large part of the set of taboo-words of many cultures. The existence of taboo-words or taboo ideas stimulates the creation of euphemism. (Fromkin, 1983: 266-70).

These issues gave birth to new euphemisms prove to be nonce terms, while those that are ratified through reuse as true euphemisms may last for generations or centuries, while others fade away or develop into unconscious euphemisms which are still in used but reflexively without thought of their checked origins. However, euphemisms are embedded so deeply in our languages. Few people including those who are pride of speaking plain language i.e. without jargon, slang, code mixing, code switching etc. can ever get through a day without using euphemism. In other words, euphemisms have become a part of our everyday language.

Euphemism is a word or series of words which replaces sad, unpleasant or shocking ideas with softer and nicer expressions. For instance: “departure from life” is a euphemism for “death”. Examples are as follow:

1. Rose’s father is a gentleman on the high way. (He is an armed rubber)
2. The young school girl has been put in family way. (she has been impregnated)
3. The thug has gone to the white college. (he has gone to prison)
4. The beautiful lady is every man’s wife. (she is loose/immoral)

In the examples above, it can be observed that a word/phrase have being substituted to mild or subtle instead of the offensive or direct word.

So also, many languages of the world use Euphemisms where unpleasant or direct words or phrases are substituted with a mild and indirect words or phrases. But in some languages the substitution may be beyond
harschness or directness of the words or phrases. Fulfulde for example, the use of euphemism is beyond harschness or unpleasant. It becomes a style or a mastery of the language will make the speakers use euphemisms in the language. More so, Fulɓe have a doctrine called Pulaaku (shame or shyness). This is a code that controls them in their activities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rawson (1981:1) pointed out that, “Euphemisms are powerful linguistic devices which are embedded so deeply in our language that few of us, even those who pride themselves on being plain spoken ever get through a day without using them”. While Asher (1994:1180) considered euphemism as “sounding good, instead of blunt or coarse words”. He goes on to say that euphemisers prefer bland or enhancing terms and gives example of ancient Greeks who propitiated the implacable furies by calling them ‘Eumerides’, the good tempered-ones’, as they feared invoking them by their right name “erinyes”. Asher also observed that some experiences in people’s lives are too vulnerable to be discussed freely without safeguards and gave examples of the major subjects of anxiety or shame as death, the supernatural, sexuality, the body, illness among others and pointed out that the precise areas of taboo are culture and era-specific, but the urge to vet or veto is timeless. He concluded by stating that, “Euphemisms provide a way of speaking about the unspeakable. It falls midway between transparent discourse and total prohibition” Asher (ibid: 1181). The point being made is that, in a conversation, an interlocutor is able to select a word or phrase which sounds better than the other in line with words used. The perspective presented by Asher shows that euphemisms are substitute of an agreeable or less offensive expressions in place of one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the receiver or make it less troublesome for the speaker, in the case of doublespeak. The deployment of euphemisms is a central aspect within the public application of political correctness.

Stockwell (2002) associated euphemisms with taboo and went further to identify sex, death, war, defecation and all manners of social unpleasantness as areas. On the other hand, Crystal (2002) observed that the taboo language is a language which is in times when people avoid a taboo item by replacing it with a more technical term commonly happens in medicine, where terms such as anus, genital, vagina and penis are not mentioned directly instead euphemisms are used in form of medical terms. Burridge (2004:199) supported Stockwell (2002) and Crystal (2002) by stating that, “taboo is revolting, untouchable, filthy, unmentionable, dangerous, disturbing, and thrilling but above all, powerful.” Crystal (2000) referred to taboo as language avoided to be used by people in polite society either because they believed them as harmful or felt them embarrassing or offensive e. g. death (harm) and supernatural or merely vague discomfort deserving from a half believed superstition. According to Crystal, words or expressions are classified as taboo because they might be embarrassing as those referring to sexual act and its consequences or offensive as those referring to various substances exuded by the body and different forms of physical, mental and social abnormality. Usually taboo words are avoided by replacing them with a more technical terms, so, these technical terms are usually associated with euphemisms.

Another specific purpose of euphemism is to facilitate the avoidance of taboo words. In modern times, most of the taboo terms are avoided because their use is regarded as distasteful within a given social context. Some speakers claimed that, to utter taboo terms would offend their own sensibilities because of the unpleasantness or ugliness of the taboo terms. In many societies there is the perception that violation of taboo would automatically cause harm (even death) to the violator or to his/her family members. For example, in many cultures the name of gods and devils are taboo and people manage to avoid mentioning them directly, otherwise they would be accused of blasphemy. In order to avoid mentioning or talking about taboo matters, euphemisms were employed as substitutes for taboo words than often result in anxiety, embarrassment and public shame.

Finally, from the available literature, euphemisms are used in order to show politeness. In modern society, the psychology for the production of euphemisms has changed the motivation for euphemism is not usually with such fears, but is more concerned with not harming the sensibilities of any parties involved. The most important communicative function of euphemisms leads to the art of showing politeness. From the above examples, it is clear that euphemisms are used as a way of avoiding to frustrate or hurt those in sorrow but to somehow please them by using less offensive words in place of offensive ones.

Competence in using euphemisms is an on-going linguistic socialization process throughout in individual’s life. Since euphemisms are culture-specific, they constitute the living and live experiences of individuals. They can only be acquired and used appropriately through the linguistic socialization process. This perspective is line with Duranti (1985) and Hymes (1972) who described speech events as “socially recognised activities that occur in specified situational settings, involving participant performing one or more socially relevant acts using communicative resources in conventionally expected way to achieve certain outcomes.” The point being made is that linguistic socialization .lk/constitutes the only avenue for acquiring competence in using euphemisms.

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III. DISCUSSION

Euphemisms in Fulɓe like other languages’ euphemism is a substitution of direct, unpleasant, offensive words or phrases to indirect, pleasant, less offensive and mild words or phrases. Although sometimes words are not even offensive but Fulɓe do substitute these words simply because of Pulaaƙu(fulɓe code of conduct related to shame or shyness) which they are known with, and this sometimes makes them to use pleasant, indirect words or phrases for a leisure and style in the use of language.

The following are examples of Fulɓe Euphemisms according to the three sociolinguistics domain of their usage:

1. Religious domain
   a) Taaskaago (preparation): this word is used when a person wants to be ready in doing religious activities such as performing ablution; he may simply say ‘haa mi taasko’ literally it take a meaning of (let me get prepared), but euphemistically it can take a meaning of ‘purification’.
   b) Odonloota; she is washing; this word is used to refer to a female who is in menstruation period; although many languages do hide this kind of words for example they can say things like; O donder al-aada’she is menstruating’ but due to the code of conduct Fulɓe known with, the sentence O don der al-aada is also considered aggressive or unpleasant, they rather prefer the first sentence Odonloota, means literally ‘she is washing’ but it actually means ‘she is in menstruation period’. More so, the sentence ‘Odonloota’ have a meaning of ‘he/she is washing cloth or something’. Therefore, the context determines the intended meaning.

2. Death and decease domain
   In this domain, words/phrases are widely euphemized in every culture and era. For example in English it is hardly to hear somebody saying ‘he died’. They mostly use words such as: ‘he/she passed away’, ‘he/she couldn’t make it’, ‘he/she rest in peace’, ‘he/she join the majority’. All these phrases and many more are used in place of the direct word died or death.
   In Fulɓe language, it can be observed that euphemisms used in relation to this domain in the examples 2a, 2b and 2c.
   2a. O walameans ‘he/she doesn’t have’.
   2b. O arda means ‘he/she went ahead’
   2c. O timmi means ‘he/she finished’.
   The Fulɓe sentences 2a, 2b and 2c written in italics are euphemisms for ‘death’. It is well known that all languages hardly pronounce the word death because it may sound aggressive to the audience rather; these words and many others are used to replace ‘he/she died’.
   2d. Meemtidọ ‘an insane person’, this is a euphemism use to refer to the mad person especially that has a slight mental disorder which is not reflected in the person physically. But mentally if a person misbehaves slightly such expression is used to refer to that person. Ginnaadọ’sad person’ is considered aggressive or unpleasant in Fulɓe.

3. Bodily parts and bodily functions (excretion) domain
   a. Yeeso ‘face’
   b. choofe ‘moist’
   c. poofe ‘male or female organ’
   d. Derkeejo ‘a child’
   e. Joonde ‘sitting’
   The words lettered (a-e) with their literal meaning are sometimes use euphemistically to hide aggressive or direct words in Fulɓe. Let us examine this in the following sentences:
   i. Nyoiiyeeso ma? ‘How are/is your eye/eyes?’
   In Fulɓe language you hardly hear a native speaker of Maare Fulɓe asking somebody who is suffering from eye problem about the condition of his eye. He will rather use euphemistic expression; ‘nyoiyeesomada’, means ‘how is your face’. This is considered more appropriate and less offensive.
   ii. KoweeetiOsosofay. ‘Since morning he didn’t urinate’. This expression is mostly use by Fulɓe to hide a direct expression such as ‘koweeeti o sillay’ the meaning is considered direct or unpleasant expression.
   iii. Koremaakowa’ari ‘his wife is pregnant’. This sentence has about two words use euphemistically, i.e. Kore ‘wife’ and tampudo ‘pregnant’. Fulɓe hardly use the direct words or phrases for this sentence such as Debbo maakuredu the meaning is considered aggressive and unpleasant. If a woman is pregnant of eight or seven month Fulɓe use a sentence like Koremaakotampudo ‘his wife is pregnant of seven or eight months’. Thus, in English we may also use an expression such as ‘she has been put in the family way, (That is she is
pregnant). But this expression mostly refer to the unwanted pregnancy (that is pregnancy out of wedlock). This is considered negative euphemism as Rawson, 1981: 3; Henry, 2006: 1 stated that, the negative euphemisms deflates and diminishes. It is defensive in nature, offsetting thepower of tabooed terms and otherwise eradicating from the language everything that people prefer to deal with directly. Thus negative euphemisms replace language that people prefer to avoiding. Examples include ‘harvesting’ in place of ‘killing’, ‘collateral damage’ instead of ‘civilian causalities’ or ‘deaths’, ‘relationship’ for ‘sexual relationship’, and ‘intestinal fortitude’ in place of ‘guts’.

In first column, second column indicates it direct usage in Fulfulde and the third column states the literal meaning of the Euphemism in English, while the last column states contextual meaning of the Fulfulde Euphemism in English.

A. Words or Phrases substituted from direct to indirect because of pulaaku

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fulfulde euphemisms</th>
<th>Direct Words/Phrases</th>
<th>Literal Meaning</th>
<th>Euphemistic Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chofe</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Moist</td>
<td>Urine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Oyeisocfugo</td>
<td>Oyeisiculugo</td>
<td>He went to make moist</td>
<td>He went to urinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tampudo/ owaaari</td>
<td>Keedujo</td>
<td>Disable woman</td>
<td>pregnant woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Oolo, oOdenwadaa, a laada</td>
<td>She is washing</td>
<td>She is menstruating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tampudo</td>
<td>Ndotiijo</td>
<td>Disable man</td>
<td>an old man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. O dastoyi</td>
<td>Owoarinbebbomaako</td>
<td>He pulled</td>
<td>He brought back his wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. O wadwuro/ Ohowi</td>
<td>Obang</td>
<td>He made a town</td>
<td>He got married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Haa mi taro</td>
<td>Miyahana hawosunul I want to go round</td>
<td>I will go to toilet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Doggere</td>
<td>Kwre</td>
<td>Running</td>
<td>Darnhoea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Derkejo</td>
<td>Bidajo</td>
<td>a child</td>
<td>The first child of a family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ohephthooremaka</td>
<td>Obesi</td>
<td>She identified herself</td>
<td>She delivered a baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Poobe</td>
<td>Bus/kuttu</td>
<td>Male/Female organ</td>
<td>Penis/Vagina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Bocooode</td>
<td>Kalle</td>
<td>Male organ (an adult)</td>
<td>Penis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Words or phrases euphemized from direct, unpleasant to mild, indirect or subtle

| 14. Dinsudo         | Bundo               | hollowed-eye    | Blind person       |
| 15. O heltaande      | Ofewar              | He/she is breaking it | He/she is lying |
| 16. O wala           | Omaayi              | He/she is finished | He/she is dead |
| 17. O ardake         | Omaayi              | He/she went front | He/she died       |
| 18. O sooyi          | Omairama            | He/she missed   | His/her beloved died |
| 19. O meeman         | Owuujam             | He/she touches  | He/she can steal  |
| 20. O onnetto        | Oonwuyka            | He/she tastes   | He/she takes alcohol |
| 21. Noyyeosoma?      | Noygitema?          | How is your face? | How are your eyes? |
| 22. O juutagtejejo   | Giddoraibe          | He has long sight | He is a womaniser |

IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have observed that Fulfulde euphemisms are words/phrases being used by Fulɓe to hide unpleasant issues and substitute them with the pleasant words/phrases which is applicable to many human languages in the world. Euphemisms in Maare Fulfulde may change from time to time for instance if the substituted words/phrases to hide a particular expression become popular among the speakers of the dialect, another will be coined or euphemize to serve instead of the popular one. More so in Fulfulde some words are not even aggressive in nature but influence of Pulaaku (Fulɓe code of conduct) they endowed with, might cause the substitution of the words to portray the image of Pulaaku.

It is only three domains had been uncovered in this paper, there are possibility of other domains that are left for other researchers to explore the area(s). We believed that there are gaps that need to be bridged because this is the nature of every realistic research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


