

**Research Article**

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## Euphemisms as communication vehicle in the Tiv language and literature

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**Abstract:** The beauty of Tiv language and literature is achieved when communication or discourse is laced with euphemistic expressions. Euphemisms aid in turning impolite utterances into polite ones. This study, therefore, investigates the communicative potentials of euphemisms in the Tiv language and literature. The study discusses formations of euphemisms, classifies euphemisms and explores the effects of euphemisms. Connotative theory of meaning has been deployed in this study because the interpretation of euphemisms is contextually and connotatively loaded. Methodologically, the author used primary and secondary materials. The author used a participant-observation tool for data collection. Being a native speaker of the Tiv language, the author collected, translated and classified euphemisms. Secondary materials were sourced from textbooks, journal articles, online sources and dictionaries. The following findings were made: euphemisms constitute phrasal or idiomatic synonyms; they beautify or spice our daily communication; they can becloud meanings. This study will benefit preachers, writers, lecturers/teachers, researchers, semanticists, public speakers, politicians and students.

**Keywords** – Communication vehicle, Euphemism, Literature, Taboo, Tiv language

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tiv, a language spoken in Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba states in the north-central geo-political area of Nigeria and Southern Cameroon, is rich in euphemisms. Tiv language has both connotative and denotative meanings that she uses for effective communication. The former kind of meaning refers to the suggested or implied meaning whereas the latter type of meaning refers to a literal or dictionary meaning. Euphemistic expressions belong to connotative meaning which cannot be deciphered by referring to individual words. Just like phrasal verbs, idioms and proverbs, in euphemisms, too, words or phrases are wholly taken together before arriving at the intended meanings. That is to say, in speaking and writing, euphemisms exist in colony or have a strong concatenation. Words are neatly strung together to enhance effective communication. This concatenation is what is well-known as collocation, that is, the company that words keep. This collocation aids the speakers and readers in comprehending euphemistic registers while conversing or writing.

There is no spoken (and/or written) discourse in Tiv that is not couched in euphemisms and the beauty of euphemisms in linguistics and literary texts cannot be gainsaid. Orators are measured by their mastery of

connotative language such as euphemisms, idioms, proverbs and figures of speech. A native speaker of Tiv that has a mastery of euphemistic expressions in their linguistic repertoires can save souls physically, emotionally and spiritually by avoiding shocking words and expression! Expressions that are euphemistically loaded reduce tension and anxiety, thus paving way for a peaceful atmosphere. Decent presentation of incidents, scenarios and events enhances harmonious co-existence and development. Where things are bluntly expressed, there is often anxiety, tension and fighting. There is no doubt from the foregoing that Tiv language has euphemisms. However, less scholarly attention has been given to them. Obviously, the thrust of this study is to investigate the communicative potentials of euphemisms in the Tiv language and literature. The study therefore discusses formations of euphemisms, classifies euphemisms and explores the effects of euphemisms in the Tiv discourse.

## 2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Literature survey is divided into conceptual review which comprises communication and euphemism, empirical review of scholarly works on euphemisms and the existing research gap that the available studies indicated. This subsection also deals with theoretical framework that has been adopted. Connotative theory of meaning has been deployed in this study because the interpretation of euphemisms is contextually and connotatively loaded.

### 2.1. Concepts of communication and euphemism

#### *Communication*

Etymologically, McArthur (1992) states that the word *communication* was derived in the fourteenth through French from Latin word *communicatio/communication* which means making common. According to McArthur (1992) and Crystal (2008: 89), communication is transmitting and receiving of 'information between a source and a receiver using a signalling system'. Bussmann (2008) defines communication in its broadest and narrower senses. In its broadest sense, communication means any type of mutual dissemination of information using signs or symbols between humans and non-humans. In its narrower or linguistic sense, communication is the comprehension which occurs between humans via linguistic and non-linguistic devices such as voice, gestures and mimicry. Danesi (2009) define communication as the exchange of messages via channels and media. The sole aim of communication is sending of the received information to the decoder.

Communication involves a sender (encoder) who sends or encodes the message or information to the receiver (decoder) through the use of communication media. These media of communication are known as verbal and non-verbal communication. McArthur (1992) identified three media of communications such as: tactile, visual and aural. Tactile communication involves shaking, grasping, stroking, pushing and punching and its study is called *proxemics*. Visual communication is communication that deals with facial expressions and body movement and its study is referred to as *kinesics*. Arthur attests that oral-aural mode is the main mode that involves speech and perception that shows a 'systematic visual reflex in the form of writing'. The concept of communication involves transmission, dissemination, sending or encoding messages to the receiver. The channels of communication comprise the encoder, message and decoder. The two well-known media of communication are verbal and non-verbal media of communication.

#### *Euphemism*

According to Rawson (1981: 1), the word *euphemism* has its etymology from the Greek prefix *eu* which means 'well' or 'sounding good' and *phêmê* refers to 'speech'. Similarly, McArthur (1996:357) states that euphemism was derived in 17th century from the Greek word *euphemismos* which means speaking well of something or someone. Bussmann (1998), Akmajian et al. (2001), Campbell and Mixco (2007), Winkler (2007), Abrams and Harpham (2012), and Richards and Schmidt (2010) describe euphemism as a rhetoric device in which a pleasant or polite statement replaces a blunt or taboo word. From the above definitions, euphemism is a rhetorical term, trope, figure of speech

that uses decent, agreeable, roundabout, polite, pleasant, mild, inoffensive, comfortable, peaceful, positive words or phrases to replace, substitute, use in a place of, in lieu of, instead of indecent, impolite, harsh, offensive, negative, obscene, unpleasant, coarse, painful and taboo ones. Euphemism serves as a 'phatic communion' and it is through effective deployment of euphemisms that painful truth can be expressed without causing any discomfiture to the speakers and listeners.

## 2.2. Empirical studies

In his words, Rawson (1981) stated that euphemisms perform the following functions: they conceal the name of dreadful things; they cover up the facts of life; they are used by governments and individuals to show only the befitting news; and they are part and parcel of language we consciously and unconsciously use them. Warren (1992) maintained that euphemisms protect the conversationists from offence and effrontery. Euphemisms serve as a polite way of expressing tabooed words such as death, excretion, menstruation, theft, sex and disability. Rawson (1981: 1) compartmentalised euphemisms into 'positive and negative'. According to him, the positive ones exaggerate the fact thus making it more prominent whereas the negative ones understate and reduce their importance. Udu (2009) classified euphemistic proverbs into eating and drinking, excretion or urination, sex, death and speech euphemisms. Eating or drinking euphemisms refer to words or phrases that decently refer to consumption of food and sipping or drinking of alcohol. Excretion euphemisms are those words or expressions that politely show somebody wants to ease themselves. Sex euphemisms indicate art of or expressions referring to having sex or sex organs. Death euphemisms are mild words or expressions showing deaths. Kaosa-Ad (2009) examined and compared how euphemisms are used by the speakers of English and Thai. Karshima (2010: 39) cites '*nan undu se*' 'has left us'; '*nan mase*' 'given up the ghost' to replace the harsh word – died! and '*Aluer ne mba tan akam yô, de te nen sha kurgbenda ga*' translated as 'If you are laying bricks, do not lay them on the road side' which connotatively means, 'If you are defecating, do not defecate on the road side where people can see it' as examples euphemistic figure of speech. Gómez (2012) stated that the two cognitive processes of conceptualisation involve euphemism and dysphemism. Burrige (2012) discussed the diachronic roles of euphemism and dysphemism in the study of language change. The author identified the characteristics of euphemisms such as addition of words, loss of words, distortion of phonological structure and semantic shift. Goma and Shi (2012) investigated death euphemisms in Egyptian Arabic and Chinese.

Their study is vitally important hence the two speech communities consider death as a taboo and euphemisms replace it. Ryabova (2013) analysed the devices forming euphemistic expressions and their roles in communication. Borrowing, semantic broadening, metonymic and metaphoric transfers, ellipses, antiphrasis, abbreviations, adaptations, use of negative prefixes, truncations, ambiguities are the devices that Ryabova used. Pan (2013) dwelled on the linguistic functions of English euphemisms. The functions performed by euphemisms include politeness, glossing-over, taboo avoidance and disguising. Par (2014) investigated the pragmatics of euphemisms and their usefulness in written or spoken discourse. Deng (2016) explored the phonetic formation processes of English euphemisms. These formation processes are tone changing, phonetic distortion, acronym and clipping and repetition. Grinová (2017) classed euphemisms into sexual, bodily effluvial, disease, death and dying, economic, military and political phenomena. The study also differentiated between dysphemism and orthophemism. Sa'd (2017) examined discourse strategies that Arab speakers use in replacing tabooed expressions. Among these strategies are language of euphemism, code-switching, joking and witticism, circumlocution and conventional-fixed expressions.

Majeed and Mohammed (2018) centred on the functions that euphemisms performed in the *Evro Bahdini Daily Newspaper*. Dalamu (2018) deplored the devices of euphemism that stimulate advertisements of products. Zaid, Batool, Khan and Mangla (2018) looked at the challenges of using euphemisms by second language users. According to the above authors, using euphemisms is problematic because of the differences in educational and

social backgrounds, lack of exposure, many synonyms, mother tongue interference, differences in perception and communicative competence, and ill-trained teachers and faulty teaching methods. Prato (2019) investigated the potentials of euphemistic expressions in the political discourse and how they positively influence people's opinions. Hua (2020) compared English taboos and euphemisms, classified and showed a connection and a difference between the two. Cao (2020) used pragmatic principles in his study to discuss the pragmatic roles of English euphemisms. Felt and Riloff's (2020) study was based on the recognition of x-phemisms, a cover term for euphemisms and dysphemisms, by deploying natural language mechanisms. Parmis, Bantasan and Berdos (2020) explicated the role of euphemisms in spoken discourse. Inomovna, Gulyamovna and Qizi (2020) hinged on the classification of euphemisms in English.

In his study of Tiv synonyms, Aor (2020a) classified euphemisms as a type of synonym. According to Aor (2020a: 28), euphemistic synonyms are 'polite synonyms that are used to avoid harsh, indecent, vulgar talks or discourse.' The author expatiated that euphemistic synonyms are used in formal discourse, communication, religious, educational, political and cultural settings. The researcher maintained that euphemistic synonyms are used to avoid calling death, kill, sex, pregnancy, private parts and emaciation by their original names. He cited *agbaga*, *ashawo* and *akuna* (harlot or prostitute), *due won* and *za awambe*, (to menstruate), *goho* and *kande* (emaciate), *ii* and *koso* (bury or inter), *ikyom* and *orkpem* (corpse), *ityô* and *ikyur* (vagina), *jile iyol* and *wa iyav* (to conceive, to become pregnant), *yav* and *kpa* (sleep with, have sex with, sexual intercourse or fuck). In another study, Aor (2020b: 230) stated that 'clipping aids in the formation of euphemistic words'. He maintained that euphemism is a polite way of expressing something that is harsh, impolite, raw and indecent. He therefore cited some examples of clipped words that are euphemistically created as *anhyula* for *anhyulatyô*, an invective which describes small anus and it is a name of a local market in Vandeikya LGA of Benue State; *imbyor* for *imbyoroyungu* which means an 'ancestral pipe.' Other clipped forms are *ikpyongo* for *ikpyongotyô* and *ikpyongotswar* –are invectives that describe the shape of one's rectum and *tandyer* is a euphemism for *mtswantadyer*, 'name of a shrub.' Note that *mtswan* in Tiv language means 'clitoris.' These clipped euphemistic words – *anhyula*, *ikpyongo* and *tandyer* – reduce tension and add politeness to our daily communication.

Uzdi-Yıldız (2021) described how Turkey students use euphemisms in their daily communication. Her study was based on Gomez's linguistic formations of euphemisms. Ihtiyorjon and Sangcheol (2021) attested that euphemisms enhance effective communication hence the words and phrases used are mild, pleasant, decent and polite. The above co-authors discussed how new euphemisms are formed and they compared English and Uzbek euphemisms. The foregoing review shows that most studies classified euphemism, stated the functions of euphemisms, compared euphemisms between two languages, explored pragmatic roles of euphemisms, identified strategies of forming euphemistic expressions and discussed characteristics of euphemisms. The above scholarly works are based on English, Turkish, Egyptian-Arabic and Chinese euphemistic expressions. None of the above studies dwelled on the communicative potentials of euphemisms in the Tiv language and literature. Considering the efficacy of euphemisms as phatic communion in the Tiv discourse, this study attempts to fill this existing scholarly gap.

### 2.3. Theoretical framework

The authors adopted Connotative Theory of meaning in their study. According to Trask (1999), Crystal (2008), Martin and Ringham (2000), Baker and Ellece (2011) and Abrams and Harpham (2012), connotative meaning is a word, a phrase or an expression that has secondary or additional interpretation to its denotative meanings and this type of meaning is got through associations and contexts which may be positive or negative. Connotative theory of meaning has cultural, social and emotional undertones or associations. The interpretation of words or expressions goes beyond what words are saying. In connotative theory, meanings of words, phrases, sentences are implied,

suggested, associated and inferred for meaningful interpretations of a given discourse. Euphemisms, idioms, phrasal verbs, proverbs and figures of speech are within the purview of connotative meaning.

Connotative theory reduces harshness, impoliteness, unpleasantness and indecency in language usage. In a nutshell, connotations are used to avoid using taboo words in our daily communications. When taboo words are replaced with polite expressions, they change such negative expressions to positive connotations. For instance, if somebody says in Tiv language that: *Dooshima kpe* and *Dooshima nyuma guma*. The person is saying the same thing. The former means *Dooshima died* while the latter refers to *Dooshima bit the dust*. The denotative meaning of the former sentence means that it is actually the dust that she has bitten whereas the second sentence connotatively means she has ceased to exist. Therefore, the connotative meaning in the above sentence is more appealing than its denotative meaning. This theory is vitally important in this study because euphemistic expressions readily and politely substitute negative words with their positive ones.

### 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The ubiquity of euphemisms in the Tiv language and literary texts has not been adequately explored or studied by linguistic and literary scholars. The potentials of euphemisms in the spoken and written Tiv discourse cannot be gainsaid. The available sources that the authors gleaned from indicated that there is a paucity of critical studies on the Tiv euphemisms. In the Tiv language and literature, Udu classified euphemistic proverbs into eating and drinking, excretion or urination, sex, death and speech euphemisms. Karshima discussed euphemism as a figure of speech. Aor treated euphemistic synonyms and clipped euphemisms as a word-formation process in Tiv. Undoubtedly, no study has adequately treated Tiv euphemisms. The aforementioned studies partially treated euphemisms. The richness of euphemistic expressions in speaking and writing Tiv language can never be forgotten in a hurry. It is because of this relegation of the Tiv euphemisms to the academic background that this study seeks to address. This study attempts to fill the existing gap by forming Tiv euphemisms, classifying Tiv euphemisms and stating the effects of using euphemisms in the Tiv language and literature.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OR METHODS

The study entitled 'Euphemisms as a communication vehicle in the Tiv language and literature' used non-probability sampling. The authors have liberty to select words and expressions that are couched in euphemisms. They deployed participant-observation instrument for data elicitation. The authors are native speakers of the Tiv language as such they picked many euphemistic expressions as they observe and speak their language. Both primary and documentary sources have been used. Primary data were obtained through participation and observation. Documentary sources were got from textbooks, dictionaries, journal articles and dissertations or theses which contributed to conceptual and empirical reviews. As for the data presentation, the authors jotted down all euphemistic expressions they obtained and translated them. After translation, the authors discussed formations, classifications and effects of euphemisms as communication vehicle in the Tiv language and literature.

### 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study entitled: 'Euphemisms as communication vehicle in the Tiv language and literature' is trichotomised into:

- i. Formation of euphemisms in Tiv and literature;
- ii. Classification of euphemisms in the Tiv language and literature; and
- iii. Effects of using euphemisms in the Tiv language and literature.



### 5.1. Formation of Tiv euphemisms

Every language has a way of forming her euphemisms. The following are some of the ways of forming euphemisms in Tiv. These include synecdochic, metaphoric, allusive, descriptive and personified, idiomatic and relexicalised euphemisms.

**Synecdochic Euphemisms:** These are polite expressions that a part stands for a whole. Parts of human body are mostly used for forming euphemisms in Tiv. These are *u karen gôngor ayem* (testing the speed of somebody's throat) which *gôngor* (throat) stands for human-being that is eating. Again, *zwa* (mouth) represents human-being in *benden kwagh sha zwa* (touch something on the mouth) which means to eat food. Also *ikye* (testis), *ityogh* (head), *uma* (soul), *tough* (ear) in *kundu ikye*, *a yem ityogh tingir*, *Aôndo tôô uma na*, *haa awambe nya*, *a tim tough*, *a na uma na sha* connotatively mean death or to die. Furthermore, *gambe* (woman) in *u unden or sha gambe* refers to befriend somebody's wife. Lastly, a word *ave* (hands) stands human-being and to '... *za ve ave iyol*' (Akua, 2021:60) is a euphemism for beating somebody thoroughly.

**Metaphoric Euphemisms:** These euphemisms are formed without the use of 'as', 'as—as' and 'as if' to call somebody by the way they behave, resemble or do things. For instance, *ankper* (he-goat) is metaphoric euphemism for Casanova; *akpela* (mortar) refers to a prostitute or a harlot; *igbyur kwagh*, *Ter tseghe*, *atsormon* are metaphoric euphemisms for penis.

**Allusive Euphemisms:** These euphemisms allude to classical, biblical, historical, literary events or characters. These two examples are biblical allusions – *u ningir Yeriko* (moved around the walls of Jericho) and *ormee* (a snake or serpent). God told the people of Israel to move around the walls of Jericho for seven days and of the seventh day they move for seven times then the trumpet should be blown. This allusion means to visit a lady several times before she will accept. *Ormee* is a serpent that lured Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Any snake or traitor is called *ormee* in Tiv.

**Descriptive Euphemisms:** These euphemisms are formed by the use of descriptions. Private bodies are called *kwagh u nyanden* and *shin u kya*, to urinate is described as *keren gari* and *pande mngerem*, hot drink is known as *kwagh u tseen*, *kwever* describes vagina, *kpelanya* describes the movement of snakes and *u haan azer* means to be pregnant.

**Personified Euphemisms:** These euphemisms give human attributes to non-humans such as taking, biting, sleeping, moving and travelling. When someone dies, it is said that *a zembe tôô ve!* (Hawk has taken!), *jande nyima nzua zwa ga* (paddy has chewed without cleaning its mouth) and *a yem zende* (travelled). In the above examples, hawk has the attribute of carrying or killing human-beings; paddy has the ability of biting and dead person has legs to embark on a journey.

**Idiomatic Euphemisms:** These euphemisms have idiomatic meanings. Generally, meanings of individual words do not count in arriving at the intended meaning. For instance, *u eren kwaor sha kwase u or* and *u unden or sha gambe* mean to sleep with a married woman; *u unden agungu*, *u fan kwase shima* and *u nengen kwase idyelegh* connotatively mean to have sexual intercourse with any woman. Finally, *a za kohol u ter nav* and *a kundu ikye* imply that somebody has died.

**Relexicalisation:** In relexicalisation, words and phrases have different interpretations other than their denotative meanings. Thus, new meanings evolve from previously used words. That is to say, denotative meaning is out of place in the analysis of euphemisms. For instance, *ôô ishig/ashe* denotatively means wash face/eyes but connotatively refers to drink alcohol; *kwe* and *tobi bam* literally imply cavity and petticoat bank but connotatively refer to vagina; *nyôr gema* and *a yevese* denotatively refer to 'enter latrine' and 'he/she ran away' can be interpreted as he/she died. The above phrases changed their dictionary meanings to connotative interpretations when they are euphemistically used.

## 5.2. Classification of euphemisms in the Tiv language

For easy understanding of the Tiv euphemisms, the authors classed euphemisms in the following manner: drink/drinking and feeding, sex or private parts and conception, discharging of waste products from the human body, death or to die, prostitute or prostitution, tobacco and Indian hemp, animals, woman or to befriend women, arms and ammunitions and witchcraft euphemisms.

**Drink/drinking and Feeding Euphemisms:** These are polite words or expressions that refer to alcohol, drinking of alcohol and feeding. Alcohol is euphemistically called *jaga*, *ayashi*, *jebeleje*, *akpeteshi*, *zaa*, *tashi*, *burukutu*, *ihôrave*, *amine* and *kwagh u tseen*. *Ma* or *bende* (drink or touch) is used to describe drinking of alcohol such as *ma zeva*, *ma ikyôhô*, *ma amine*, *ma ibyer*, *ma kwente*. Furthermore, eating of food is euphemistically referred to as: *u karen gôngor ayem*, *u benden kwagh sha zwa* and *ushien defe*.

**Sex, private parts and conception euphemisms:** These are euphemistic ways referring to having sex, private parts and conception. Expressions meaning have sexual intercourse are *ta soho* (to sting), *wa anu* (put knees), *kpile kwagh* (touch something), *zoghôl iyol* and *nungwa iyol* (mix bodies), *sendee uganki*, *ongoo ihyula* (perforate hole), *tsa a kwase* and *yav a kwase* (sleep with a woman), *hungwa kwagh shin* (insert something in), *gbidye kpilingi*, *tuur ice* (push pubic hair), *gbidye igbir*, *u kôron kwase tseren* (encircling woman), *bende ken kwase* (touch a woman), *u zenden ken sule u tser u yô* (waking in the farm that is set apart), *u u wan iwenge* (put waist), *u nengen kwase shin ityô* (looking in the woman's rectum), *u hian kwase ityu yô* (scorching a woman with iron pipe), *u bee ana* (finishing with somebody), *u surun shima* (comforting oneself), *gber tsan-tsan* (strike quickly) and *u eree cômgo* (cleaning circumcision). To befriend a woman (*yaven* or *a wan/ kwase u or*) has these phrases: *sôôr kwase*, *keren kwase*, *u keren acômgo*, *u keen kon* and *u ningir Yeriko*.

Penis (*ijua*) is connotatively referred to by the following elocutions: *gbèlá*, *mise gbagbongon* (root of a tree), *igbyur kwagh* (yoke of something), *Ter tseggha* (Lord has marked or consecrated), *atsormon* (deprived of hair on the neck), *nomsoor* (manhood) and *nomkyer* (a cock). Impotency is described as *u yaven nderen ga* (does not wake up), *kulugh nyima* or (tortoise has bitten him) and *fetyô u unden gyungu ga* (he cannot climb a hill). Vagina (*ikyur*) is connotatively referred to as: *manyi*, *ityô* (rectum), *kwever* (cavity), *wan due* (birth canal), *kwagh u nyanden* (urinary organ), *shin u kya* (inside the goods), *ihyula* (hole), *shin anam* (inside thighs) and *mzangen*. Euphemisms for conception are: *jile iyol* (conceived), *u haan azer* (spitting), *a tôô kee*, (take in), *u yaan alev* (eating beans), *kwagh gba ker* (something entered), *ngu yôhól* (she is heavy) and *iyav zenda imor* (stomach is big). Breasts (*atumba*) euphemisms are *amaku*, *mtebembem*, *asegh*, *abakpa*, *vanger* and *ihyur*. *Tswar* (rectum) refers to *ityô*, *ikpongo*, *iniondo*, *kwagh teman* and *mtem*. Woman (*kwase*) is called *atumba* (breasts), *nyandeagbelan* (urinate on the shins), *orbyer* (maker of porridge), *gambe* (bed).

**Discharging Euphemisms:** These are euphemisms refer to the act of discharging of waste products from the human body. These polite expressions – *due won*, *nenge a shie na* – euphemistically replace *za awambe*, menstruate. To pass our water is politely expressed as: *wanger iyol*, *keren gari*, *u pande mngerem* instead of the harsh word *nyande*, to urinate. *Ambi* (faeces) is called *akômgo* and *akam* and to *nyia ambi* (defecate) is mildly known as *wa alôm icigh*, *za akômgo*, *za ke hyungwa*, *ta akam*, *za sha toho*, *haa akômgo* and *miase akômgo*.

**Death Euphemisms:** These euphemisms describe death or to die. Death is a taboo in Tiv therefore it has many polite words that express it. These include: *yem shin alu gben*, *ngu tyough ndor ga*, *rumun myila u ter* (answered Lord's call), *yem tyough tingir* (went head long), *jande nyima nzua zwa ga* (paddy chewed with cleaning its mouth), *yem zende* (travelled), *saa* (lost), *nyima gema* (bite latrite), *a nyôr akwati* (he or she entered a coffin), *kwaghnyion/ anger mbu gande/hemba*, *u kenden ve!* (you left me!), *a tim tough*, *a na uma na sha* (give up this/her life), *Aôn do tôô uma na* (God has taken his life), *a zembe tôô ve!* (*hawk has carried it!*), *u koughon* or *ibyer sha zwa*, *sule* (cold), *iyav elegh*, *mkulem haa kpa gber ngu hee* and *gber kpeese* (having still birth). Euphemisms for killing are *tese* or *gbenda* (show somebody the way), *ver* or *gbenda* (escort somebody), *kar a or sha* (take somebody away), *haa awambe nya* (*shed blood*), *u tôôn* or *uma* (take somebody's life).

**Prostitution Euphemisms:** These euphemisms refer to prostitutes or to prostitute. *Gbaga* (prostitute) has the following meanings *akpela*, *akpongo*, *akuna*, *kwase u gbidyen akpe*, *hòlôn* and *atôô*. The act of prostitution is expressed as: *gbidye akpe* (beating of bottles), *u nan agbo shin ikyô* (giving bullets in the forest), *u nan tar kwaghyán* (give the world food) and *u eren nyaregh shin tyô* (making money in rectum).

**Drug Euphemisms:** These euphemisms refer to tobacco and Indian hemp. Tobacco is generally called *taav* but when used connotatively, it known by the following elocutions: *akpena*, *kpômkô* and *koks*. *Ikya* (Indian hemp) is otherwise called *ahu*, *ityu i tamen*, *ityu jôv*, *gbedu*, *ganja* and *taav*. Smoking of Indian hemp is described as *tôô ityu i tamen*, *ma ganja* and *jinge/suse/tenger ihyugh*.

**Animal Euphemisms:** These are words or phrases that describe certain animals such as snakes and cat (*kpatuma*). Snake or serpent has names such as *tir*, *ormee* (tempter), *kpelanya* (crawler), *ankon* (a stick) and *tsuwe* (hook). The biting of snakes (*iyô nyiman*) is described as *tir mande*, *iyô gber*, *tsuwe gber*, *ankon kuma*. A cat (*kpatuma*) is called *icôngo chol* (raffia fox), *beer ka* and *hwa* (wild cat).

**Money Euphemisms:** Money (*inyaregh*) has the following euphemisms: *bashi*, *dela*, *iyôl*, *shan pam*, *asange a kyoboo*, *u ngu a kwagh ave*, *via ka shagbaor*, *or la ngu yôôyôô*, *ngu a rwam iyol*, *a mende shim u hyôôn* and 'akpoo', according to (Gyangyang, 10). Money is an essential commodity that people do not want to call it by its original name. To mention the word *nyaregh* (money) in the public may draw attention to the speakers. Money has many euphemisms that this study cannot accommodate.

**Arms and Ammunitions Euphemisms:** These euphemisms refer to the tabooed words – *gbuuka* (gun), *agbo* (bullets), *mbautyav* (fighter). It is an offence for unauthorised persons to own rifles in Nigeria. Therefore, guns and ammunitions must have coded language to express them. Words relating to guns are *igwa*, *gbough* (rod), *ityan* (canon), *kon* (tree), *cakpuun* (Dane gun) and *annamkyegh* (pistol). Ammunitions are variously called *ako* (batteries), *aka* (charcoal), *sham aturugh* (okra seeds). The fighters (*mbautyav*) are well-known as *mbatatov* (hunters) and *mbaakende* (big shouldered men), *mbakangen iyav* (those that tied their stomachs).

**Witchcraft Euphemisms:** These euphemisms refer to witchcraft and its fetish objects that wizards and witches use in their operations. Witches and wizards are feared that calling them by their names is inviting a disaster in your vicinity. Here we have euphemisms for *imbyorvungu*, the ancestral pipe such as: *imbyor*, *areki* (*Ark of the Covenant*), *antyô kwagh* (the head of something), *ityough ki ayu* (the head of manatee).

### 5.3. Effect of using euphemisms in the Tiv language and literature

Euphemisms have negative and positive effects that the speakers and writers appreciate. Both positive and negative euphemisms are intensively used in spoken and written discourses.

#### Positive Effects of Euphemism

**Euphemisms Figures of Speech:** Euphemisms are artistically used, especially, in literary works such as prose-fiction, dramatic texts and poetic texts. This figure of speech depends of its connotative interpretations. Writers who want to spice their books will resort to using words or expressions that depend on secondary association of meaning. For instance, Gondo (2006: 67) and (2007: 27) uses death euphemism to express the deaths of Tor Nyam Tsegba and Tor Gumnor Aberikya when he writes: 'Ayem ityough tingir' which is translated as 'He went head long'. Chia (2015) uses death euphemisms to add variety to his classical novel. These figures of speech are '... *ve tese nan gbenda u zan shin alugbem....* (245) 'They showed him the way to go the world beyond.' *Shido Agena, Kumashe, Kwase u Adan-Wade, yemo! Yem tar u alugbem shin ape iyange i duen ga la* (262) 'Shido Agena, the beautiful wife of Adan-Wade, left! Left for the world of no return where sun does not rise'. 'Nyoon (2021: 37) uses sex euphemism when he says, 'Gum or ugen, gema lu nyôron un gwe' translated as 'A young man was sleeping with (Orhena's wife)' is a euphemism that means 'A young man was having sexual intercourse with (Orhena's wife)'.



**Euphemisms are Substitutes for Taboo Expressions:** Euphemisms replace negative expressions. The definition of euphemisms clearly states that in euphemisms, indecent words, phrases and expressions are replaced by decent or polite words, phrases and expressions. Both spoken and written and written discourses are embedded with taboo words that are substituted with positive ones. Literary texts have multitudinous instances of euphemistic words or expressions. Udu (2010: 16) prefers calling Beki Faasema 'Mummy' instead of 'Concubine' so that people would not know his illicit affair with Faasema's wife. Nyoon (2017: 37) uses *zeva* in the place of *msôrom* (alcohol). Also, instead of using penis, Nyoon (2017:39) uses *nula* (syringe), *orapirashe* (blind man), *iyô* (snake), *dagi* (javelin) and *ikyav* (goods) to connotatively replace *jua* (penis). Using different connotative words to refer to penis provides many synonyms thus breaking the monotony of deploying one word. Akua (2021: 20) chooses *ishanpam* in lieu of *inyaregh* (money) in his dramatic text.

**Euphemisms beautify Communication:** Linguistic aestheticism is enhanced when communication is laced with a different form of meaning. It will amount to tautology if communication is fraught with denotative meaning rather connotative meaning. Spoken and written language is measured when language is laced with expressions that have secondary or associated meanings. It will be boring if our discourse is loop-sided, that is, monotonous sentential architecture. Our daily communication must be replete with euphemisms, idioms, proverbs, phrasal verbs and figures of speech.

#### **Negative Effects of Euphemisms**

**Euphemisms can lead to ambiguities:** Euphemisms are susceptible to different interpretations hence both literal and figurative meanings are lumped together. Those people who are not so competent in Tiv or any language that is laced with euphemisms may choose the literal meanings. It is obvious that euphemisms play idiomatic or figurative roles in our communication. For instance, to *ya elev* may literally mean to *eat beans*. It may also mean to *conceive/ to be pregnant/ take in*. Another example that shows sentential ambiguities is found below: *Tsebo yaven nderen ga* can be explained that: 'Tsebo does not wake up' and its idiomatic meaning is 'Tsebo is impotent'.

**Euphemisms hide the truth:** The truth of an expressing is often concealed when euphemisms are used. Individual words are highly deceptive. A story is told of a woman who strongly warned her daughter not to allow any boy/man to see her pant. The said girl obeyed her mother. However, she only knew pant to mean 'under wears'. One fateful day, the said girl was coming back from school and desired to eat some mangoes. For her to be safe before the prying eyes of boys/men, she pulled off her pant, kept it in her school bag and climbed a mango tree. Hmmmmm! It was not a funny sight to behold. Those boys who were under the mango tree showed her the ripe 'mangoes' to pluck. When she came back from school with enthusiasm, she reported to her mother how she managed to pluck mangoes amidst boys/men by carefully hiding her pant in her school bag. It was after her reportage that she knew that the word *pant* was euphemistically and synecdochically means *private* body or not to expose her body before the opposite sex. Ironically, those men or boys that were under the tree saw what the girl's mother did not want them to see before her daughter would marry. The above scenario clearly shows that euphemisms hide the actual meaning of words or expressions.

**Euphemisms avoid giving right names to people and objects:** In the society that is fraught with evil and secrecy, euphemisms are intensively utilised by avoiding taboo words that refer the names of people and objects. Thieves, armed-robbers, assassins are called *mbayev makeranta* in Tiv which mean students. Aor had a discussion with someone who said that that road is not safe at night because *mbayev makeranta*, students, are working on it. He was so curious to know such students that would even work at night. It was after my curiosity that he was told that *mbayev makeranta* are not just students but they are thieves or armed-robbers that torture, steal, abduct, kill and destroy. Euphemistically, the word 'students' refers to thieves, armed robbers and kidnappers. The following euphemisms are used in the place of their original words: *sule – kpe* 'died', *due won – za awambe* 'menstruate', *igwa – gbuuka* 'gun', *ako – agbo* 'bullets', *yav – kpa* 'fuck', *ityô – ikyur* 'vagina', *ityough ki ayu – imbyorvyungu* 'ancestral

pipe', *akpela* – *agbaga* 'harlot or prostitute', *utsva* – *mbatsav* 'witches and wizards', *Ufyagh-fyagh* – *Aôndo* 'God'. This roundabout naming can equally result in ambiguities.

*Euphemisms are used by people of the underworld:* Euphemism encompasses slangy expressions, antilanguage, idioms and proverbs. Thieves, assassins, kidnappers, ritualists, magicians, wizards, witches, drug addicts utilise them in their daily activities to avoid stating the obvious. These groups of people give variegated synonyms to obvious words to confuse the 'outsiders' – those that do not belong to them. They have euphemisms for guns, drugs, having sex, God, girls or women, private bodies, death, killing, smoking and so on. The non-inclusion of the majority of people in their conversations poses a serious threat to humanity. Their vocabularies are condensed with difficult words and euphemistic expressions that can becloud meanings. Someone's death will be discussed in his or her presence but they will not fathom the meaning of what has been said. Aor & Iorember (2021) assert that Chia's (2015) *Adan-Wade Kohol Ga* uses euphemisms to refer to human flesh/being: *bagu* 'monkey', *ikyegh* 'chicken' and *ikyegh mbatuv*. The above three words are euphemistic registers that are used in the witchcraft practice. Witches, wizards and cannibals will never call human flesh as *nyamor* (meat) but they have different words for it.

## 6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- i. This study will help clergymen and women to always use euphemisms in their homilies instead of obscene or vulgar words that may drive people away from their churches.
- ii. Writers of literary texts will also find this study relevant so as to avoid using negative or taboo words in their books.
- iii. Semanticists will give prominence to connotative meaning just like other semantic theories of meaning.
- iv. Feminists or gender fanatics will value this study for it reduces the harshness of using gender-based language which is raw and humiliating.

## 7. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- i. This study links euphemisms with lexical synonyms, idioms or proverbs.
- ii. This study encourages the speakers of Tiv to use euphemisms in their spoken and written discourses.
- iii. Pedagogically, this paper will help lecturers, instructors and teachers to always use polite expressions, examples or illustrations while lecturing, instructing and teaching.
- iv. Theoretically, connotative theory of meaning reduces shock thus concealing the bitter side of the story.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Tiv language and literature have enjoyed another form of meaning which has connotative associations that is known as euphemism. In our daily communication, euphemisms are consciously or unconsciously used to reduce obscenity and vulgarity. Language and literary experts simply view euphemisms as a figure of speech, rhetorical and literary device that replaces impolite expressions with polite ones. This study has proven that euphemistic communication has inferred, implied and associated meanings. This form of meaning spices our discourse and serves as a yardstick for measuring the linguistic competence of writers or characters that they use. Tiv language has euphemisms for sex, private bodies, thieves or robbers, witchcraft, hunger, madness, drugs, money, just to mention but a few. In order to use politically accepted language, euphemisms are judiciously employed to avoid stating the obvious vocabulary that may result in tension, shock and death. Euphemistic expressions are therefore significant in the society that is fraught with abduction, herder-farmer crises, robbery, ritualism, banditry, assassination, rigging of elections, communal crises, prostitution, pen-robbery, hunger and starvation, insecurity, examination malpractice and so on. Euphemism, therefore, is an integral component of connotative meaning that is enjoyed by old people, public speakers, writers, teachers/lecturers, preachers, students and government institutions.

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