Subject matter: Specificity of Euphemism Formation and Functioning.

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The given paper deals with the problem of euphemisms in modern English.

A euphemism is a generally innocuous word or expression used in place of one that may be found offensive or suggest something unpleasant. Some euphemisms are intended to amuse; while others use bland, inoffensive terms for things the user wishes to downplay. Euphemisms are used to refer to taboo topics (such as disability, sex, excretion, and death) in a polite way, or to mask profanity. Euphemisms may be used to avoid words considered rude, while still conveying their meaning; words may be replaced by similar-sounding words, gentler words, or placeholders. Some euphemisms have become accepted in certain societies for uncomfortable information; euphemisms can be used to downplay or conceal unpleasant facts, such as “collateral damage” for “civilian casualties” in a military context. Euphemisms may be incorporated in a number of ways. Periphrasis, or circumlocution, is one of the most common: to “speak around” a given word, implying it without saying it. Over time, circumlocutions become recognized as established euphemisms for particular words or ideas.

To alter the pronunciation or spelling of a taboo word (such as a swear word) to form a euphemism is known as taboo deformation, or “minced oath”. In American English, words that are unacceptable on television, such as fuck, may be represented by deformations such as freak, even in children’s cartoons. Bureaucracies such as the military and large corporations frequently spawn euphemisms of a more deliberate nature. Organizations coin doublespeak expressions to describe objectionable actions in terms that seem neutral or inoffensive. For example, a term used in the past for contamination by radioactive isotopes was sunshine units. Euphemisms often evolve over time into taboo words themselves, more recently called the “euphemism treadmill”. This is the linguistic
process known as *pejoration* or *semantic change*. For instance, *Toilet* is an 18th-century euphemism. In the 20th century, where the words *lavatory* or *toilet* were deemed inappropriate (e.g. in the United States), they were sometimes replaced with *bathroom* or *water closet*, which in turn became *restroom*, *W.C.*, or *washroom*. 