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**EUPHEMISMS FOR DEATH.
A COMPARISON OF AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH
CORPORA (COCA AND BNC)
BA thesis**

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the use of ten euphemisms for death in English using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNC) in order to find patterns in their preferences. The euphemisms have been chosen following a set of criteria in order to fit the scope of this study, excluding ones exclusive to certain subgroups or language varieties, verbose and arguably dysphemistic ones, and those with no notable search results. The resulting information has been calculated into relative frequencies in order to accurately compare the two corpora. Findings of the comparison are then discussed, touching on the similarities and differences in the preferences of the two corpora.

The first chapter introduces the concept of euphemism – the different options for its definition, why it is used, how euphemistic phrases work – the concept of (word) taboo and why euphemisms are often used when speaking about death. The chapter also discusses problems regarding the effectiveness of euphemisms, and finally introduces text corpora, which make tracking euphemism use in American and British English possible. The second chapter focuses on methodology, results of corpus queries, comparing said results and analyzing the info gained from their comparison. The results illustrate which euphemisms each corpus prefers, what they have in common and what they disagree on, and how much variation the two varieties show in their use of the chosen ten euphemisms for death.

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INTRODUCTION

Euphemisms are linguistic devices used to soften the effects of words or phrases that can cause discomfort in the speaker or listener, for example ones on the topics of excretion, sex, death etc. Their use is necessary to accommodate people's feelings and to create a mutual ground between speakers. The English language is rich in euphemistic expressions, and because euphemism use is heavily dictated by the taboos in different cultures, a comprehensive overview of the preferences regarding euphemism use in various areas of the anglosphere can offer somewhat of an insight to the culture at hand. Knowing when and where to use certain euphemisms can therefore help one fit in and conform to the communication style of said environment. This is an important aspect of language learning and can be aided by the use of text corpora, which help illustrate these different linguistic preferences. Thus, the objective of this thesis is to compare the use of ten chosen euphemisms for death in American and British English to find patterns in preference – which euphemisms they agree on and which they disagree on. The frequency information is obtained via the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC) XML Edition, which is then converted into normalized relative frequencies for accurate comparison between the two. After comparison, a short analysis and discussion of the findings will explain the differences between the language choice for speaking about the delicate topic of death in American and British English, based on the chosen ten euphemisms. Knowing which euphemisms each variety uses most and seeing how they prefer to conceptualize death can aid in language learning, as well as serve as a basis for future studies on the topic.

The first chapter starts with an introduction to what euphemisms are, the different possible ways to define the linguistic device, and why euphemisms are used at all, in order to help explain the author's reasoning when choosing phrases to compare. The following

section 1.2. introduces the meaning and history of ‘taboo,’ and the notions of word taboo and concept taboo, while attempting to explain the reasoning behind death taboo, and its potential consequences. 1.3. describes problems regarding the ‘successfulness’ of certain euphemisms, potentially elucidating the reasoning behind more frequently used phrases, and 1.4. introduces text corpora – what they are and what they can be used for, as those will be employed for the comparison of euphemism use in American and British English.

The second chapter focuses on the methodological and discussion parts of this thesis – firstly, 2.1 determines the criteria based on which the final ten euphemisms are chosen in order to fit in the scope of this study. The following section 2.2. describes the process of looking up the terms in the corpora and how this can be conducted to yield the most productive results, followed by 2.3., in which the frequencies obtained through corpus queries are normalized by calculating their relative frequencies in order to be more accurately compared between the two corpora. This is followed by an individual look at the relative frequencies of the euphemisms in COCA in 2.4. and the relative frequencies in BNC in 2.5. Finally, 2.6. looks at the relative frequencies in both corpora concurrently, and 2.7. comments on the findings, discussing their possible reasonings and meanings, and what sets one variety apart from the other in terms of euphemisms for death.

1. EUPHEMISMS, TABOO, AND CORPORA

This chapter discusses the different options for defining ‘euphemism,’ explaining the reasoning behind its use and how euphemisms are formed. It goes on to elaborate on the issue of death as a taboo word and concept, and how this problem can be overcome with the use of euphemisms. Using euphemisms for death can result in both lexical complications of ‘word contamination’ and social complications due to its avoidant nature, thus, the chapter also discusses the ‘effectiveness’ of euphemisms when speaking about death. To analyze the way death is spoken about, text corpora offer a convenient solution, which warrants a discussion of corpora, what they are, and what they can be used for.

1.1. Euphemisms

Euphemism is most often loosely defined as a word or phrase that is used instead of a potentially offensive one when discussing taboo topics. This is an oversimplification of the multifaceted linguistic device. In his book *Slang and Euphemism*, Spears (1982: ix, xii) elaborates that ‘euphemism’ refers to “the processes of avoiding, disguising, mincing, abbreviating, lexical up-grading and metaphorizing” in order to respect the etiquette of polite company. Casas Gómez (2009: 726) maintains that the word ‘euphemism’ has multiple ambiguous definitions ranging from the linguistic device’s constructional elements to its purposes, and divides the definitions into extralinguistic and strictly linguistic ones. The former group, favored by most dictionaries, is concerned with the psychological incentives behind euphemism use, and the latter with the linguistic character of euphemisms (Casas Gómez, 2009: 728). Extralinguistically speaking, euphemism is a device used for a variety of reasons, generally to avoid explicitly discussing controversial or uncomfortable topics (McGlone *et al.*, 2006: 261) by using a polite semi-synonymous expressions (Casas Gómez, 2009) or paralinguistic devices such as gestures, intonation, etc. (Casas Gómez, 2012). McCallum and McGlone (2011: 570) explain that this

avoidance of the negative can serve both selfish and empathetic purposes, either by attempting to uphold one's own reputation or by trying to soften the effects of the message on the addressee. Casas Gómez (2012: 46) highlights Latin philologist Uría Varela's proposition that euphemism cannot be interpreted merely on a lexical level, as paralinguistic elements such as gestures or tone of voice often take on a euphemistic role.

Furthermore, it is possible to discern different 'types' of euphemisms. Based on the development of euphemisms and antonymous dysphemisms (antonymous here being an oversimplification for the sake of brevity), Chamizo Domínguez (2009: 434) claims that the devices can be divided into three subtypes – novel, semi-lexicalized, and lexicalized euphemisms/dysphemisms. He describes these subtypes as follows – novel euphemisms/dysphemisms are generally used in restricted context and often require clarification, semi-lexicalized ones are acknowledged by standard dictionaries, and lexicalized ones have become the prominent meaning of their referent (Chamizo Domínguez, 2009: 434). According to Spears (1982: ix), slang and euphemism are the two primary devices used for avoiding taboo topics, and the aforementioned dysphemism (occasionally called counter-euphemism, anti-euphemism or cacophemism, according to Casas Gómez (2012: 50), although these all have their own nuances of meaning) can be categorized as a subtype of slang. Due to the line between euphemisms and dysphemisms being unclear, as it highly depends on the context, an issue arises with dictionary definitions. Burridge (2006: 458) notes that euphemism and dysphemism dictionaries are compiled with social attitudes in mind, and thus the extent to which something is deemed dysphemistic is based on a "middle-class politeness criterion". Additionally, Chamizo Domínguez (2009:434) finds that by definition a euphemism should be ambiguous enough that it could be interpreted as both its literal and its figurative meaning as well as have positive connotations, while a dysphemism should be explicit enough that the taboo

referent is prominent and have negative connotations (2009: 435). For example, although in wide use, dysphemisms such as *kick the bucket* are inappropriate in most contexts due to the negative connotation (Chamizo Domínguez, 2009: 434).

It must be noted here that euphemisms and dysphemisms are not always mutually exclusive, as Casas Gómez (2012: 48) points out the phenomena of euphemistic dysphemisms and dysphemistic euphemisms, the categorization of which often depends on the speaker's intention, and as Burrige (2006: 457) adds, the dialect group or community in which they are used. Moreover, as Casas Gómez (2012: 49) suggests, not all acts of courtesy in the form of euphemisms are necessarily seen as unanimously 'polite,' as a person may instead find it insulting if someone close to them addressed them in a formal register instead of a casual one. Conversely, phrases generally deemed dysphemistic may serve a euphemistic role in certain contexts. Burrige (2006: 457) exemplifies this with the dysphemistic word for death, '*croak*,' in which case "its flippancy detracts from the seriousness of death, which makes it preferable to a more direct term like die". As Burrige (2006:457) puts it - "There can be no such thing as 'Everyman's euphemism' or 'Everyman's dysphemism'". Furthermore, euphemisms are not always used to avoid taboo or offensive topics – Burrige (2006: 456) explains that they are prevalent in day-to-day life often with the intent of enhancing their referent with a more positive connotation, for example when calling the elderly 'senior citizens'. Although a wide definition for euphemism as exemplified above is justified, the definition adopted for the sake of corpus queries for this study is that of Burrige (2006: 455) – "an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face" (the dispreferred expression in this case being 'death').

1.2. Taboo and death

Spears (1982: xii-xiii) tracks 'taboo' back to the word's Polynesian roots, where it

stood for religious prohibitions that were followed by punishment upon breaking, whereas the modern sense of the word covers “any prohibition imposed by social convention”. Spears adds that in Western society, taboos are generally of concern only in public, especially in the presence of women, and usually include excretion, sex, death, and profanity among other sensitive topics (Spears, 1982: xiii, xix). For example, as Schneider (1992: 77, 79-80) puts it, death along with the physical and mental processes concerned with it — “loss of bodily functions /.../ the embarrassed family waiting at the bedside” — is a private matter “deeply vulnerable to shameful public intrusion and profaning violation”. With death being such a shameful and feared matter, the word itself has become somewhat taboo (Casas Gómez, 2009: 734). Crespo Fernández (2006: 203) exemplifies this with the attitude towards death in primitive societies, wherein some tribes are forbidden from saying the name of a dead person, or even saying words that rhyme with said name. Word taboos originate from the historically held belief that naming certain things will invite them into our lives (Casas Gómez, 2009: 734), which has been applied to speaking of death, among other undesirable things, in many different cultures. Casas Gómez (2012: 46) explains the difference between ‘concept taboo’ and ‘word taboo’ as follows – the first one is caused by the wish to not cause discomfort in the hearer, while the latter is caused by a personal reluctance. Word taboos, as Burrige (2006: 461) explains it, are a means with which mankind can shield themselves from topics that “threaten to cause distress and offense”. The exact time when word taboos emerged is unclear. Spears (1982: x, xiv) touches on the popular theory of Victorian prudery as the prominent force behind the spread of word taboo, although notes that this is unlikely to such an extent – albeit not entirely untrue – due to there being older and more widespread instances of the phenomenon. The Victorian ‘prudery’ theory in the context of death is further questioned by Crespo Fernández (2006: 104), who notes that Victorians were more so emphasizing the

religious consolations entwined with death than avoiding the word due to etiquette.

The suppressed topics that euphemisms are frequently utilized for include among other topics intimate aspects of our everyday life, such as our bodily functions (McCallum and McGlone, 2011: 566). McCallum and McGlone (2011: 566) explain that for some reason humans have deemed topics regarding their ‘animalistic’ requirements uncomfortable and private, only being explicit about eating and drinking while avoiding topics such as excretion, sex, and death. They go on to elaborate that this may be due to trouble accepting our inevitable mortality and weakness and can help us cope with it (McCallum and McGlone, 2011: 566). In fact, this link between death-related anxiety and discomfort regarding bodily processes is exemplified in McCallum and McGlone’s (2011: 577) study, which through self-report questionnaires filled out by undergraduate students found that the use of euphemisms about bodily functions was more prevalent among participants among whom mortality was made salient through preceding questionnaires by asking questions about the subject’s attitude towards their own death. Even the word ‘obituary,’ as Crespo Fernández (2006: 104) points out, is euphemistic in nature – from Latin *obitus*, which means ‘departure’ – another testament to man’s fear of mortality.

As death, among other ‘animalistic’ characteristics, is deemed uncomfortable to talk about, it is the social norm to avoid talking about it, and it is often the understanding that failing to meet such social norms can lead to exclusion from a social group (Chamizo Domínguez, 2009: 429; McCallum and McGlone, 2011: 571), the threat of which further reinforces the censorship of the taboo topic. Burrige (2006: 461) discusses the possibility that stepping over the lexical boundaries of another community may result in said members judging the speaker solely on their transgression and assigning them into a group that they believe speak and feel that way – racists, misogynists, etc. Spears (1982: xiii), in turn argues that such rules are “traditions of etiquette” and breaking them is merely the

violation of a social norm, which warrants no serious punishments. Furthermore, Walter (1991: 296-299, 303) proposes that treating death as a universal taboo is excessive, and that its avoidance is enforced by a common fear of the unknown rather than any unwritten rule. Such a culture is difficult to change, as Cacchione (2000) claims, elaborating that the society we live in is growing sensitive even to the euphemisms used for death. Conducting a study with terminally ill patients, Cacchione (2000) found that medical staff were wary of the term 'life-threatening,' which they equated to 'dying' so much so that they did not wish to assign such a label to their patients' conditions. Burrige (2006:259) notes that such an approach is somewhat inevitable, as euphemisms used specifically about death are generally with a consoling undertone, often shifting the focus from the end of a life to a new beginning. For example, in Crespo Fernández's (2006: 114) study of Irish obituaries, he found that the most prominent conceptualizations of death were that of 'a journey,' 'a loss,' 'a joyful life' (essentially an afterlife in Heaven), 'a rest,' and 'a reward' and 'the end' – in order of frequency.

It must be acknowledged that there is a time and place for such hedging. The use of euphemisms may also warrant criticism for 'sugar-coating' serious topics – for example, Habeck-Fardy (2019) highlights that medical practitioners often choose in favor of euphemisms when talking about death, while many patients wish for a more direct approach – as also expressed in Cacchione's (2000) study – and both the patient and their family members can be misled by the vocabulary used to express dying. This preference was demonstrated through an inspection of discharge summaries from an Australian hospital, which revealed that the euphemism *passed away* was used remarkably more than others when talking about deceased patients, and the explicit word death was avoided altogether in most cases (Habeck-Fardy, 2019). In fact, Schneider (1992: 86) clarifies that studies have shown doctors to believe that discussing death with patients at risk is

insensitive, while patients themselves disagree and wish to be as informed as possible. He also explains such phenomena by proposing that discussing death in hospitals – places of healing – is an awkward contradiction to our understanding of the healthcare system and a “humiliating defeat” (Schneider, 1992: 80-85, 87). Thus, Cacchione (2000: 7) raises the question – “is the physician or nurse protecting the patient or themselves?” Omori *et al.* (2020) emphasize that not only can the ambiguity of euphemistic language cause confusion in the addressees, but it can also lead to more serious issues such as inadequate medical care and distrust towards medical professionals.

1.3. Complications

Due to death being a universal experience, euphemisms surrounding it are fairly common and numerous, especially in western cultures. Crespo Fernández (2006: 102) even goes as far as calling obituaries “a breeding ground for euphemistic words and expressions [for death]”. Ralston (2016: 79) explains that death warrants a profuse number of metaphoric alternatives not only because it is emotionally difficult to discuss, but also because we can merely imagine what it is like – it cannot be accurately described. Ralston (2016: 80) adds that instead of having one comprehensive metaphor for it, we have multiple self-explanatory ones such as *passing away*, most of which serve a euphemistic purpose to address death in a more sensitive manner (Ralston, 2016: 83).

There are two main problems to keep in mind when using euphemisms for taboo topics. Firstly, Crespo Fernández (2006:103) proposes that the use of a euphemism can in some cases have the adverse effect of calling its referent (e.g. death) into mind in a context where even acknowledging such topics are unacceptable. This effect can at times be avoided by staying silent on the matter or conveying the message with paralanguage instead (Crespo Fernández, 2006: 103). Secondly and perhaps more importantly, as McGlone *et al.* (2006: 262) explain, euphemisms can become quite explicitly recognizable

if their use is recurrent enough. McGlone *et al.* (2006: 262) address how prior research finds that this instability can ultimately lead to the explicitly recognizable euphemism losing its softening effect by becoming increasingly similar to its referent via negative connotation, causing the need for a new one to replace it, a process also discussed by Burrige (2006: 460). In fact, Chamizo Domínguez (2009: 433) and Burrige (2006: 460) go as far as to say that the lexicalized euphemisms often become dysphemisms – unpleasant or derogatory alternatives to their referent; or how Chamizo Domínguez (2009: 434) defined them, ‘forbidden terms’. Burrige (2006: 460) exemplifies this with an emphasis on terms regarding the controversial topic of mental health – how, for example, the word ‘asylum’ is a derivation from Latin and originally meant ‘a place of refuge,’ but has taken on the meaning of ‘mental hospital’ (or even ‘madhouse’) due to contamination by use in the mental health field.

In other words, research regarding the aforementioned process – coined “associative contamination” by some linguists – implies that novel or less frequently used euphemisms provide a more satisfactory result to the speaker through lack of connotation (McGlone *et al.*, 2006: 263). On the other hand, as McGlone *et al.* argue, euphemisms used in a conversation must conform to the context at hand to an extent so as to conceal them – a device that the authors compare to military camouflage (2006: 263). There are many methods for concealing a euphemism, be it by using contextual vocabulary or ambiguous expressions (McGlone *et al.*, 2006: 263). Another strategy – causing inattentiveness via use of clichés (McGlone *et al.*, 2006: 264) – seems to be popular when it comes to euphemisms about death (whether it be consciously or not). Thus, the authors propose instead that the more conventional a euphemism is, the more likely it is to be accepted without thought, while more unconventional ones raise questions in the addressee (McGlone *et al.*, 2006: 264). Indeed, a study conducted among 120 undergraduates by

McGlone *et al.* (2006: 274) shows that it is rather the case that conventional euphemisms are considered more polite, mature, and positive, while unconventional ones seemed less so, yet were more memorable, as the authors expected.

1.4. Text corpora

In order to see just how conventional a given euphemism is, text corpora can be used. Simply put, a text corpus is “a highly searchable collection of texts,” as defined by Davies (2020). There are multiple types of corpora, some focusing on a specific field or topic, such as the Corpus of American Soap Operas or the Coronavirus Corpus, others – coined ‘balanced’ corpora – cumulate text samples from multiple genres or domains, such as the Strathy Corpus of Canadian English. Text corpora have a multitude of applications ranging from Computational Linguistics to language teaching in numerous languages.

A wide variety of English language corpora exist online; however, not all of them offer the same extent of systematization or accessibility. According to Davies (2020), the most used online English corpora are currently provided by English-Corpora.org, which comprises nineteen English language corpora. Davies (2020) exemplifies that these corpora for the most part allow additional categorization such as genres, historical periods, and dialects, helping us separate spoken language from written, informal texts from academic ones etc. English-Corpora.org hosts among others the Corpus of Contemporary American English, the largest corpus of American English, making it the most suitable option for this study. Although the page also hosts a version of the British National Corpus, a newer version (the XML version) is hosted on a different server, the Corpus Query Processor at CqpWeb.Lancs.ac.uk, which will be used instead. Additionally, the size of the corpora must be taken into account – American and British variety corpora are naturally larger than those of Scottish or Canadian, thus it proves more productive to base the study off of the prior two.

In order to compare the lexical preferences of American and British English, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC) will be used. Although both corpora cover a number of similar ‘genres’ – COCA covering TV/movies, blog, web-general, spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic, and BNC covering spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic journals – it must be noted that COCA uses texts from 1990 to 2019 and has a word count of one billion, whereas BNC uses ones from 1980s-1993 and has a word count of 100 million. Nonetheless, BNC is the most comparable British English corpus to COCA, as the alternatives are the Hansard Corpus, which comprises 1.6 billion words but is limited to parliamentary texts, and the Early English Books Online corpus, which is outdated compared to COCA. The XML edition of BNC used for this study is the third edition of BNC, which has been revised but does not include any additional texts.

Corpora such as these can be used for a variety of purposes. Davies (2020) describes the possibilities for analyzing specific word use in context – whether it sounds academic or not, whether it is novel or obsolete, the patterns in which it occurs, etc. – which can be helpful in language teaching and learning, researching patterns of language use, and researching cultural issues through the language with which they are discussed (Davies, 2020). For example, Crespo Fernández (2006: 108-109) used a corpus sampling 228 Irish obituaries to analyze the language with which they discussed the delicate topic of death, and found 119 euphemisms used instead of the word, while different forms of the word itself were present only 33 times. From the information provided by the corpus, Crespo Fernández (2020: 125-126) was able to draw conclusions on the attitude towards death at the time, and the way it was conceptualized. As Gries (2009: 5) describes the process: a corpus merely provides numbers of frequency; the information sought by the researcher has to be deduced from those numbers.

2. DEATH EUPHEMISMS IN COCA AND BNC

This chapter describes the process through which the studied euphemisms were chosen, and how said euphemisms were searched in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC). As the corpora are of different sizes, the chapter also touches upon how the results have been converted to relative frequencies in order to compare them more closely. It then describes the relative frequencies of the chosen euphemisms in COCA and BNC, followed by a comparison of the two sets of frequencies and a discussion about the results.

2.1. Choice of euphemisms for death

The euphemisms discussed in this paper have been selected from two dictionaries – *A Dictionary of Euphemisms* by Holder, 1995 and *Slang and Euphemism* by Spears, 1982. As the total number of figurative expressions for death, dying, burying, etc. was well over three hundred between Holder's and Spears's dictionaries, the following criteria were set to narrow down the number:

- The expression must describe the act/process of dying or the state of death/being buried itself without using the word 'death'.
- Phrases describing suicide, murder, death at war and phrases only used in specific groups will not be chosen, e.g. *lay down one's life* meaning to sacrifice one's life or *promoted to Glory*, a phrase used in the Salvation army when talking about the death of a Salvationist.
- The phrases must conform to the definition of euphemism provided in 1.1. – leaving out dysphemisms such as *bite the dust*, *come home feet first*, *croak*, and other sayings that are generally considered offensive.

- Phrases that are over four words long, such as *bring one's heart to its final pause*, and phrases that have multiple or popular alternative meanings, such as *expire*, *called away* and *in a better place* will not be chosen for the sake of brevity and searchability.
- Phrases that are exclusively limited to variations besides American and British will not be included, e.g. the Australian expression *pass in one's marbles*.
- Phrases that met the preceding criteria but had little to no search results will not be used.

Following these criteria, ten euphemisms were chosen for the study: *to breathe one's last*, *depart (this life)*, *be gathered to one's fathers*, *give up the ghost*, *go to one's reward*, *keel over*, *lose one's life*, *meet one's maker*, *no longer with us*, and *pass away*. These euphemisms will be looked at in the context of American and British English, as the information regarding other variations of English is more limited and so is the scope of this study.

2.2. Searching the phrases in the corpora

Each of the euphemisms chosen following the criteria in 2.1. must be searched individually in COCA and BNC in order to compare the frequencies of their use in American and British English. To get the most comprehensive results, the euphemisms must be searched with the verbs in each tense, a process that can be simplified with search modifiers. For example, in the case of *pass away*, it is most productive to use the search modifier * and present the query as 'pass* away,' which would incorporate all tenses of the word 'pass'. In the case of irregular verbs, such as in *give up the ghost*, it is possible to account for 'gave' and 'given' by searching 'g*ve* up the ghost' for the most accurate results. Another thing to keep in mind are the numerous possible pronouns in the euphemisms. As a solution, both corpora offer the option to use tags for labeling parts of

speech. The tags differ slightly between the corpora but work more or less in the same way. Unlike BNC, COCA differentiates between pronouns and possessives – the first option being tagged ‘PRON’ and the latter being ‘POSS’. Because of this, it is necessary to specify some of the queries in COCA with the use of the ‘POSS’ tag, for example in the case of the euphemism *meet one’s maker*, for which it is productive to search ‘me* POSS maker’, which would yield results such as *met his maker* etc. Using the PRON tag here would trigger an error declaring that there are no search results. BNC offers a similar tag feature, where pronouns are indicated with `_ {PRON}`. BNC does not offer a ‘possessive’ tag, so to see different pronoun options, searching ‘me* `_ {PRON}` maker’ is necessary.

Some phrases are inevitably used in more contexts than just the death of living beings, e.g. *laid her anxieties to rest*, which is why the search results must be scrutinized to pick out the relevant ones. Contexts referring to inanimate objects and plants were thus omitted, but ones referring to animals were accepted. Additionally, because most euphemisms are still often used in their literal sense, for example *keel over*, which originally means ‘to fall over suddenly’, phrases like *keel over and die* were omitted, as the first half here is used in its literal sense. In the case of more vague uses, it was occasionally necessary to go through the queries’ expanded context – usually around 250 words of text – to see whether the literal or euphemistic sense of the phrase was meant. In some cases it can be difficult to tell which sense has been used, even with the expanded context, or the phrase has been intended as a *double entendre* (e.g. a religious person using the phrase *meet one’s maker*, which could mean both dying and meeting God in the literal sense), in which case the author has included the phrases based on the limited context given. The exact searches used are as shown in Table 1 below, including only ones that were kept in the study:

Table 1. Exact Queries in the Corpora

Euphemism	COCA query	BNC query
<i>to breathe one's last</i>	breathe* POSS last	breathe* _{PRON} last
<i>to depart (this/one's) life</i>	depart* * life depart* life	depart* * life depart* life
<i>to be gathered to one's fathers</i>	gathered to POSS fathers	gathered to _{PRON} fathers
<i>to give up the ghost</i>	g*ve* up the ghost	g*ve* up the ghost
<i>to go to one's reward</i>	go* to POSS reward	go* to _{PRON} reward
<i>to keel over</i>	keel* over	keel* over
<i>to lose one's life</i>	los* POSS life	los* _{PRON} life
<i>to meet one's maker</i>	me* POSS maker	me* _{PRON} maker
<i>no longer with us</i>	no longer with us	no longer with us
<i>to pass away</i>	pass* away	pass* away

2.3. Relative frequency

Due to COCA being around ten times the size of BNC in word count, the frequencies displayed in it differ greatly from those of BNC, and thus cannot be directly compared. Therefore, calculating relative frequency instead of absolute frequency is necessary for an accurate outcome (Gries, 2009:7, 8). As Gries (2009: 7) instructs, this is calculated by dividing the corpus-given frequencies by the size of the corpus and normalizing the result through multiplication with a suitably large number, e.g. 1,000,000. As this study is based on specific phrases, not single words, the observed absolute frequencies are low. Therefore, multiplying with 1,000,000,000 instead of 1,000,000 makes the resulting relative frequency more comprehensible. For example, the different variants of *meet one's maker* had a total frequency of 140 in COCA therefore we must divide 140 by the total number of words in COCA, which is 1,002,889,754, and multiply the result by 1,000,000,000. The calculation would look as follows:

$$\textit{meet one's maker (COCA)} = \frac{140 \cdot 1,000,000,000}{1,002,889,754} \approx 139.59$$

In the case of BNC, where different variants of the phrase had a total frequency of 7, we must divide the frequency by the total number of words – 96,986,707. The formula thus looks as follows:

$$\textit{meet one's maker} \text{ (BNC)} = \frac{7 \cdot 1,000,000,000}{96,986,707} \approx 72,17$$

Two Excel sheets were created for tracking the frequencies of euphemisms in the corpora, omitting a euphemism if all variations of it had an observed absolute frequency of <1 in either corpus. The frequencies of the different variations were added together to acquire the absolute frequency of a euphemism, after which the normalized relative frequency for each euphemism was calculated using the aforementioned formula. The results were rounded to two decimal spaces, the data of which can be seen in Table 2 below. For the Excel sheets showing exact absolute frequencies of the different variations of a given euphemism, see Appendices 1 and 2.

Table 2 – Absolute and Relative Frequencies in the Corpora

Euphemism	Absolute / relative frequency in COCA	Absolute / relative frequency in BNC
<i>to breathe one's last</i>	111 / 110.68	11 / 113.42
<i>to depart (this/one's) life</i>	39 / 38.89	6 / 61.86
<i>to be gathered to one's fathers</i>	6 / 5.98	1 / 10.31
<i>to give up the ghost</i>	69 / 68.80	10 / 103,11
<i>to go to one's reward</i>	17 / 16.95	2 / 20.62
<i>to keel over</i>	234 / 233.33	6 / 61.86
<i>to lose one's life</i>	790 / 787.72	60 / 618.64
<i>to meet one's maker</i>	140 / 139.59	7 / 72.17
<i>no longer with us</i>	212 / 211.39	18 / 185.59
<i>to pass away</i>	5659 / 5,642.69	71 / 732.06

2.4. Analysis of relative frequencies in COCA

The chosen euphemisms used for death in the Corpus of Contemporary American English display a vast difference in frequency. The most frequently used *pass away* and its variations totaled to a relative frequency of 5,642.69 while the least frequent *gathered to one's fathers* yielded a relative frequency of 5.98 – over 900 times less than the former. The second most frequent euphemism *lose one's life* had a relative frequency of 787.72 – over seven times less than the most frequent one. In fact, the sum of all other chosen euphemisms' relative frequencies make up less than a third of that of *pass away*. The enormous difference becomes all the more evident when studying Figure 1 below.

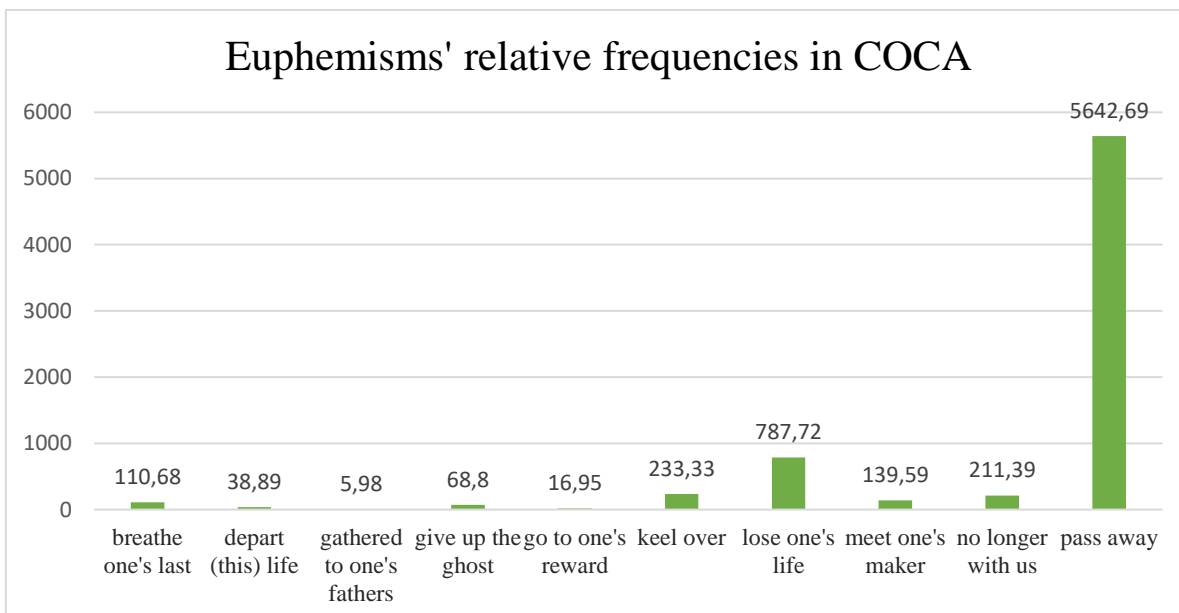


Figure 1. The relative frequencies of chosen euphemisms for death in COCA.

It must be acknowledged here that Figure 1 would likely portray a more even distribution had it been possible to include commonly used euphemisms such as *expire* or *in a better place*, the omittance of which is discussed in 2.1.. Compared to the difference between *pass away* and all other chosen euphemisms, the difference between the other nine do not appear as drastic. Upon closer inspection, however, it can be seen that the second most frequent euphemism *lose one's life* is over 130 times more frequent than the

least occurring *gathered to one's fathers* (787.72 and 5.98 respectively) – a far larger difference than that between *pass away* and *lose one's life*.

2.5. Analysis of relative frequencies in BNC

The most frequent euphemism for death in the British National Corpus was *pass away*, followed by *lose one's life*, with relative frequencies of 732.06 and 618.64, respectively. The latter was used notably more in 'news' texts than other categories, while *pass away* was not as limited to one category. The least frequently used euphemism was *gathered to one's fathers*, with a relative frequency of 10.31 – about 70 times less frequent than *pass away*, and about 60 times less frequent than *lose one's life*. As evident in Figure 2 below, the eight visibly less frequent euphemisms lack drastic differences in frequency – *no longer with us* is less than 20 times more prevalent than *gathered to one's fathers*. In combination, the less frequent eight have a relative frequency of 628.94, not far behind *pass away* and just slightly over that of *lose one's life*.

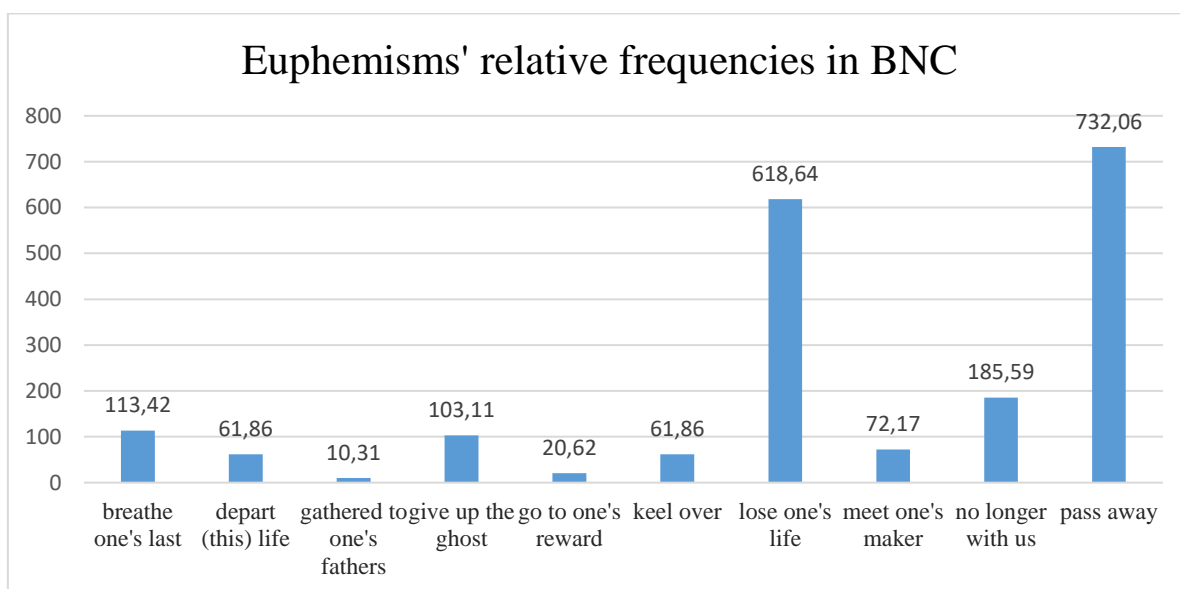


Figure 2. The relative frequencies of chosen euphemisms for death in BNC.

In Figure 2, two euphemisms seem to dominate over the others, instead of the expected one, *pass away*, and the least occurring euphemisms are at a relatively close

rate. Although the relative frequency of *go to one's reward* is double that of *gathered to one's fathers*, a multiplication of two within one corpus is minuscule in comparison to the other euphemisms' frequencies. Interestingly, *depart (this) life* and *keel over* had the exact same relative frequency of 61,86, despite having very different connotations to them, *keel over* being used most in fictional prose contexts. Overall, the BNC displays a versatile use of the different euphemisms.

2.6. Comparison of relative frequencies

The two corpora used in this study display only slightly different preferences in the use of euphemisms for death. This is likely in part due to BNC lacking web-based sources, where language use can often differ from that of other written sources, while web sources make up a bit over a quarter of COCA. Nonetheless, the relative frequencies of the euphemisms are comparable, although difficult to display on a chart at the same time.

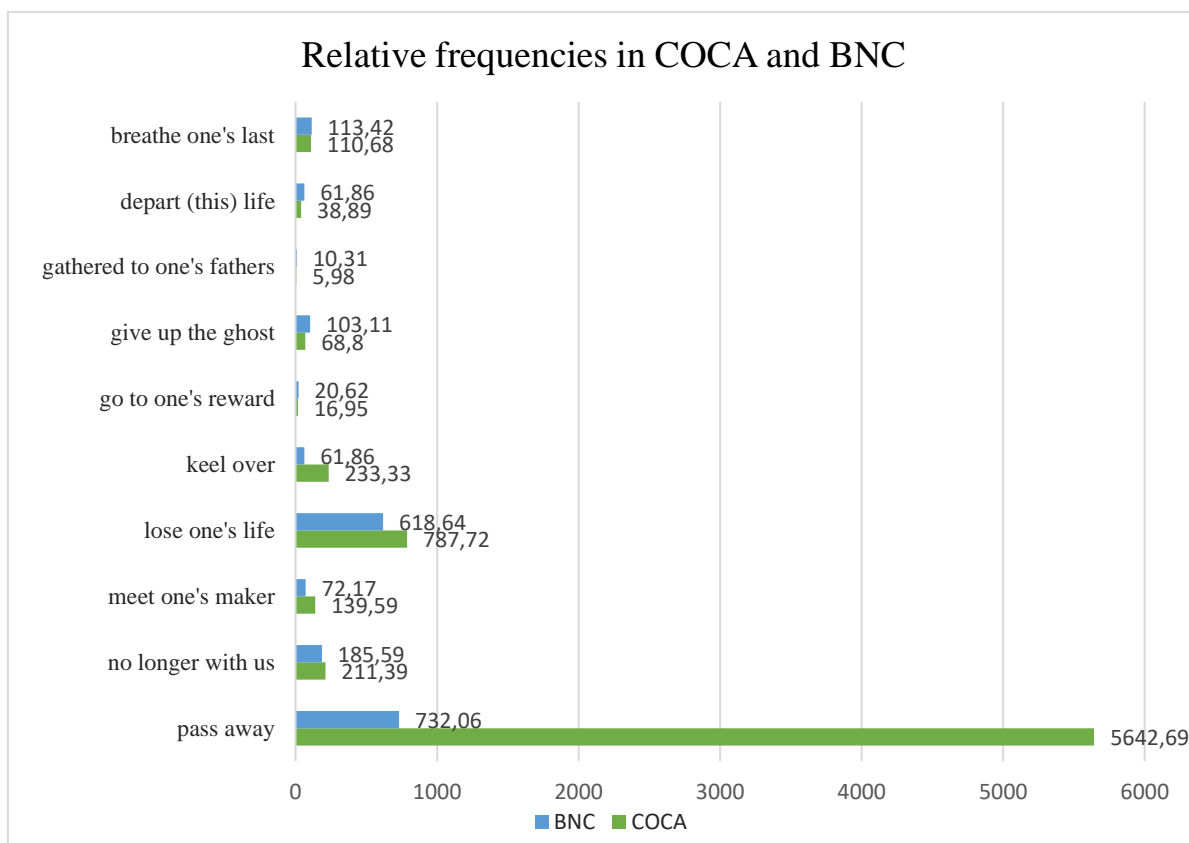


Figure 3. The relative frequencies in COCA and BNC illustrated side by side.

As seen in Figure 3, the overall preference of euphemisms is quite similar, with *'pass away'* being the most frequently used one, followed by *lose one's life*. Both corpora yielded least results for *gathered to one's fathers* and *go to one's reward*, with the latter occurring slightly more often in both corpora. While the frequency of most other euphemisms had less than a twofold difference between the two corpora (the only exception being *keel over* which was used 3.77 times as much in COCA as it was in BNC), *pass away* occurred in COCA 7.71 times as frequently as in BNC. It is evident in Figure 3 that COCA yielded a less diverse result than BNC, possibly due to texts opting for variations of *pass away* instead of other euphemisms, while BNC had a more balanced profile.

While some euphemisms had little difference between the corpora – *breathe one's last* having a difference of 2.74 relative frequency and *go to one's reward* differing by 3.67 relative frequency – others were more significant. Notably, *keel over* was far more prevalent in COCA than in BNC, despite the phrase arguably having more of a dysphemistic connotation than the other chosen euphemisms. *Meet one's maker* also stood out more in COCA than it did in BNC – another euphemism that has grown layers of connotations because of films and other modern media. In fact, *meet one's maker* was predominantly in the 'MOV' (movies) texts category in COCA, but not dominating in any specific text category in BNC. BNC, in turn, showed a nearly twofold use of *gathered to one's fathers*, although the frequency for this euphemism was distinctly low in both corpora. Similarly, *go to one's reward* was seen more in BNC but had a strikingly low frequency in both corpora compared to all other euphemisms used. *Give up the ghost* and *depart (this) life* were also more prevalent in BNC but ranked as the 7th and 8th euphemism based on the combined relative frequency.

2.7. Comments on the findings

The aim of this study was to find a pattern in preferences regarding euphemisms for death in the Corpus of Contemporary American English and the British National Corpus. Studying differences in the relative frequencies of ten euphemisms, which were chosen based on criteria set in 2.1., it is possible to detect some preference patterns and categorize the euphemisms for death based on the way they conceptualize death. This comparison elucidates how differently or similarly American and British English speakers may discuss the topic depending on context, which can be useful for language learners and future researchers on the topic of speaking about death in the English language.

Evidently, both American and British English favor variations of the ambiguous phrase *pass away*, which conceptualizes death as a journey, a popular category of euphemisms for death suggested by Crespo Fernández (2006: 114). According to Chamizo Domínguez's (2009: 434) definition, this euphemism can be categorized as lexicalized, meaning it has become the prominent meaning of its referent. Despite the phrase becoming essentially synonymous with its referent, which Burridge (2006: 460), Chamizo Domínguez (2009: 433), and McGlone *et al.* (2006: 262) propose could result in the phrase adopting a negative or even dysphemistic connotation, *pass away* is still the most frequently used euphemism of the chosen ten. This leads to believe the proposition by McGlone *et al.* (2006: 264), touched upon in 1.3., that the more conventional a euphemism is, the more favorable it is, as it blends in with the conversation, whereas less frequently used expressions may warrant unwanted attention.

The second most frequent euphemism was surprisingly *lose one's life* in both corpora. This is a rather straightforward euphemism – one cannot lose their life without dying. This euphemism was used most in 'news' texts in BNC, possibly due to its fairly neutral tone. Furthermore, it fits Crespo Fernández's (2006: 114) category of death as 'the

end’ – one of the two least frequent categories in his study. The aforementioned also applies to the fourth most frequent *breathe one’s last*, which conversely was used most in the ‘FIC’ texts category in COCA. Because these euphemisms are explicitly recognizable as their referent, one may say that they are lexicalized, however, because they are such ‘transparent’ euphemisms, this is a case of the phrases being naturally recognized as their referent rather than acquiring the connotation throughout time. Since the phrases only censor the word ‘death’ and not the concept itself, they can be regarded as euphemisms against word taboo, not concept taboo. They shield the speaker from saying the forbidden word, while not disguising their referent. The fact that both corpora unanimously had *lose one’s life* as the second one after *pass away*, and *breathe one’s last* as the fourth one, was therefore an interesting find. Although *depart (this) life* shares the aforementioned transparency characteristic, it implies death as ‘a journey’ and is thus more sentimental than the previous two euphemisms.

The corpora also shared their least frequent euphemism – *gathered to one’s fathers*, which has perhaps more implications than the ambiguous *pass away*, because it can be interpreted as implying a spiritual afterlife or conversely as emphasizing the state of being physically buried among one’s family, which still implies a togetherness and is thus not exactly descriptive of death as ‘the end’. Therefore, out of the categories suggested by Crespo Fernández (2006: 114), the euphemism best conforms to the ‘joyful life’ category, a relatively frequent category for death euphemisms. Chamizo Domínguez’s (2009: 434) definition would treat this euphemism as a semi-lexicalized one – while the phrase is generally recognized as a euphemism, its use is low enough to suggest that it has not become semantically equal to its referent. Both corpora seem to imply that *gathered to one’s fathers* is not conventional enough to be an effective alternative to phrases like *pass away*.

In fact, the two corpora had a similar pattern when it came to euphemism preference, the biggest outlier being *keel over*. While *keel over* shared the spot of third least frequent euphemism alongside *depart (this) life* in BNC, it was third most frequent in COCA, being over three times more frequent than in BNC. Interestingly, the phrase was most frequently found in the fictional texts categories in both corpora. *Keel over* is perhaps the least euphemistic euphemism among the chosen ten – it does not attempt to console and has no implications of death as a journey or something desirable. Out of the categories proposed by Crespo Fernández (2006: 114), *keel over* fits best in death as ‘the end,’ although even this is assigning more meaning to a phrase that rather describes death as a sudden short process – it simply happens and that is it. Therefore, it did not meet the expectations of being infrequently used, despite it lacking the sentimentality that other euphemisms provided. Since this euphemism is often (if not most of the time) used in its literal sense of collapsing or ‘capsizing,’ though admittedly often in the phrase *keel over and die*, it can be considered semi-lexicalized – although recognized as a euphemism for death, its interpretation may depend on context.

Another difference in preference was regarding *meet one’s maker*, which was nearly twice as frequent in COCA as it was in BNC. While one explanation for this could be that American action films often use this phrase in a threatening manner – for example, “prepare to meet your maker” yields 15 results in COCA, out of which 11 are from movies, three from TV, and one is from the fiction category – these contexts were omitted when collecting frequencies. Out of 60 results for the exact phrase *meet your maker*, most of which were in the ‘MOV’ category, 49 were suitable for this study. The absolute frequencies of different variations of the euphemisms in COCA can be further inspected in Appendix 1. The euphemism certainly falls under the ‘joyful (after)life’ category, but is also somewhat a ‘reward,’ as it implies getting to Heaven. Conversely, a euphemism that

was more frequent in BNC than in COCA was *give up the ghost*, used most in fictional prose, which could be interpreted in many ways – as ‘the end’ with the soul leaving the body, as ‘rest’ because the body no longer has to house the soul, and as a ‘loss’ due to the body being forced to part ways with its soul. Despite both aforementioned euphemisms having religious undertones, the latter, more modest euphemism in terms of religiousness, has a much higher frequency in BNC than *meet one’s maker*.

Thus, both American and British variations seem to favor the conventional *pass away* to other euphemisms for death. The phrase is remarkably more frequent in American English, which rotated between other euphemisms much less than British English. Out of the euphemisms chosen, those conceptualizing death as either a journey or the end were most prominent in both corpora. The corpora agreed on the least frequent euphemisms as well, although BNC incorporated them slightly more than COCA. The largest gap was in the use of *keel over*, a euphemism lacking in sentimentality, which was not notably favored in BNC, but was relatively frequent in COCA. Another notable difference was that COCA preferred *meet one’s maker* much more than BNC, placing it as fifth most frequent, and BNC preferred *give up the ghost* more than COCA, placing it as its fifth most frequent. Overall, the corpora had a similar distribution of relative frequencies, there were no large disagreements between preferences. Nonetheless, as the corpora are compiled of texts from different timeframes – COCA comprising texts from 1990 to 2019 and BNC from the 1980s to 1993 – it must be acknowledged that the results of these comparisons do not reflect modern language use with 100% accuracy, due to BNC missing most web-based sources. Nonetheless, this comparison helps illustrate preferences in language choice when talking about death in American and British English and can serve as a basis for further studies on the topics of euphemisms for death, and the preferred conceptualization of death in different varieties of the English language.

CONCLUSION

The role of euphemisms in everyday life is larger than is given credit for. Euphemisms provide speakers the tools with which to elevate, downgrade, conceal, or emphasize positive aspects of subjects that may cause discomfort in either the speaker themselves or their audience. While euphemisms are used for a multitude of subjects, the most important use for them is in discussions of anything taboo. This includes sex, death, and excretions among other things, the language for which must be chosen carefully depending on context and environment. While the use of euphemisms in more serious realms such as in the case of death may be criticized, and rightfully so, it is such a common practice that the English language is riddled with euphemisms for death.

The term ‘euphemism’ itself can be defined in a number of ways that can be simplified as the following two – a phrase used to avoid speaking of uncomfortable topics, and a process of expressing oneself differently for the sake of etiquette. While the elusive ‘real’ definition may be somewhere in between, the first option is the more commonly used one. These euphemisms can be categorized into novel, semi-lexicalized and lexicalized ones, much like dysphemisms can, or into dysphemistic euphemisms and not-so-dysphemistic euphemisms, among other possibilities. As the line between euphemisms and antonymous (a simplified explanation) dysphemisms is debatable, so are the options for its categorization. This is all the more reason to treat euphemisms with caution – one must realize which one is suitable in a given context, which one will most effectively convey the attitude intended by the speaker, and which ones will yield the unwanted effect of drawing attention to a delicate subject.

Among such delicate subjects is the universal experience of death, something most people fear or are disturbed by. To accommodate this common fear, the language used for speaking of the topic has been softened and sentimentalized, either to shield one

from the word taboo that could result in the spoken thing entering their lives or the concept taboo that is a sensitive topic to many. Although the use of euphemisms for death may be dangerous in areas such as the medical field, it is deeply engrained in society. Because of this, the English language is rich in euphemistic expressions for death, some varieties having their own distinct euphemisms, and others sharing their more frequent ones.

In order to study these differences in varieties of English closer, text corpora offer a great source of information. These corpora allow the user to seek out specific phrases with the help of search modifiers and find the contexts and collocations with which they are used, and how frequently. In order to compare American and British English, for example, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNC) are the most useful options. Thus, this study has chosen ten euphemisms for death based on criteria that excluded ones specific to a certain variety or societal group, ones that were too dysphemistic or verbose, and very infrequent ones, in order to compare their use in COCA and BNC. Although the two corpora are of very different sizes, calculating the euphemisms' relative frequency allowed for easy comparison.

The comparison of the ten euphemisms in these two corpora revealed that the overall preference of euphemisms for death was quite similar – *pass away* was the most frequent and *gathered to one's fathers* the least frequent euphemism in both corpora, although clearly dominating over the other euphemisms in COCA. BNC, on the other hand, had a more balanced preference, with *pass away* being most frequent only by about 114 relative frequency, whereas this number was over 4,800 in COCA. *Keel over* was interestingly much more prevalent in COCA; in fact, it ranked third most frequent there, despite its lack of sentimentality. COCA also preferred *meet one's maker*, ranking it as fifth in frequency, while BNC preferred *give up the ghost* – having that as its fifth most

frequent euphemism. As it is proposed that a euphemism should preferably be conventional to have its intended effect while not drawing too much attention to itself, it is logical that the aforementioned euphemisms were much less frequent than *pass away*. Additionally, *pass away* conceptualizes death as a journey – one of the more popular conceptualizations discussed in this study – making it more appealing than e.g. *keel over*, which implies that death is ‘the end,’ if anything. Despite these small differences, the two corpora had a relatively similar preference in euphemisms for death, although further inquiry would provide more precise information.

Unfortunately, the two corpora comprise texts of different timeframes and different sources, which means these results do not reflect modern language use as accurately as the topic deserves, but the findings here can act as a bridge to other studies on the topic of euphemisms for death. A more in-depth analysis with a larger number of euphemisms could reveal more systematic euphemism use – how frequently the euphemisms are used in different text sources, ranging from newspapers to web sources and movies; how different varieties of English prefer to conceptualize death, etc. Such studies could aid the learning and teaching of euphemism use and provide a step towards understanding the different cultures within the anglosphere.

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Appendix 1. Total frequencies in COCA

Query	Result	Frequency	FREQ total	Dominant context
breathe* POSS last	breathed his last	36		
	breathed her last	26		
	breathes his last	12		
	breathe my last	7		
	breathed their last	4		
	breathe his last	6		
	breathe your last	5		
	breathe their last	5		
	breathe our last	3		
	breathes her last	2		
	breathed your last	2		
	breathe her last	2		
	breathed my last	1	111	FIC
depart* * life	departed this life	14		
	depart this life	11		
	departing this life	3		
	departed from life	2		
	departure from life	2		
	departs this life	1		
	departing his life	1		
	departing from life	1		
depart* life	departed life	2		
	depart life	2	39	
gather* to POSS fathers	gathered to his fathers	4		
	gathered to your father	1		
	gathered to my fathers	1	6	
g*v* up the ghost	give up the ghost	35		
	gave up the ghost	23		
	given up the ghost	7		
	gives up the ghost	3		
	giveth up the ghost	1	69	FIC

go* to POSS reward	gone to his reward	4		
	gone to their reward	3		
	gone to her reward	2		
	gone to your reward	1		
	gone to our reward	1		
	going to my reward	1		
	going to his reward	1		
	goes to his reward	1		
	go to their reward	1		
	go to his reward	1		
	go to her reward	1	17	
keel* over	keeled over	111		
	keel over	73		
	keeling over	32		
	keels over	18	234	FIC
me* POSS maker	meet your maker	49		
	meet my maker	27		
	meet his maker	21		
	meet their maker	19		
	met his maker	15		
	meet our maker	4		
	meets his maker	5	140	MOV
no longer with us	no longer with us	212	212	WEB
pass* away	passed away	5021		
	pass away	338		
	passing away	167		
	passes away	133	5659	
los* POSS life	lost his life	282		
	lost her life	93		
	lost their life	57		
	lose his life	52		
	lose their life	38		
	lost my life	32		
	losing his life	40		
	lose your life	34		
	loses his life	17		
	lose my life	27		
	losing your life	29		
	lose her life	20		
	losing her life	17		
	losing my life	16		
	losing their life	11		
	loses their life	7		
	lose our life	2		
	lost your life	5		
	lose its life	2		
	lost its life	3		
	lost our life	0		
	loseth his life	0		
	loses her life	2		
	losing our life	1		
	loses its life	0		
	losted his life	1		
	losses his life	1		
	losses their life	1	790	

Appendix 2. Total frequencies in BNC

Query	Result	Frequency	Total freq.	Dominant context
breathe* _{PRON} last	breathed his last	5		
	breathed her last	1		
	breathe my last	1		
	breathe me last	1		
	breathe her last	2		
	breathed my last	1	11	
depart* * life	departed this life	4		
	departure from life	1		
	departing this life	1		
depart* life		0	6	
gather* to _{PRON} fathers	gathered to his father	1	1	
g*v* up the ghost	gave up the ghost	3		
	given up the ghost	2		
	gives up the ghost	2		
	give up the ghost	2		
	giving up the ghost	1	10	fict. prose
go* to _{PRON} reward	gone to her reward	1		
	go to her reward	1	2	
keel* over	keeled over	3		
	keel over	2		
	keeling over	1	6	fict. prose
me* _{PRON} maker	meet his maker	1		
	meet their maker	1		
	met his maker	1		
	meets his maker	1		
	met their maker	1		
	meet 'is maker	1		
	meeting his maker	1	7	
no longer with us	no longer with us	18	18	fict. prose, pop lore, misc
pass* away	passed away	53		
	passing away	9		
	pass away	8		
	passes away	1	71	
los* _{PRON} life	lost his life	38		
	lost their life	0		
	lose his life	4		
	losing your life	2		
	loses his life	0		
	lost her life	2		
	lost my life	3		
	lose her life	3		
	losing her life	1		
	losing his life	3		
	lost its life	1		
	loses their life	1		
	lose my life	1		
	losing my life	1	60	news, fict. prose, misc

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Mirjam Ruth Loide

Euphemisms for Death. A Comparison of American and British English Corpora (COCA and BNC)

Eufemismid surma kohta. Ameerika ja Briti inglise korpuste võrdlemine (COCA ja BNC)

Bakalaureusetöö

2022

Lehekülgede arv: 36

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on võrrelda eufemismide kasutust surma kohta Ameerika ja Briti inglise keeles. Võrdluseks on kasutatud suurimaid võimalikke tekstikorpuseid – Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) ja British National Corpus (BNC). Võrreldakse kümne eufemismi sagedust mõlemas korpuses ning uuritakse nende eelistusi – sarnasusi ja erinevusi eufemismivalikutes – pakkudes ka potentsiaalseid põhjendusi või selgitusi.

Töö on jaotatud kahte peatükki, millest esimene tutvustab lähemalt eufemisme – kuidas seda nähtust defineerida ja kategoriseerida, mis eristab eufemisme düsfemismidest ja mis nende eesmärk on. Samuti püüab esimene peatükk selgitada surmaga seotud tabu ja seda miks surmast rääkimiseks eufemisme üldse kasutatakse. Sellele järgneb arutus eufemismide kasutamise keerukusest ning sellest, kuidas neid võimalikult efektiivselt kasutada. Esimene peatükk lõpeb tekstikorpuste tutvustamisega, et nende kasutus järgnevas peatükis arusaadav oleks. Teine peatükk keskendub meetodikale – selgitab, kuidas töös kasutatud eufemismid valitud on, kuidas neid korpustes otsiti ja kuidas sagedusi võrreldi. Sellele järgnevad illustreeritud võrdlused ja nende analüüs.

Võrdlemiseks valiti kümme eufemismi kriteeriumite põhjal, mis jätsid välja kindlale kultuuri- või keeleruumile spetsiifilised väljendid, liigselt pikad või düsfemistlikud väljendid ning need, mille otsingutulemused olid <1. Nende kümne eufemismi sagedustest kalkuleeriti suhteline sagedus mõlema korpuse kohta, et need oleksid omavahel võrreldavad. Seejärel võrreldi sageduste sarnasusi ja erinevusi ning korpuste eelistusi. Selgus et kahe korpuse eelistatuid ja vähim eelistatud eufemismid kattusid – mõlemad kasutasid valitud eufemismidest enim *pass away* ja vähim *gathered to one's fathers*. Enamjaolt järgisid korpuste sagedused sarnast mustrit, kuigi *pass away* oli COCA's kordades dominantsem kui BNC's. Suurim kõrvalepõige antud mustrist oli *keel away* puhul, mis COCA's oli kolmas kõige sagedasem, aga BNC's kolmas vähim sagedane. Olid ka mõned väiksemad erinevad eelistustes – COCA eelistas *meet one's maker* rohkem kui *give up one's ghost*, BNC'l oli aga vastupidi. Üldjuhul oli näha, et enim kasutatakse kõige tavapärasemat fraasi *pass away*, mis vihjab esimeses peatükis välja toodud teooriale, et mida tavapärasem eufemism on, seda paremini see täidab oma eesmärki ilma liigset tähelepanu tõmbamata.

Märksõnad:

Ameerika inglise keel, Briti inglise keel, keeleteadus, fraseoloogia, eufemismid surma kohta, keelekorpused, korpuste võrdlemine.

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