

THE POLITICAL NATURE OF PERIPHRAISIS IN ENGLISH

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Annotation: This thesis explores the role of periphrasis in English political discourse, focusing on how indirect language functions as a strategic rhetorical device. Periphrasis, often viewed as a stylistic element, is shown to serve deeper ideological purposes, such as softening controversial statements, avoiding accountability, and shaping public perception. The study examines how political figures use vague, euphemistic, or passive constructions to influence meaning, obscure agency, and maintain authority. It also considers the sociolinguistic and psychological implications of such language use, particularly its impact on transparency and public trust. The thesis emphasizes that periphrasis is not only a linguistic choice but also a reflection of power dynamics in political communication.

Keywords: periphrasis, political discourse, euphemism, indirect language, rhetorical strategy, accountability, ideological framing, power in language, political communication.

Periphrasis, the use of indirect and circumlocutory expressions in place of direct language, is a powerful linguistic tool in political communication. In English political discourse, it serves not just a stylistic function but a strategic one, allowing speakers to manage perception, avoid responsibility, and influence interpretation. Rather than simply stating facts or decisions, politicians often employ periphrasis to frame their messages in a more acceptable, diplomatic, or ambiguous light [1].

Periphrasis, or circumlocution, can be politically charged in English by softening harsh truths, masking political agendas, or achieving a desired level of formality or ambiguity. It's a stylistic choice with various rhetorical effects that can be used to manipulate or obscure meaning.

This use of language is deeply tied to power and ideology. Politicians frequently rely on euphemisms, passive constructions, and vague terminology to soften the impact of controversial policies or actions. For instance, terms like “collateral damage” replace the harsh reality of civilian casualties, while phrases like “adjusting economic priorities” mask the consequences of austerity measures. Such expressions are not accidental but serve the purpose of managing public reaction and preserving political image.

Periphrasis also enables evasion of responsibility. By avoiding clear agents in a sentence—such as saying “mistakes were made” instead of “we made mistakes”—political figures can distance themselves from negative outcomes. This linguistic strategy blurs accountability and allows the speaker to maintain authority while minimizing potential backlash. Furthermore, periphrastic language creates room for reinterpretation. Vague phrases such as “we are exploring multiple options” give the appearance of action without committing to specifics, making political speech more flexible and less vulnerable to criticism.

In the context of international diplomacy and state communication, periphrasis is often used to maintain neutrality and avoid escalation. It allows governments to comment on sensitive issues without direct confrontation. In media reports and official statements,

bureaucratic jargon and inflated terminology can obscure the real meaning, making it harder for the public to critically evaluate political decisions[3].

The ideological dimension of periphrasis lies in its ability to shape how reality is perceived. Through subtle shifts in language, political actors can redefine events, reframe conflicts, and realign public values. It is a method of constructing consent and controlling discourse without overt manipulation. While it may enhance politeness or professionalism in some contexts, excessive or deliberate periphrasis risks alienating the public and eroding trust in leadership.

In conclusion, periphrasis in English political discourse is far more than a grammatical phenomenon. It is a calculated rhetorical device that reflects and reinforces power dynamics. Understanding its use and recognizing its effects are crucial for anyone seeking to analyze political language critically. As language remains central to shaping public consciousness, the study of periphrasis reveals how deeply political intentions are embedded in everyday speech.

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