Taboo and euphemism in the religious language

Mocanu, Mihaela

Taboo and Euphemism in the Religious Language

Mihaela Mocanu

Department of Interdisciplinary Research in Socio-Humanities Field,
"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Romania,
11 Carol I Boulevard, RO 700506

mocanu.mihaela@uaic.ro

Abstract. We propose in this paper to review the main religious taboos specific to the religious language and the description of the pragmatic valences that the euphemistic expression manifests in the religious communication. We use the "linguistic taboo" when referring to terms, syntagms, phrases, etc. whose utterance is forbidden within a certain linguistic community. Manifested essentially by prohibitions and restrictions, the taboo was mainly paired with religious prohibitions, although the origin of the taboo phenomena predates any religion. The sacred taboos are traditional taboos that have accompanied the human civilization since its beginnings, and which, in one form or another, exist in all cultures of the world, constituting anthropological universal elements. Whereas the pragmatic purpose of euphemistic speech was originally to attenuate the impact that the message could have had upon the interlocutor, the analysis of the contemporary religious discourse demonstrated that the euphemisms acquires new pragmatic dimensions related to the desire to conceal the negative social aspects and deficiencies in order to promote a positive image of reality.

1. Introduction

The work proposes a pragmatic and semantic approach of euphemistic speech, justified by the specificity of the research topic: the linguistic taboo and the euphemism are related to the speech act and not to the language system, a fact that requires the research of this phenomenon in a discursive context. Methodologically, our main method is discourse analysis, yet we also make use of the conceptual and methodological apparatus of other disciplines such as linguistics, semantics, pragmatics and computational linguistics. The analysis covers the official messages of the Romanian Patriarchate, available on the website of the institution, and press the releases of the "Lumina" newspaper, the weekly Christian spirituality and attitude newspaper edited under the patronage of the Romanian Patriarchate.

A term of Polynesian origin meaning "sacred" and "forbidden", taboo original pointed at people or things that were forbidden or placed under restriction by the ruler. Ethnologists stress out the fact that the taboo phenomenon is a universal one, as it refers not only to beings and objects, but also to the words designating them. Mystical thought associates language with creative power; for the primitive populations the name was part of the being or the object it denominated: knowing the name of a person or of a spirit indicated gaining an ascendant over the bearer of the name, while the simple utterance of the taboo-name signifies the de facto achievement of a forbidden act [1].

Vocabulary interdictions should be related to the belief in the demiurgic force of the word and the human fears materialized as taboo. From this particular perspective the linguistic taboo becomes the expression of certain socially conditioned interdictions which are only rarely linguistically determined. "Taboos can be found in every society; what really changes from one society to another is what is considered taboo. Accordingly, some terms are considered taboo in a given society, but not in another" [2]. Along with superstitions and beliefs, linguistic taboo is motivated by emotional and social reasons, by education, politeness, good manners, decency, kindness, etc. that force the speaker to avoid phrases or words that are considered to be too tough, rude or indecent and use instead words and phrases that are less specific, that "name without naming", all these being labelled as euphemisms [3].

The religious taboo is based, as we already highlighted, upon the belief in a certain magic of the words (extremely strong belief amongst the primitive societies, but which continues to be active in the modern society). In the virtue of identifying the name with the object that the name stands for, is it deemed that calling a thing by its name may attract negative effects on the interlocutors and therefore words or phrases less specific are utilized instead, "which call without a name" [3]. Used for the social acceptance, the euphemism is designed as a substitute for the taboo for the latter is placed under the sign of ban to be named. Between the euphemism and word taboo a relationship of partial synonymy is established, the euphemia designation can switch the word taboo in the same context. The euphemism is explained by reference to the pivot or taboo word that usually is the first to impose in the speaker's speech. This creates, based on the taboo word by euphemization an entire paradigm and the terms of which undergo changes over time because, by wearing any euphemism loses its basic function and a need to be replaced appears.

The issue of euphemisms was ignored for a long period of time, due, on the one hand, to the reticence to speak about "certain matters", specific to Western cultures and on the other hand to the restrictions imposed by totalitarian political regimes. The first linguists that manifested an interest for the research of this phenomenon belong to the Anglo-Saxon area. As far as for the Romance languages, systematic research on this topic dates from the 8th decade of the 20th century, the first studies dedicated to euphemisms being mainly focused on stylistic approaches. France opens the way for the *eccentric* language phenomena with *Dictionnaire historique d'arhot et des excentricités du langage*, published by L. Larchey, in 1859. Another landmark in the modern research of euphemisms is established by the issue, in 1949, of the study "Euphemismes anciens et modernes", signed by Emile Benveniste. Two decades later Spain issues a dictionary of euphemisms, dysphemisms and cacophemisms, organized according to taboo conceptual areas: *Diccionario secreto* (1969), belonging to Camilo José Cela. The end of the 20th century marks the end of lexicographic and stylistic approaches upon euphemisms, as the research dealing with the dynamics of the relationship between language as a manifestation of cultural tradition and euphemism becomes a priority.

The post-modern society produces a multitude of euphemisms. New power to euphemism production is provided by political correctness and various "isms" (starting from ableism and ending with weightism) [4]. The widespread character of this phenomenon was confirmed by the coinage of a new term – euphemantics (Dodd, 1962) in the 60's of the 20th century. Numerous books (Pei, 1970; Enright, 1985; Allan, 1991) and dictionaries (Spears, 1981; Neaman, 1983; Green, 1984; Holder, 1987; Rawson, 1989; Ayto, 1993) have been dedicated to the subject. As well as this, a series of studies and articles published in various specialized magazines stress out on the multiple perspectives of approaching euphemisms: Nora Galli de Paratesi (1964, 1973), Emilio Montero Cartelle (1981), Kröll (1984), Miguel Casas Gomez (1986), Allan and Burridge (1991), Chamizo Dominguez și Sanchez Benedito (2000), Keith Allan & Kate Burridge, *Forbidden Words. Taboo and the Censoring of Language* (2006), Kate Burridge, *Taboo, Euphemism and Political Correctness* (2006), Eliecer Crespo-Fernandez, *Euphemism and Dysphemism. Manipulation Processes for handing taboo in English literature* (2007). The above-mentioned works have in common the relationship they establish between euphemism and dysphemism, on the one hand and the language interdictions, on the other, as well as the interest for the ways in which language interdictions can be evaded.

2. The individuality of the religious language

The instrument of knowledge and communication of religious essence, the religious language is based upon the recognition of a world of sacredness, which is defined by reference to the religious dimension of the human being. From the semantic perspective, the religious language is rooted in a *preexisting extra-linguistic referent*, which eludes historic space-time categories, in an attempt to build a world of transcendental essence and establish a relationship between man and the sacred. In this view, the word is invested with magical powers, playing the role of a mediator between the human being living in the world of the profane and the sacred world of the Divinity.

Since the word embraces the essence of the named element with the power to shape reality, the religious man pays special attention to the verbal expression not only from the desire to adapt to reality, but especially out of the care not to cause adverse changes amidst it.

Identifying specific language of the religious domain involves the detection of certain traits that distinguish it from other forms of discursive manifestation. Thus, researchers believe that the religious language has a clearly marked individuality between the diastratic and diaphasic varieties of language, its specificity is determined by its use in communication situations different from those current and by the enabling of the "magic or incantatory functions" [5]. The religious language is a specialized language that acquires its individuality through a range of features such as: the archaic character, the monumentality, the need to maintain distance from everyday speech without losing the communication skills and the emotional involvement, the desire to balance tradition and modernity, the sacredness and accessibility [6]. Among the elements that distinguish the religious language from the other discursive manifestations Rodica Zafiu also mentions: the specificity of communication situations and religious practices different from the current ones; the oscillation between solemn / high and accessible / low; the prototypical communication situation: the human / superhuman recipient; the old age (the first document dates from the sixteenth century); the predominance of the conative expressive and magical functions,; the conservative and traditionalist character; marked intertextuality [7].

The individuality of the religious language is conferred by specific linguistic phenomena, at morphological, syntactic and, especially, lexical level. Thus, the extending of the symbolic principle determines the use of nouns and pronouns as proper names, as substitutes for the Divinity: *Father, Your, The One, Him, His,* etc. At the morphological level the strong articulation of common nouns stands out, even when there are no subjects or they do not have attributive determinations as they behave as true proper names (the Spirit, the Lord) [6]. The curing pronoun which disappeared from the literary Romanian language continues to be used in the religious language, giving it a pronounced archaic touch (*Thyself, O Lord, receive our prayers ...!*). At the level of the syntax, the religious language is characterized by the consistent elision of the predicate, by the adjustment of the apposition with the regent by archaic syntactic constructions where the dative has a possessive value, by the frequency of the conjunction "and", that grants the discourse a narrative character and by the use of the inversion, to create symmetry. The distinctive note of the religious language remains the lexicon: at the vocabulary level there is the high number of archaisms and the semantics specialization of certain words in the common vocabulary. The literature indicates the presence of many words missing from the today's literary use, the large number of lexical archaisms, of borrowings from the Slavic and Modern Greek, the preservation of some old words of Latin origin, preserved only in dialects, the use of etymological forms non-prefixed or the calculus with unusual structures. Equally numerous are the semantic archaisms that are characterized by the preservation of many meanings which have been out-of the literary language for a long time.

3. Religious taboos and euphemisms

3.1. The linguistic taboo

Starting from the premise that language is a creative activity par excellence, Eugen Coşeriu lists among the bases of the metaphorical creation in the language the so-called language taboo which he defines as "the phenomenon by which certain words associated to superstitions and beliefs are avoided as they are substituted by loans, euphemisms, circumlocutions, metaphors, etc." [3]. The selection amongst several ways of designating a reality is a constant of the linguistic usage, whether among these designation ways there is any semantic connection or not. It is this distance between the linguistic signs that makes the use of the stylistic language possible. The co-occurrence of the taboo and the euphemism in a given context can be a matter of stylistics; the speaker communicates his image about the reviewer by the selection that he operates in the paradigm that designates that reviewer.

We use the name of "language taboo" when referring to words, phrases, expressions, etc., which know the ban of their utterance at the level of a language community. The vocabulary

prohibitions must be placed in relation to the beliefs in the demiurgic power of the word and the human fears materialized as taboos. Considering the facts from this perspective, the linguistic taboo appears as the linguistic form of certain socially determined prohibitions and only secondarily from a language standpoint. The same observation is applicable to a large extent to the euphemism [8].

Essentially, the language taboo is based on the belief that to name something by its own name can be dangerous, because the name of that precise thing entails the thing itself; it is preferable therefore to employ words or phrases less specific which call "without name". Investing the name with meanings and roles so important determined the trend to develop mechanisms to try to avoid any adverse consequences that the action of speaking a name would have. In his work *Totem and Taboo*, Freud highlights the ambivalent attitude of man towards what is taboo: the taboo is based on a ban, a renouncement, but the pleasure of violating this prohibition continues to exist in people's unconscious [1]. If the form of manifestation of the taboo is linguistics, its essence is of social-spiritual nature.

The phenomenon of the language taboo is closely related to the modern cultural taboos, as taboos evolve with civilization. Thus, the naming of the genitalia is a widespread taboo in the contemporary society, while the Indo-European languages featured the tabooing of the hand and eye. The terminology fluctuations the term "hand" registers in proto-history highlights the archaic fear to call this part of the body. This is because the hand is of particular importance, a fact highlighted by the large number of expressions containing it: *to be within the grasp of someone, to get one's hands off of something/someone, to hand someone,* etc. For the primitive mentality the hand was an independent being invested with magical powers that can do much good and evil [9].

The linguistic taboo is due not only to superstitions and beliefs, but also to emotional or social reasons, for reasons of education, courtesy, good manners, decency, kindness etc. The usual phrases and words that are considered too harsh, rude or indecent are avoided [3]. Thus it is considered too harsh, in the presence of the relatives of the deceased, to say that someone died: we say that the person *disappeared* or that someone *is gone*, and that *his/her soul went to God*, that the person *went to the afterlife*, etc. There are also avoided, especially in the presence of a patient, but also in other circumstances, calling serious diseases by their names is avoided: cancer, syphilis, tuberculosis etc. Likewise, calling the names of parts of the body which are considered to be naughty, in particular, genitalia is avoided words that refer to particular physiological acts, in particular the sexual intercourse, or otherwise related to particular sexual orientation such as homosexuality, lesbianism, by substituting them by either scientific terms, or - in everyday language - through usually metaphorical euphemisms which become very quickly proper, and, consequently, vulgar and they are being substituted by new euphemisms.

3.2. Religious taboos

Manifested essentially by prohibitions and restrictions, the taboo was mainly paired with religious prohibitions, although the origin of the taboo phenomena predates any religion. The sacred taboos are traditional taboos that have accompanied the human civilization since its beginnings, and which, in one form or another, exist in all cultures of the world, constituting anthropological universal elements. The sacred taboos are the expression of superstitious fears. The fear to name realities endowed in the collective imaginary with superhuman attributes, able to intervene concretely in the life of the community, defines, in fact, the fear of death. The emergence of the first language prohibitions is link to the earliest manifestations of the mystical-religious thinking, of totemic and shamanic type, the death and sexuality are two realities that underpin traditional taboos.

The religious prohibitions deal with beings, states, objects which by their nature are taboo: leaders, priests, witches, corpses, pregnant women fall into this category. The taboo nature is contagious (the spot where a leader put his foot on becomes taboo), and the person violating the taboo draws on terrible punishment: disease, madness, death. Beyond the background of religious bans there is the human's fear of death, the reluctance to get in touch with everything that has to do with it. The paradigm of euphemisms within the religious communication proves to be extremely rich and varied, mainly aimed at:

a. Taboos on-death: – the alofemic designation of the end of the life reveals on the one hand, the fear of the human being in front of this great unknown, but also the tendency of embellishment, the mystification of what the end signifies. The taboos on death generated in Romanian a wide range of euphemistic expressions meant to reduce the hard semantic charge this word: the earth called him, to be on the death bed, to be on one's last legs, to live on borrowed time, to have on foot in the grave, smelling spade, to tip over the perch, to be on hearse, going out feet first, the crossed hands on his chest, to eat one's nut sweet for funerals, to meet one's maker, etc. The above examples show the trend to solving taboos in the semantics area of *the death* especially by a change of perspective, by introducing positive, optimistic even ironic notes that detract from the tragic appearance of the reality of death.

b. *Taboos on the devil* – the euphemisms in this semantic area are even more numerous than those in the previous series: *the impious, the wicked, the foe, the foe, the evil, the sin, the devil, the horned one, the wicked, the unclean, Old Harry, Scaraoschi, cursed be its name* and so on. Whereas the calling of the name would entail the incarnation or the manifestation of that reality "in many languages there are a plethora of apparent detour names, circumlocutions and synonyms to name the evil spirit. The plethora is apparent because each of these names is striving to capture a feature of the reality called to suggest unequivocally who is involved; also the names strive to keep a safe distance from what might trigger the manifestation of the bad spirit" [8].

In Romanian, the evil spirit is expressed in linguistic forms such as: *Beelzebub, benga, demon, devil, idol, Satan, Scaraoschi,* etc. The feature of this series is given by the origin of the cultivated nature of its terms. The forms such as *belzebub* and *mamon* are of biblical origin, while *demon* and *idol* are of Greek origin and are rather cultural expedients given by the relationship that the Christians had with the pre-Christian religions and in general with any non-Christian religion. Even if these terms ensures that they cannot cause the appearance of the devil or effect of its presence, some speakers fear that the utterance of one of the two words might lead to the appearance of the evil spirit which actually hides behind these terms. This explains the emergence of a new series of forms, as heterogeneous as the origin and method of formation: *aghiuță, cel-de-pe-comoară, cel-din-bală, ducă-se-pe-pustii, împielițatul, împiedicătorul, încornoratul, mititelul, necuratul, nefârtatul, nepriitorul, nevoia, pustiul, spurcatul* (the wicked)*, ucigă-l crucea, ucigă-l toaca, vicleanul* (the cunning), etc. Highlighting different perspectives and attributes, the role of such expressions is to protect the speaker and possibly the listener, of the (certainly destructive) effects of the incarnation or the manifestation of the evil spirit, thus called. All these terms are used to avoid the term which etymologically is derived from the Latin. *draco, -nis* [8].

c. The taboos related to the names of deities: names given to God as a supreme being: *the Almighty, the Father, the Exalted*; names given to the Son of God: *the Son, the Messiah, the Savior of Nazareth*; names given to the Virgin Mary: *the Mother of God, the Virgin, the Virgin Mary, the Holy Virgin*. The actual cases of euphemia of the name of God and of the terms that define the elements of worship are some situations aimed at "calling someone's name in vain" (using the term as interjection), or some special fixed constructions with a blasphemous tint. In these cases the euphemia is performed not at the level of content, through a metaphor, but in the form of the word, by phonetic distortion: *dumnescrisu măti, bisăuu măti, crupa mătii (crucea), ceapa mătii (ceara)* etc. [10].

To the extent that the above terms are meant to send to a particular concept, but avoiding the word that evokes the corresponding reality, they constitute some euphemisms. The euphemisms represent the improved forms of expression, ensuring the participants that the linguistic act of speech will remain in a linguistic framework and will not generate the called concrete reality, neither as object nor as process. The paradigmatic wealth of the euphemistic expression indicates a degree of uncertainty from the speakers concerning the safety of the terms. This mistrust creates new euphemisms meant to blur the fear of the speakers concerning the effects that the utterance of the specific word might have.

3.3. The euphemism - a solution to circumvent the religious taboos

The term *euphemism* comes from the Greek and defines etymologically "auspicious word". Benveniste notes that, while originally the Greek term has a positive meaning denoting a positive effect designating *to to utter auspicious words*, it gradually acquired negative valences. The linguist explains the emergence of this negative aspect through a confusion between the «language» and the «speech» values (in the Saussurian sense). The religious meanings with all their echoes, the associations and their interference, relate to the "speech"; these meanings can be determined, however, only starting from a purely linguistic value. In the case of the term *euphemism* the action of the cultural use over the lexical meaning is quite obvious [9].

The explanatory dictionaries highlight the pragmatic valences of the euphemistic expression:

(1) "A lexical process consisting of the highlighting of mitigating the expression of an idea by substitution or circumlocution; in rhetoric, the figure of thought based on this process: The film was not bad; The man is not without qualities. In the statement, the euphemism appears:
a. To avoid trivial raw or indecent expressions: *to sleep, to go to a better world, to pay one's debt towards the community, to croak* - "to die"; *to sleep, to rest* - "death";
b. To avoid insulting expressions or that could be interpreted as follows: *unseeing* – "blind"; *handicapped* – "mentally retarded"; "paralyzed";
Social or religious taboos, sometimes name-related: *alcoholic* – "drunk"; *The devil, the one sitting on top of the treasure* – "the devil"; the beautiful – in popular language, the name of "evil fairies"; in the Greek antiquity, the name of the evil gods, Erinnyes ("vindictive rage", infernal deities), was substituted by Eumenide – the 'benevolent' "(DSL, s.v.).
(2) "a word or phrase in speech or in writing, replacing an unpleasant an offensive, indecent or obscene word or phrase, observing the parallelism of sense - From fr. *Éuphemisme*" (DEX, s.v.).
(3) "a word, expression that replaces in speech or in writing a word or phrase denoting something nasty, offensive or obscene. [<fr. *Éuphemisme,* cf. Gr. I – well, phemi - speak]" (DN, s.v.).
(4) "a language element that replaces in speech or in writing, a word or phrase which is unpleasant, vulgar, offensive, respecting the parallelism of sense. / < fr. *Éuphemisme*" (NODEX, s.v.).

The euphemism is not part of the linguistic system of the language but a fact of speech. People resort to euphemisms either because they want to be polite or because they do not want to utter words deemed too harsh by the speakers or to hide unwanted realities. One of the essential functions of euphemism is to make the other party forget about the taboo. The euphemism is therefore the result of a meta-linguistic functional approach (it deals with the performance of any educated speaker and the place and it takes in a communication situation; the euphemism is not a system) focused on the illocutionary component of the act and aims precisely at minimizing a perlocutionary aspect: to hurt / offend unintentionally [10].

Among the methods of achieving the euphemism two categories can be singled out: a) the first deals with the assignment of auspicious names to adverse notions; b) the second concerns the process by which the expression which is considered inauspicious is desecrated by its replacement with a distant or weaker equivalent [11].

The euphemism is created from the need to manipulate reality: man has sought ways to name a dangerous reality without violating prohibitions; in fact, without causing, in this way, the unpredictable and undesirable effects of the manifestation of that reality. In the paradigm of the euphemistic expressions degrees and nuances can be identified, reflecting distinct perspectives of knowledge and approach to reality. The periphrastic names that call without naming, to improve, attenuate, reinterpret suggest by restricting the content notes, they hypertrophy and generalize traits

considered to be positive by falsifying the essence, the scope or content notes – this also generates other effects such as changing reality or just changing a word, the creation of a new reality, etc. [8].

The features of the euphemistic expression include, as Lavinia Seiciuc notes:

A. The function to avoid the implicit taboos

The implicit taboos are traditional taboos that have accompanied the human civilization since its inception, and which, in one form or another, exist in all cultures of the world, constituting anthropological universals. The implicit taboos are of two types: the sacred taboos and taboos of the impure. The sacred taboos are linked to the mythical-religious thinking and taboos of the superstitious fear. The initial motivation of certain language bans has diminished as the concerned object has acquired the character of taboo. The taboos of the impure are generated by a sense of revulsion or disgust (in this category can be found taboos in the field of the reproductive function (sexuality, pregnancy, menstruation, etc.) and those related to the excretory function (urination, defecation).

B. The function of avoiding explicit taboos

The explicit taboos are taboos born in modern western society, related to the coexistence in society of different categories of people, which have an explicit, motivated and legislated character and transgressions are punished immediately. These taboos are not universal; they vary from one culture to another and have been developing rapidly. Such euphemisms characterize the language called *politically correct* language.

In turn, the function of avoiding explicit taboos goes through three embodiments:
1. The dignifying function – a favorable image of reality perceived as negative is created (drunkenness - *"ethylic intoxication"*, garbage collectors – *"sanitation technicians"* gypsy-*"Roma*", etc.);
2. *The mitigation function* – the euphemisms are designed to mitigate the impact of the contents of a message that evokes unpleasant or painful realities ("he could not be saved" for *he died*, "casualties", "collateral damage" or "victims" for *dead,* "stunning" for *slaughter,* etc.);
3. *The ceremonious function* – a particular case of euphemism is the expression of ceremonious formulas (in state, diplomatic or religious protocol, or in the administrative or legal discourse, the use of standardized formulas is required: *His Excellency*, *His Bea*titude, *His Eminence, His Holiness*) [10].

In the religious language, the use of the euphemism is not necessarily due to modesty, but to fear. Since the bans have a social character, the use and impact of euphemisms is linked to the social level, the domination relationship with other social circles of the individual and the social group. Thus, typically, a euphemistic term at a certain social level can be vulgar in another register or social level. Also, as the language evolves alongside the society, one of the effects of using this route is the mitigation (to extinction sometimes) of the consciousness that, indirectly, a ban is violated. As a distortion the euphemism may have more serious consequences than the naming because the distortion is not followed by knowledge of reality. In addition, the act of euphemism involves the existence of degrees, all with the role of distancing of reality and from reality through which, in fact, this is twisted, replaced or simply removed. The reality can be depicted in a nuanced, attenuated and metaphorically way – or through various rhetorical figures - can be falsified until the occurrence of a different reality, or until the cessation of any reality [12].

The analysis of the official messages of the Romanian Patriarchate, available on the website of the institution, and press the releases of the "Lumina" newspaper, the weekly Christian spirituality and attitude newspaper edited under the patronage of the Romanian Patriarchate revealed the contamination of the institutional religious discourse with euphemistic expressions taken from the *politically correct* language: "occult practices" – for the religions that do not follow in the Orthodox Christian church doctrine; "missionary strategy" – for the proselytizing activities of the church representatives; "media apostolate" – for the editorial work of the magazine "Lumina",

and so on. Another example is the camouflage of the mercantile interests of the clergy by resorting to euphemistic expressions which, by frequency, have led to the lexicalizing of the euphemistic terms.

If at first glance the religious and the political language seem to be radically separate, they seem to become closer at the level of the symbolic relationships that they build; both the religious and political language justify their existence by legitimating discursive mechanisms that they trigger. They both offer the individual a particular image of reality, in terms of the shared ideology for politics and the angle of sacredness in the case of the religious language. Like politics, the religion resorts to euphemistic discursive events to promote a positive image of the institution and its representatives and gain faithful adherence without which the institution of the church would not prove useful. Besides the euphemisms that are the basis of the intention to protect the speaker of the undesirable effects of naming certain realities, the euphemisms ranging in the *politically correct* euphemisms aim rather at promoting a positive image and the mystification of the aspects affecting the church and its representatives.

Conclusions

If at first sight the euphemistic expression seems incompatible with the religious language as it is considered par excellence the privilege of the political communication, its presence in the religious discourse is related to a series of religious bans, which have generated over time an inventory of relatively stable euphemisms.

The analysis of the religious language analysis indicates that there are two main categories of euphemisms specific to the religious communication:

a. Euphemisms with a role of circumventing the traditional taboos of the sacred;

b. Euphemisms taken from the *politically correct* language - they no longer have the function to circumvent potential negative effects that direct appointment of beings and things would attract over the speaker, but that of mystification, the embellishment of adverse social realities.

The *politically correct* language claims to be the materializing through the language of positive social attitude on issues perceived traditionally as negative, purifying the language of insulting, derogatory, discriminatory words or phrases, that would arouse the susceptibility of those targeted, but introducing instead, a repertoire of institutionalized euphemisms. Despite the dignifying intentions of certain disadvantaged categories, the *politically correct* language is perceived as a form of censorship, a way to infringe the fundamental right to express one's opinion.

Unlike the pragmatic valences manifested by the euphemistic expression in the political communication, in the case of the religious communication, its main stake is the evocation of the reality while sparing the receiver. Nowadays, however, we note an increased investment of the religious euphemism with mystifying pragmatic valences. The Church is keen to strengthen its position in the balance of power in the state and, according to this it resorts to rhetorical strategies carefully managed with the intention of promoting a positive, clean image of the institution and the clergy. In this context, the euphemism becomes one of the favorite means of expression contributing to circumvent the unpleasant, harmful aspects to the church and its representatives.

References

[1]   F. Sigmund, *Totem and taboo*, revised translation, preface and notes by Leonard Gavriliu, Mediarex Publishing House, 1996.

[2]   D.P. Chamizo, Linguistic interdiction: Its status quaestionis and possible future research lines, Language Sciences. 31(4) (2009) 428-446.

[3]   C. Eugen, Metaphorical Creation in Language, in: Dacoromania, new series, V–VI, 2000–2001, Cluj-Napoca.

[4]   B. Kate, Taboo, Euphemism and Political Correctness, in: Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, Elsevier, 2006.

[5] J. Roman, Essais de linguistique générale, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1963.

[6] C. Gheorghe, Refections on the Current Church Language, Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997.

[7] R. Zafiu, Archaism and Innovation in Religious Language, in: Stylistic Diversity in Current Romanian Language, University Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001.

[8] G. Alexandru, The Names in the Bible, in: Cultural Romanian nr. 9/2008.

[9] G. Charles, Le tabou linguistique: limites d'une explication, în: Etudes de linguistique generale et de linguistique latine, Societe pour l'Information Grammaticale, 1987, Paris.

[10] S. Lavinia, Another Kind of NOT to Say: euphemism and disphemism in Romance languages, "Ştefan cel Mare" Publishing House, Suceava, 2011.

[11] B. Emil, Old/Ancient and Modern Euphemisms, in ch. Vocabulary and Culture, in Problemes of General Linguistics, vol. I, Universitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000.

[12] D. Ovidiu, Parofonic Euphemism, in: Studies of Romanian Language in the Memory of Professor Radu Sp. Popescu, Universitaria Publishing House, Craiova, 2008.

[13] DEX =Ion Coteanu, Luiza Seche, Mircea Seche (coord.), *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1975.

[14] DN = Florin Marcu and Const. Maneca, Dictionary of Neologisms, Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986.

[15] DSL = Angela-Bidu Vranceanu et alii, Dictionary of Language Sciences, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 205.

[16] NODEX = The New Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, Litera International Publishing House, 2002.

[17] Information on http://patriarhia.ro/.

[18] Information on http://ziarullumina.ro/.