and non-finite subordination, the differential object marking which is frequently associated with a head-marking construction, namely clitic doubling, the inflected non-finite forms found in Ibero-Romance and Old Neapoletan, the loss and replacement of *esse* with *habere* or *tenere*, the emergence of the Romance causative construction, the Romance dual complementizers system, etc.). An extreme situation extensively discussed towards the end of the chapter is the dialect of Ripatransone (central Italy), that has extended head-marking, often in conjunction with dependent-marking, to almost all the areas of the grammar.

The last chapter, *The rise and fall of alignments* (pp. 312−352), explains some of the developments characterizing the transition from Latin to Romance as involving two competing alignments in the marking of arguments: the nominative-accusative orientation (found in classical Latin and Romance) interfering at some point with the active-stative orientation (found in late Latin and early Romance). The active-stative orientation, stronger in the northern area but short-lived in the southern area of the Romània gave rise to some structural oppositions between the north and the south areas: (i) prolonged retention vs. early loss of V_2 syntax, (ii) marking of transitive and intransitive subject (subject clitics, generalized preverbal positions) vs. marking of the object (prepostional accusative, object clitic doubling), (iii) prolonged retention vs. early loss of binary (or ternary) case system, (iv) *habere/esse* auxiliary alternation vs. generalized auxiliary (*habere* or *esse*), (v) retention vs. loss of participial agreement, (vi) loss vs. retention (and reinforcement) of the preterite.

In conclusion, this book represents a model of how modern diachronic syntax can re-think the traditional descriptive distinctions and can incorporate the latest benefits of generative grammar theorizing, without throwing into relief the theory in expense of the data.

Adina Dragomirescu
"Iorgu Iordan − Al. Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics, Bucharest
Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest

ANDRÉ HORAK, *L'Euphémisme. Entre tradition rhétorique et perspectives nouvelles*, München, Lincom Europa, Edition Linguistique, 2010, 110 p.[1]

Beginning with the title, André Horak's recent monograph on euphemism places itself at the crossroads of "new perspectives" in linguistics. The author sets out in the "Introduction" to realize a study of euphemism, considering that this "linguistic phenomenon" (p. 7) has not been, so far, correctly situated in the field of linguistic theory and that a truly scientific definition of it has not been drawn. Between the rhetoric treaties of neoclassicism and the more recent input of communication theory and study of conversational tropes, the author faces a difficult task. However, his preference for the theory of illocutory tropes remains evident, and his lack of interest in cognitive linguistics, which also recently approached tropes[2], narrows the range of the "perspectives nouvelles" that his title indicates.

The first chapter, "Tabou et euphémisme: bases terminologiques", starts with the acknowledgement that taboos change with the epoch, culture and social context in general, so that euphemism has a contextual nature and individual usage, verging on the idiosyncratic. In accordance with this awareness will be arranged the entire argument of the book.

[1] This paper is a result of the project „Transnational Network for Integrated Management of Postdoctoral Research in Communicating Sciences. Institutional building (postdoctoral school) and fellowships program (CommScie)" – POSDRU/89/1.5/S/63663, financed under the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

[2] Javier Herrero Ruiz, *Understanding Tropes. At the Crossroads between Pragmatics and Cognition*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2009.

BDD-R23 © 2012 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-05 10:51:39 UTC)

A large portion of the book (the second chapter: "L'euphémisme dans la perspective diachronique") is dedicated to a necessary diachronic survey of theories on euphemism. The origin of the ancient Greek euphemism may have been religious, as indicated by an example in the title of a famous Aeschylean tragedy, *Eumenides*, a name which was meant to appease the vengeful goddesses more aptly called Furies or *Erinyes*. But the Greek treatises of rhetoric, such as Aristotle's or Hermogenes', often point out the orator's obligation to comply with the taste of a lay public, and therefore their need to use ameliorative figures of speech. Even if the Greeks do not name them euphemisms, their function is eufemization. Horak studies the presence of any variety of euphemism, and not just the rare identification of euphemisms as figures of speech, which will only come in the 18th century. The Romans were also keen on studying rhetoric and identifying euphemic figures of speech and were able to identify such processes as the lexicalization (or "death") of euphemic words. After investigating the ameliorative figures indexed in some Roman treatises of rhetoric such as the anonymous *Retorica ad Herennium* and Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*, the author quotes some examples of euphemism from Lucretius, Ovid, Vergil, then uses a recent study[3] to discuss the reasons for the maintenance or abolition of some euphemic words in the modern language translations of the Bible. Although there are reasons for discussing the fidelity to the original Hebraic euphemisms in the Latin *Vulgata*, the discussion of modern occurrences has only the merit of showing the mutability of taboos in history, which was already demonstrated. But the initiative does not clarify the use of euphemisms in the Antiquity.

After invoking some euphemisms in the courtly poetry of the Middle Ages, Horak further discusses an often overlooked phenomenon from the 17th century, namely the habitual periphrastic talk of the French *précieux* and *précieuses*, made famous by Molière in his comedy *Les précieuses ridicules* (1659). Since Molière's play, the *précieux* and their euphemistic parlance (e.g. "dents – l'ameublement de la bouche") have been an object of derision, and sometimes even their use of euphemism has been deemed "false" (Camillus Nyrop) because their linguistic habits had been stigmatized as ridiculous. However, the intended function of their "precious" parlance was not to cause laughter, not even to simply "embellish" ugly realities, but to avoid and attenuate the terms considered inside their group to be vulgar. The existence of the 17th century *précieux* builds a strong case for the author's insistence that the euphemism is always relative to a situation of speech and to the perception of an individual speaker or a group of speakers.

In the survey of the theories of euphemism elaborated in the 18th and 19th centuries, the author discusses the views of rhetoricians such as Lamy, Rollin, Dumarsais, Beauzée and Fontanier. It is Dumarsais who, in his 1730 treatise *On tropes*, first takes into consideration euphemism as a trope in its own right, differentiated from the other figures for which it is often mistaken, such as reticence, paraphrase, metaphor or allegory. Horak appreciates Dumarsais' definition of euphemism as "a figure that disguises disagreeable ideas" (p. 33), presumably because euphemism is thus no longer subordinated to other figures of speech. However, Horak's view in the introductory chapter is that euphemism is not a proper figure, but a figural "process". Dumarsais is opposed by Beauzée and then Pierre Fontanier who, because euphemism can be realized through a number of figures of speech, refuse to acknowledge it as something other than a „quality [...] of eloquence" (p. 35). Here the author speculates the inconsistencies in Fontanier's theory of tropes to accuse the belated French rhetorician of not being consistent in his classification of euphemism as a "general" figure, instead of observing that this imprecision speaks volumes about the open and mobile character of the euphemic phenomenon. The last historical figure is the Danish linguist Camillus Nyrop who, in a 1913 treatise of grammar, favors a social approach to euphemism. But his errors will be maintained through most of the 20th century by linguists who tend to judge morally the use of euphemisms as a way of "falsifying reality" or who consider euphemisms outside their contexts and presume their unrealistic "universality". Thus he paved the way for the future dictionaries of euphemisms, an enterprise that André Horak disproves of, given its utopianism (such dictionaries can never be complete) and its lack of accuracy (they almost always neglect the situation of speech).

[3] H. Schorch, *Euphemismen in der Hebräischen Bibel*¸ Wiessbaden, Harrassowitz, 2000.

BDD-R23 © 2012 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-05 10:51:39 UTC)

The historic survey has shown the main points in the definition of euphemism that Horak intends to give. The third chapter ("Pour une théorie modernisée de l'euphémisme") seeks to reach this definition by following several paths consequently. First, the author uses the Saussurian theory of the linguistic sign. The euphemic process contains a transfer of semantic weight from the taboo signifier to the initially neutral, euphemic signifier, which comes to connote the taboo, while still denoting, to some degree, its initial, "neutral" referent. The model tries to explain how euphemism functions in the mind of the individual at the receiving end of the euphemic communication. Following this line of argument, Horak gives the following definition: "L'euphémisme est une figure référentielle qui produit un écart entre les intensités de deux réalités (psychiques *ou* extralinguistiques), l'une denotée, l'autre connotée par le langage" (p. 54). But he knows that this definition fails to account for such particular cases of euphemization as hyperonymy, which replaces a taboo term by another, whose larger semantic sphere encloses, but is not reducible to the taboo (e.g., calling "an attack" of US forces in Afghanistan "an operation"). At the same time, the author invokes cases of conversational euphemization when the taboo is avoided via paralinguistic manifestations such as intonation or gestures. This is why the theory of euphemism may not remain a purely Saussurian one.

The author then appeals to a "morpho-semantico-structural" approach, that is, he examines the morpho-semantic resemblance which may exist between a taboo word and its substitute. Morphologically, there usually exists a correspondence between a taboo word and a euphemic word, in that the speaker may choose more readily a euphemic noun to replace a taboo noun. Another challenge is to find how many semantic analogies exist between the tabooized word and the euphemic word. Given the existence of euphemic antiphrasis and euphemic ellipsis, where there is a flagrant lack of semantic resemblance between the taboo word and the euphemic word, one must conclude that semantic relatedness is not a precondition to the euphemic process. However, a negative rule is that the euphemic unit and the "forbidden" word must have in common an obligatory smaller number of semes than the total number of semes which constitute the taboo sememe. But a semantic link between the two is not necessary; there is no minimum number of semes to be shared by the taboo and the euphemic word.

The third approach to a definition of euphemism is made via pragmatic communication theory, as elaborated by H.P. Grice and O. Ducrot, and verbal interaction linguistics of C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni. Horak studies euphemization as a communication which violates various principles of verbal interaction, such as the principle of cooperation, the relation principle, the law of clarity (all formulated by Grice), or the law of exhaustibility (Ducrot). Thus euphemism is, then, the linguistic manifestation of the refusal of explicit communication. Horak broadens the range of phenomena that are usually described as euphemic by including conversational behaviors, at the same time stressing the situational character of every euphemic speech usage. Following a definition by Anne Krieg-Planque, "l'euphémisme est un euphémisme pour quelqu'un, à un moment donné, dans une situation donnée" (p. 67). The monographer goes on to discuss the polyphony of the euphemic discourse, observing that, although euphemic communication requires a degree of shared mutual knowledge, an euphemic enouncement may also be monophonic. The example the author offers, however, is not convincing: a roasted chestnut vendor advertises his trade by yelling "chauds les marrons, chauds!" and thereby conceals the fact that his merchandise is old and stale. But that is not reticence, because there is nobody at the receiving end of this communication to recognize the reticence as such[4].

Finally, the author uses a sociolinguistic approach, which emphasizes the relativity of euphemism. The idea of an objectively existing taboo is criticized, since all euphemisms are individual or shared by a small collectivity. Taboos vary with the speech situation (not even sexual

[4] This is where a pragmatic-cognitive approach seems to be more helpful, since it aims at describing "the production and understanding of tropes" (Javier Herrero Ruiz, *Understanding Tropes*, Frankfurt, 2009, p. 252) from both the speaker's and the hearer's end of the communication process, and not their abstract functioning.

BDD-R23 © 2012 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-05 10:51:39 UTC)

linguistic taboos are active in many adolescent contemporary Westerns societies) and the euphemistic phenomenon depends on the pragmatic or contextual data which determine the discursive behavior of the speaker. After all, a given word is *not* euphemic in itself; it only functions as such in a given context. On the semantic level, the euphemism brings about an embellishment of reality, but its function may be better described as that of avoiding a negative reaction from the part of the receiver, or trying to achieve the "zero effect" in verbal interaction. But at the same time, the euphemism produces a series of stylistic effects often used in literature. They vary according to the procedures used, be they tropes, non-tropic figures and a virtually unlimited number of nonfigurative means of communication. Following Marc Bonhomme, Horak establishes that, even if the euphemism itself is not a figure, its basic principle (the amelioration of the negativity of a tabooized reality) is a figural one, given that its characteristics are the freedom of a measurable marked speech, received by an interlocutor which has sufficient contextual information to understand the message. Trying to find a comprehensive definition, the author chooses this one: "L'euphémisme est un procédé figuré qui améliore la négativité d'une réalité (subjectivement) taboue" (p. 62). The ameliorative force of a euphemism is connected to its figural character; the more a euphemic word is understood in a proper sense, the more effective will be the euphemic communication. At the same time, the conventionality and predictability of euphemisms is indirectly proportional to their efficiency. One objection here might be that in various contexts, such as comic literary writings the purpose of euphemic communication (the purpose of euphemic communication is not the ameliorative efficiency) but the reconnaissance of (usually funny) taboos; that means that the communication is efficient if the euphemism is recognized as such and the taboo behind it unveiled. But the aim of André Horak's book is mainly to include into the sphere of euphemism the particular situations of speech codified as "illocutory tropes" (C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni), as well as to provide a place for extra linguistic euphemic manifestations.

In the fourth chapter ("Les moyens euphémiques"), the author draws a synthesis of the figural means of conveying euphemisms, from the ancient rhetorical tradition to the linguistic research on euphemism in the last fifty years. The figural means follow the classification of the Belgian group of Liège linguists and rhetoricians who authored the *Rhétorique generale*[5]: there are morphologic figures (anagram, aphaeresis, syncope, apocope, and acronymy), syntactic figures (ellipsis, reticence, periphrasis, epanorthosis, and oxymoron), semantic figures (metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, comparison, and symbol) and referential figures (such as the antiphrasis; litotes is a special case, since it can never, by itself, function as a euphemism). But there are also non-figural means of realizing the euphemism, such as paronymy and hyperonymy, and then there is the case of the conversational euphemism, which informs the whole effort to a new definition of euphemism in this monograph.

The final definition of euphemism, cited in the "Conclusion", is formulated in 1953 by Romanian expatriate comparatist B. Munteano: euphemism "implique, semble-t-il, six termes: la notion, ou l'objet; le terme proper qui les désigne; le terme euphémique; la position de l'émetteur; celle du récepteur, les circonstances de temps, de lieu et d'époque" (p. 103). Although there are other parameters that may be here added, the point is that euphemism is never easy to define. André Horak's book is a noteworthy attempt to assess the complexity of the euphemic phenomenon in light of contemporary linguistic theory.

Doris Mironescu
"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iaşi

[5] Jacques Dubois *et al.*, *Rhétorique générale*, Paris, Seuil, 1992.

BDD-R23 © 2012 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-05 10:51:39 UTC)