

# The Utilization of Circumlocution in Some Selected Religious Texts

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## Introduction

Circumlocution is a strategy used to describe or explain the meaning of the target expression, through description of its characteristics such as shape, colour, size or function. In other words, using many words to describe something for which a concise expression exists (Smyth, 1920: 681).

Circumlocution is often used by aphasics and people learning a new language, where in the absence of a word (such as **grandfather**) the subject can simply be described the father of one's father). It is also used frequently in Basic English, a constructed dialect of non-regional English (ibid.).

Circumlocution is beating around the bush, circumambages, diffuseness, discursiveness, euphemism, gassiness, indirectness, periphrase, periphrasis, pleonasm, prolixity, roundabout, tautology, verbal evasion, verbiage, wordiness (Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus, 2012 : 25).

A lengthened, roundabout mode of speech is allowable for the sake of variety or emphasis, or when a direct assertion might be offensive. But when none of these ends is accomplished, the mode of speeches becomes feeble and ineffective.

Broadly speaking, circumlocution receives less attention in studies. In addition, very little is known about the purposes of employing circumlocution in speech and writing.

Accordingly, this study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is circumlocution?
2. What are the types of circumlocution ?
3. What functions is circumlocution used to achieve ?
4. What are the types used in religious texts?

## 1. Previous studies

It has been stated that circumlocution is describing or exemplifying the target object or action. To the best of the researchers' knowledge there are no previous studies applied circumlocution to the religious text. However, circumlocution has been applied as one the communication strategies in many studies, Teng, Huei-Chun. (2012), examines the effects of teaching communication strategies (CSs) to EFL college students in Taiwan, she finds that participants use circumlocution more than other strategies (3). Another study reports the detailed steps employed in developing students' circumlocution strategy in an intermediate Chinese language class (4). An Iranian study sets out to study CSs in terms of their relation to language proficiency and their manifestation in the written production. The rationale behind this study is to take a step towards the empirical investigation of CSs in the written medium (5). A study carries out among non-native speakers of English as a foreign language who made use of a series of compensatory strategies (circumlocution) when faced with unknown lexical items. According to the results, this particular kind of strategies proved to be especially useful to solve gaps in communication in order to keep the flow of conversation (6).

## 2. What is Circumlocution?

Circumlocution (also called periphrasis, circumduction, circumvolution, periphrase, or ambage) is an ambiguous or roundabout figure of speech. In its most basic form, circumlocution is using many words (such as "a tool used for cutting things such as paper and hair") to describe something for which a concise (and commonly known) expression exists ("**scissors**"). In this sense, the vast majority of definitions found in dictionaries are circumlocutory (Smyth, 1920: 681).

The employment of circumlocution refers to the use of unnecessarily words and indirect language to avoid getting to the point, (i.e.) contrast with conciseness. Though circumlocution is usually regarded as a stylistic vice in contemporary prose, it can be used for comic effect. Yemeni speakers, for example, avoid the use of these words through different types of replacement of taboo words with more acceptable words of circumlocution(Qanbar,2011:96).

### 3. Circumlocution Purposes

Circumlocution is a roundabout or ambiguous way of saying things. For example, saying "a certain long-eared animal with a penchant for carrots" instead of "rabbit" is circumlocutory. Circumlocution may also be called ambaage, circumduction, circumvolution, periphrase, or periphrasis. There are many different types of circumlocution and many different reasons for speaking in a roundabout manner.

### 4. Circumlocution and Politeness

According to Bach and Harnish (1979: 99) in circumlocutory utterances, "the speaker compromises the presumption of manner in order to avoid the offence to the hearer or embarrassment to himself that explicit language would endanger". Thus, instead of saying the following speech to a "tardy guess":

-It's about time you got here.

One can say the same thing "more tactfully" as in :

-We were beginning to worry about you (ibid.).

Both speeches denote that the guest's coming late, but the second one is more polite (ibid.).

Crystal (2003:187) states that there was one nice moment when the US, UK and Australian delegates were all reduced to incoherence because they found that they had disbarred themselves from using any of their natural expressions for 'the safe walking route at the side of a road' – *pavement* (UK), *sidewalk*(US) and *footpath* (Australian). In the absence of a regionally neutral term, all they were left with was circumlocution (such as the one just given).

### 5. Rationale to Circumlocution

There are many reasons for using circumlocution. Various studies show different attitudes towards the subjects in question. Qanbar's (2011 :98) study, for example, states that Yemenis employ circumlocutory terms as euphemisms. Hence , it is important to know the purposes for employing such a term.

### 6. Circumlocution Purposes

Circumlocution is a roundabout or ambiguous way of saying things. For example, saying "a certain long-eared animal with a penchant for carrots" instead of "rabbit" is circumlocutory. Circumlocution may also be called ambaage, circumduction, circumvolution, periphrase, or periphrasis. There are many different types of circumlocution and many different reasons for speaking in a roundabout manner.

**6.1 Social:** Circumlocution can also be used for social reasons, for example, to avoid saying something unlucky or offensive. The use of circumlocutory speech to avoid unlucky or taboo words is a form of euphemism. Sometimes, euphemism is simply the substitution of one word for another, but in other cases, many words are used to describe something instead of using the true word for it, which may be considered offensive, upsetting, or unlucky. For example, one may say that someone "passed away" or "is no longer with us" instead of saying that person "died," in order to avoid upsetting his or her listeners (see Qanbar's ,2011: 98).The use of circumlocution helps to avoid offence when employed as euphemism (Brown and Levinson,1978:99).

**6.2 Ambiguity:** Circumlocution can also be used in order to speak ambiguously or equivocally. A person may use ambiguous circumlocutory speech for effect, for example in a humorous double entendre, or to make a certain sentiment fit the rhyme and meter of a poem. Circumlocutory speech can also be used, however, to deceive or misinform. Politicians and lawyers are often accused of this type of circumlocution, because it can sometimes be very difficult to determine which side of a political issue one should support simply by listening to its proponents, or to understand the finer points in a legal contract.

Circumlocutory speech with the intention to deceive is not limited to groups of people who use specialized speech professionally. However, one can encounter such examples of equivocation in nearly any situation. For example, an equivocating person may say "I may not have been exactly truthful" instead of directly admitting to a lie.

According to Obeing ( 2012: 49) "circumlocution" is employed by politicians in communicating potential face-threatening acts or politically risky subjects. Politicians avoid the obvious and communicate in an indirect way so as to protect further their own careers and to have both advantages ,in the political and interactional levels, over their political opponents. This due to the fact that obliqueness in communication may be expressed through evasion, circumlocution. **6.3 Politeness** :since circumlocution includes saying things indirectly, and indirectness is in many cases employed to reflect politeness, circum-locuting one's interaction may be used to show politeness.

**6.4 Disorder:** One of the simplest reasons for using circumlocution is the inability to recall the correct word for something. This often happens to second-language learners, but is also characteristic of some types of aphasia,

language loss due to brain damage. It should be noted that most people experience this phenomenon occasionally, even in their native tongue. Circumlocution is often an effective means get the point across in such situations.

**6.5 Failure in getting to the point:** this is unwelcome habit (ibid.).

### 7. Types of Circumlocution

According to Barrass (1982: 70), in his discussion of circumlocutory utterances interaction, there are three types of circumlocution can be distinguished:

- 1) general over specific (abstract over concrete);
- 2) paraphrase over name;
- 3) complex over simple;

Additionally (1), there are other types of circumlocution presented as follows:

- 4) ambiguity ;
- 5) equivocation;
- 6) euphemism ;
- 7) grammar.

#### 7.1 General over specific

Example of a typical sentence:

-Life in Poland is difficult because the prices on many things are too high.

Problems:

- What is meant by 'life'?
- Who is this life difficult for?
- What are the 'many things'?
- How can the range of 'too high prices' be defined?

This seems important and an usual type of frequently an uneconomical overwritten sentence: the lack of precise terms is likely to force subsequent reformulations and repetitions. Speakers should be bothered with questions about the generalizations they like to use them so that they start feeling concerned and responsible for the meanings they want to convey. Informative and precise statements should be aimed at, for example, to this effect:

-The cost of living of the Polish middle class families have nearly doubled over the last year due to the continuous rise in rent rates and food prices.

#### 7.2 Paraphrase over name

This case of circumlocution appears when one is not able to 'call a spade a spade'. The employment of understatements and periphrases aims at covering the ignorance or dishonesty of the writer. Here is a good list of words that have lent themselves to the formation of such overblown jargonistic phrases. To avoid equivocality, one is advised to use these words sparingly and with caution:

- case ( instance) character ( nature) condition( persuasion)
- degree (area) angle (aspect) fact ( field) level (situation)
- spectrum ( time) type Barrass (1982: 70).

Polish speakers overuse many of these words, and more: basis ( thing), kind ( something) and matter (issue). Barrass (ibid.) gives us examples of wordy phrasing and juxtaposes them with better, shorter equivalents:

<b>Circumlocution</b>	<b>Better English</b>
arrive at decision	decide
to say nothing of	And
it would appear that	Apparently
in the field of medicine	in medicine
a disproportionate number	few decide

#### 7.3 Complex over simple

Complex writing manifests itself in a threefold manner. First, it results from the writer's inability to arrange his/her topic in a logical structure. Here, culturally conditioned cognitive processes can be affected. The way of putting them on the right path leads through varied practice in essay organizing. Second, related to the foreign structured, thoughts are the methods of presenting them linguistically. English sentences produced by Polish speakers for example, often come out longer and looser than needed. Instead of grouping logically connected topics, they abound in fragmented arguments, associative remarks and repeated comments linked by connectives: which, with which, for which, by which, who, with whom, etc. (Barrass, 1982: 70).

Third, on the lexical level, the choice of foreign, fancy or longer term is common. Poles are not

particularly prone to using them, but occasional errors do occur. For the usual reasons of clarity, impact and concreteness, English stylists, though recognizing the 'matter of ear', prefer shorter words, like those in the second of the columns given below:

Fancy word	Shorter, preferred word
Proceed	go
Scintillate	shine
accomplish	do
terminate	end
hypothesis	suggest
individual	person
considerably	much
modification	change

Brrass (ibid.) suggests that on top of being systematically corrected for their errors, speakers should receive a list of strategic rules to adhere to, preferably illustrated with examples. An abridged version of such **anti-circumlocution** guidelines is provided below:

- a) always approach your subject directly;
- b) use definite, specific and concrete language;
- c) adapt suitable phrases from original English sources to approximate your expression to the near-native;
- d) of two synonymous expressions, choose the shorter since it is usually the better one.

Such an idea is supported by many other linguists dealing with other areas of investigating circumlocution. Hicks (2007: 90), for example, declares that journalists advised to prefer the direct statement to any form of circumlocution. He suggests long list of circumlocutory words to avoid. He calls them posh words. Posh, pompous, pretentious words are the opposite of tabloids : they show the writer is putting on collar and tie to impress. Many posh words used in journalism are also examples of circumlocution (long-winded and roundabout writing), see Hicks (2007 100-101).

#### 7.4 Ambiguity

It is the ability to express more than one interpretation. It is in contrast with vagueness in which specific and distinct interpretations are permitted whereas in vagueness it is difficult to form any interpretation at the desired level of specificity. Context may play a role in resolving ambiguity (2).

**7.5 Equivocation** is the use of circumlocution to deceive others without blatantly lying . Equivocation is classified as both a formal and informal fallacy. For example, if a mother asks her child to clean a throw rug , and the child replies that he will "hang the rug and beat it" instead of saying he will "clean it", he could mean that he will forget about the rug (hang it) and quickly leave (beat it) (2).

**7.6 Euphemism** is the use of circumlocution to avoid saying offensive words. A euphemism is a substitution of an agreeable or less offensive expression in place of one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the listener or in the case of doublespeak Euphemism, however, is only sometimes circumlocutory. For example, "Holy mother of Jesus !" is a circumlocution of "Mary" but "heck" while still euphemistic, is not a circumlocution of "hell" (2).

**7.7 Grammar:** some strictly grammatically incorrect statements are considered circumlocution to avoid using awkward constructions: e.g., "Aren't I going with you?" instead of "Am I not going with you?". These are often perfectly acceptable in common discourse (1).

### 8. Data Analysis

The researchers find examples of all types of circumlocution for the Holy Quranic Text. It is a text mining which refers to the process of deriving high-quality information from text. High-quality information is typically derived through the devising of patterns and trends. Text mining usually involves the process of structuring the input text database deriving patterns within the structured data, and finally evaluation and interpretation of the output.

#### 8.1 General over specific

This type of circumlocution is used for the sake of noting .A special circumlocution is after a general one or the vice versa. The former is for the sake of noting (remarking). Allah the Almighty mentions prays in general and then specifies the middle pray so as to shed the attention of people to the importance of this pray in a sense that it is a link between other prays.

( (2) البقرة(238)حافظوا على الصلوات والصلوة الوسطى

In the latter case, the general one is mentioned after the specific one.

(... فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَاثَةِ أَيَّامٍ فِي الْحَجِّ وَسَبْعَةٍ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ تِلْكَ عَشْرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ) (2) البقرة

Here, Allah the Almighty mentions all fast days that are obligatory and then specifies those people who are unable by saying fast three days in AL haj and seven days after AL haj.

### 8.2 Paraphrase over name

Circumlocution appears when the writer is not able to a thing or a word as it is so he employs of understatements and periphrases that aim at covering the ignorance or dishonesty of the writer.

(وَإِنَّ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَنْعَامِ لَعِبْرَةً نَسْتَفِيكُمْ مِمَّا فِي بطونه من بين فَرْتٍ وَدَم لَبْنَا خالصاً سائغاً للشاربين(66)). (16) النحل

Allah the Almighty mentions the general name (العبرة), it is not clear, then He explains in a clear way what is meant by (العبرة) into two steps: the first one is (سقىيا البطون) and the second one is (اللين السانغ). This is the significant of paraphrase and its importance in stating the meaning clearly.

### 8.3 Complex over simple

يا صاحبي السجن اما احدكما فيسقى ربه خمرا" واما الاخر فيصلب فتأكل الطير من راسه قضي الامر الذي فيه تستفتيان (41). (12) يوسف

Here, circumlocution is done by explaining the night dream using simple words.

### 8.4 Ambiguity

It is the ability to express more than one interpretation. It is generally contrasted with vagueness, in that specific and distinct interpretations are permitted (although some may not be immediately apparent), whereas with information that is vague it is difficult to form any interpretation at the desired level of specificity. Context may play a role in resolving ambiguity (2).

(الخبثات للخبثين والخبثون للخبثات والطيبات للطيبين والطيبون للطيبات اولئك مبرءون مما يقولون لهم مغفرة ورزق كريم). (26) النور

Here, (الخبثات, الطيبات), these words are ambiguous (i.e.) they refer either to persons or deeds.

### 8.5 Equivocation

It is the misleading use of a term with more than one meaning or sense (by glossing over which meaning is intended at a particular time). "To call by the same name" is classified as an informal logic fallacy. It generally occurs with polysemic words (words with multiple meanings) (2).

عم يتسألون (1) عن النبا العظيم(2). (78) النبا

Here, the word النبا العظيم is used to give two meanings, it is either the Day of Judgment or Imam Ali (AS).

### 8.6 Euphemism

Beckman and Callow (1974:120) state that euphemism is a metaphoric or metonymic use of an expression in place of another expression that is disagreeable or offensive. Lecch (1981: 53) suggests that euphemism is the practice referring to something offensive or delicate in terms that make it sound more pleasant or becoming than it really is. Additionally, this technique consists of replacing a word which has offensive connotations with another expression.

(القارعة (1) م القارعة(2) وما ادراك ما القارعة(3)). (101) القارعة

Here, the word القارعة is a metonymic word which refers to the Day of Judgment. It is used instead of the Day of Judgment to exaggerate and glorify the meaning of the Day of Judgment in the minds of people.

(ويوم بعض الظالم على يديه... (27). (25) الفرقان  
( واحيط بثمره فأصبح يقلب كفيه على ما انفق فيها(42). (18) الكهف

The euphemistic expressions above express the same meaning which is a regret meaning in this living and tangible view. Thus instead of mentioning the explicit word of regret which is lifeless, these expressions are used to focus on such a meaning that make it more prominent.

(الجارم وامين (1971:131)

## 9. Conclusion

Circumlocution is a locution that circles around a specific idea with multiple words rather than directly evoking it with fewer words. It is sometimes a necessary tool of communication. Communication is one of the crucial skills that challenge interlocutors to different degrees. The main reason why communication has attracted attention across fields is that communication gets through typically all human interaction activities. What makes human beings unique is that human communication is socially, emotionally and cognitively complex. For ease of communication, it is necessary for interlocutors to find enough mean with which they can convey their ideas. There are many types of circumlocution that includes indirect speech and ambiguous or roundabout figure of speech. In its most basic form, circumlocution includes using many words. The other synonyms for circumlocution is beating around the bush, circumambages, diffuseness, discursiveness, euphemism, gassiness,

indirectness, periphrase, periphrasis, pleonasm, prolixity, roundabout, tautology, verbal evasion, verbality, verbiage, wordiness. Communicators in any situation may employ circumlocution for different reasons such as **disorder** which refers to inability to recall the correct word for something; **social i.e.**, to avoid saying something unlucky or offensive; **ambiguity i.e.**, in order to speak ambiguously or equivocally ; **politeness** as indirectness is in many cases employed to reflect polite way of expressing things , circumlocuting an interaction may serve the speaker to be polite; **failure in getting to the point** e.g. forgetting a term but having the ability to explain it (which is an unpreferred habit) .

Employing circumlocution in some situations is positive such as politeness and, social reasons as well as helping the speaker when not finding the exact words to express . In spite of all these communication advantages, it can be employed to maneuver or avoid being equivocal. The cost of doing this may be, in addition to say or use too much words on the part of the message sender, ambiguous interaction on the part of message receiver .Moreover, the latter may feel that message sender lacks the linguistic knowledge or ability.

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