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A functional-pragmatic approach to wealth-related euphemisms study in business discourse

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Abstract

In business discourse, euphemisms help alleviate the sensitive topic of material privilege. While previous research has extensively addressed euphemisms denoting various financial phenomena, such as corporate downsizing and recession, the linguistic treatment of wealth has remained comparatively underexplored. The aim of the study is to identify the key pragmatic functions of euphemisms referring to wealth and the wealthy in contemporary English-language business discourse, and to establish how these euphemisms mediate the social perception of affluence. The data comprises publications from prominent English-language business media sampled from a five-year period. Through continuous sampling, a total of 134 occurrences of euphemistic framing were extracted and analysed contextually. The article delineates four primary pragmatic functions of euphemisms denoting wealth: mitigating social sensitivity, strategic reframing, positive image construction, and abstraction. The results demonstrate that these functions are systemic and fulfil distinct pragmatic roles in business discourse. Mitigation strategies soften references to affluence, reframing aligns wealth with meritocratic achievement, positive construction associates affluence with prestige and expertise, and abstraction depersonalises wealth through technical language. The findings suggest that euphemisms denoting wealth and the wealthy in business discourse operate to justify the idea that economic privilege is legitimate. Euphemistic framing contributes to the rhetorical normalization of affluence and configures public perceptions of wealth in business discourse. The study adds to the body of knowledge on euphemism and business discourse and demonstrates the usefulness of the functional-pragmatic approach in identifying the rhetorical devices used in high-stakes arguments.

Keywords: *business discourse, euphemism, pragmatic effect, euphemistic framing, English*



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Функционально-прагматический подход к исследованию эвфемизмов, обозначающих богатство, в деловом дискурсе

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Аннотация

Бизнес дискурсу свойственно оперирование эвфемизмами для нивелирования деликатной темы материальных привилегий. В то время как в научной литературе подробно рассматриваются эвфемизмы, обозначающие различные финансовые явления, такие как корпоративные сокращения и экономический спад, лингвистическая репрезентация богатства остается сравнительно малоизученной проблемой. Цель данного исследования – выявить ключевые прагматические функции эвфемизмов, обозначающих богатство и состоятельных лиц в современном англоязычном бизнес-дискурсе, а также установить, как с их помощью формируется общественное представление о достатке. Эмпирическую базу составили публикации ведущих англоязычных бизнес-медиа, отобранные за пятилетний период. Посредством сплошной выборки было выявлено и контекстуально проанализировано 134 случая эвфемистического фреймирования. В статье выделяются четыре основные прагматические функции эвфемизмов, обозначающих богатство: смягчение восприятия социально значимых тем, стратегическое смещение фокуса, создание позитивного имиджа и абстрагирование. Результаты показывают, что данные функции систематичны и выполняют различные прагматические задачи. Стратегии смягчения позволяют сгладить упоминания о благосостоянии, смещение фокуса соотносит богатство с меритократическими достижениями, позитивная репрезентация ассоциирует состоятельность с престижем и компетентностью, в то время как абстрагирование обезличивает богатство через использование технического языка. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что эвфемизмы, обозначающие богатство и состоятельных людей в бизнес-дискурсе, служат для продвижения и оправдания идеи о легитимности экономических привилегий. Эвфемистическое фреймирование способствует риторической нормализации богатства и формирует общественное восприятие состоятельности в рамках бизнес-дискурса. Исследование расширяет научное представление об эвфемизмах и деловом дискурсе, а также подтверждает эффективность функционально-прагматического подхода для выявления риторических средств, используемых в аргументации в условиях повышенной коммуникативной значимости.

Ключевые слова: деловой дискурс, эвфемизм, прагматический эффект, эвфемистическое фреймирование, английский язык

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1. Introduction

Business discourse is intentionally constructed to measure up against institutional goals and sociopolitical norms. Among the many areas where linguistic manipulation is evident, the representation of wealth and wealthy individuals occupies a particularly complex position. On the one hand, business discourse is often driven towards appealing to affluent audiences through aspirational messaging and financial optimism. On the other, overt references to “wealth” or “the rich” may carry negative connotations in an era that is increasingly concerned with inequality and social justice, as well as corporate ethics. As a result, communicators resort to euphemistic linguistic means to obscure or reframe economic affluence. Such euphemisms contribute to the ideological framing of wealth in the public’s eyes as they have a bearing on the reader’s perception of individuals or entities being described.

Despite extensive research on euphemisms registered as part of language practices in various spheres (including political, healthcare, marketing, corporate discourses, etc.) (Allan & Burridge 2006, Burridge 2012, Litvinova & Larina 2023, Ozyumenko & Larina 2021, Crespo-Fernández 2018, Galchuk 2017, Goddard et al. 2022, Malyuga & Tomalin 2024, Musolff 2019, Mooney 2019), comparatively little attention has been paid to the euphemisms used to refer to wealth and wealthy individuals in the English-language business discourse. Existing studies have been focusing predominantly on negative phenomena, such as euphemisms for corporate downsizing, inflation, or financial crises, while discernibly overlooking how positive or privileged economic status is linguistically managed. This lack of scholarly attention witnessed so far in scientific literature constitutes a significant research gap, especially given the ever-increasing visibility of discussions around wealth disparity and luxury consumption.

To address this gap, the present study aims to investigate the euphemisms referring to wealth and the wealthy in contemporary English-language business discourse. To that end, we shall delineate the key pragmatic functions of such euphemisms and analyse the discursive contexts in which they appear. Using the examples from business media as source material, the study examines how these euphemisms function as linguistic alternatives and rhetorical tools that mediate the social perception of affluence.

The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What euphemisms are used to denote wealth and the wealthy in English-language business discourse? (2) What pragmatic functions do these euphemisms fulfil in English-language business discourse?

The findings hold relevance for scholars of language and communication and for practitioners in marketing, journalism, and finance who in their line of work are required to deal with the sensitive balance between appealing to affluence and maintaining social sensitivity.

2. Theoretical background

A conventional definition of euphemisms characterises them as lexical or phrasal substitutes for expressions deemed inappropriate, offensive, taboo, or socially sensitive. Although traditionally associated with the concealment of unpleasant realities (such as death, illness, or bodily functions), euphemisms also function in contexts where the intent is not just to avoid offense but to tactfully reframe information to serve communicative goals. In such cases, euphemism operates as a discursive strategy rooted in socio-pragmatic conventions and ideological positioning, particularly within institutionalised registers such as business discourse.

The main theoretical framework of this study is the functional-pragmatic approach to discourse, which prioritises the purpose, use, and effect of language in written or spoken communication rather than its formal structure, as posited in Malyuga (2019). The pragmatic emphasis on communicative intention and context-sensitive interpretation (Levinson 1983, Verschueren 1999) and systemic-functional linguistics (Halliday & Webster 2009, Halliday & Matthiessen 2013), which views language as a resource for meaning-making in context, are in line with this viewpoint. This venue of research brings to the foreground practical effectiveness of messages being communicated, as well as contextual appropriacy. This is a suitable lens through which the pragmatic contribution of euphemisms in business discourse can be contemplated. Notably, its relevance is reflected in recent academic publishing guidelines for the humanities and social sciences, where particular emphasis is being placed on research that addresses the functional and pragmatic scope of professional and business language use.

According to Allan and Burridge (2006), euphemisms are not inherently deceptive but are instead pragmatically motivated by a desire to mitigate face-threatening acts or promote specific ideological perspectives. This is arguably particularly relevant in business and economic discourse, because in these contexts euphemistic language often serves to maintain a favourable image of individuals, corporations, or market realities. This is where euphemism finds a close affinity to positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson 1987), as it enables speakers or writers to evade topics that can be deemed potentially contentious (such as executive compensation or concentrated wealth) without readily triggering resistance or critique from their audience.

The concept of euphemism has also been examined from the standpoint of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views language as a socially embedded practice reflective of power relations (Fairclough 1992, van Dijk 2024). Viewed from this perspective, euphemisms are not neutral linguistic choices but

ideologically loaded instruments that can depersonalise responsibility and smooth over the discourse surrounding merit and capital.

Fairclough (1995) emphasises the role of language in the reproduction of dominant ideologies, and euphemisms, by virtue of their ability to mask or reframe realities, are central to this process. In the case of wealth discourse, the substitution of “rich” or “wealthy” with euphemisms like “affluent” or “well-resourced” reflects a tendency to sanitise economic privilege in market-oriented communication. The cultural orientation towards individualism further reinforces the ideological framing of wealth as a personal achievement.

Since discursive strategies like euphemisation and politeness are influenced by culturally specific norms and expectations, cultural factors must also be taken into account in this research setting (Grishechko & Akopova 2015, Eslami et al. 2023). This implies that institutional ideology and underlying ethno-cultural communication patterns are both reflected in the practical use of euphemisms in business discourse. Despite minor shifts toward collectivist tendencies, individualistic values continue to predominate English-language cultural discourse, according to recent corpus-based research (Tamimy et al. 2022). Such cultural predispositions impact the pragmatic choices made in business discourse, so that wealth is ultimately delineated as the result of personal merit and a carefully carried out plan that led to autonomous success.

The current study’s emphasis on euphemistic mitigation techniques is also consistent with findings regarding pragmatic discourse softening techniques. The role of language as a tool for controlling social interaction and preserving face is further supported by research on hedging, which has revealed that discursive practices such as approximating or shielding propositional content serve significant pragmatic functions across genres (Gribanova & Gaidukova 2019).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of euphemistic reframing is closely connected to the concept of framing in cognitive linguistics, particularly as theorised by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Framing involves the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of reality while omitting or downplaying others, which ultimately influences how that reality is interpreted. While frames are understood as underlying cognitive structures (Fillmore 2006), euphemisms serve as linguistic expressions that evoke or reinforce these evaluative frames in discourse. For example, the phrase “high-net-worth individual” avoids the socially loaded connotations of “rich” and frames wealth as a merit-based financial status, potentially detached from socio-historical contexts of inequality or privilege. Such euphemisms often employ nominalisation and abstraction to distance the subject from interpersonal critique and to foreground economic metrics over social identities (Malyuga 2024).

A complementary perspective is provided by the theory of semantic prosody (Stewart 2010, Hunston 2007), which posits that certain lexical items acquire evaluative connotations through repeated collocational patterns. In business discourse, euphemisms for wealth often co-occur with positively connoted terms such as “success” or “opportunity”, which reinforces the semantic correlation of

affluence with virtue. This cumulative semantic effect contributes to the normalisation of wealth as a desirable and socially unproblematic state.

Recent research supports the idea that evaluative meaning is shaped by linguistic context. The co-occurrence environment of a term systematically constructs its social and evaluative perception, as confirmed by Malyuga and Rimmer (2021), who show how semantic associations can reveal implicit attitudes through an examination of how the term “buzzword” appears alongside specific lexical patterns. This realisation supports the focus of the current study, which is on euphemisms as context-sensitive agents of ideological framing in business discourse.

Research on economic euphemisms so far has typically focused on lexical mitigation of negative financial events, including downsizing (e.g., “rightsizing”, “restructuring”), recession (e.g., “period of negative growth”), or budget cuts (e.g., “cost optimisation”) (Burridge 2012, Crespo-Fernández 2018). These studies have shown that such euphemisms serve to preserve institutional legitimacy and reduce public concern. However, the linguistic treatment of positive financial states (particularly wealth and affluence) has received comparatively little attention. While available studies have noted the various issues associated with euphemisation in business discourse, there remains a gap in the literature concerning how wealth itself is euphemised. This oversight is particularly notable in light of current global debates on income and tax justice, as well as corporate social responsibility, where the representation of wealth plays a central rhetorical and ideological role.

3. Material and methods

This research conducts functional-pragmatic analysis of euphemisms related to wealth and the wealthy registered in English-language business discourse. The aim is to identify how lexical substitutions for wealth and wealthy individuals serve specific pragmatic purposes in the chosen type of discourse.

The empirical material for the study consists of publications from English-language media outlets known for their focus on economics, finance, business strategy, and corporate communication. These include *The Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *Bloomberg*, *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. These sources were selected due to their wide readership and authority. The sampling is limited to publications produced within the last five years to reflect contemporary usage trends.

The study applies a continuous sampling method: the texts were read in full and all instances of euphemistic references to wealth or wealthy individuals were identified and extracted for further analysis. The authors established the following inclusion criteria: (i) the euphemism substitutes for or indirectly refers to wealth, affluence, or the state of being wealthy; (ii) the euphemism occurs within a clearly identifiable pragmatic context (e.g., investor relations, marketing to affluent audiences, commentary on economic inequality); (iii) the euphemism does not

function solely as a fixed legal or economic term (e.g., “capital gains tax”), but carries a secondary function of reframing or mitigating social perception. The resulting sample represented wealth in varying degrees of abstraction or evaluative framing.

The extracted euphemisms were subjected to functional-pragmatic analysis. Each euphemism was analysed in context to determine its pragmatic function. The analysis draws upon principles of pragmatic theory (notably politeness theory, speech act theory, and facework) and focuses on identifying the communicative purposes served by the euphemistic substitution. The key functions include mitigation of social sensitivity (e.g., avoiding overt reference to privilege or inequality), strategic reframing (e.g., presenting wealth as merit-based or aspirational), positive image construction (e.g., promoting the idea of economic success or empowerment), and abstraction (e.g., depersonalising affluence through technical or bureaucratic language). Each occurrence was interpreted in its immediate textual context to ensure that the function was derived from actual communicative use rather than presumed semantic meaning.

Despite being interpretive by nature, the categorisation of pragmatic functions is supported by well-established pragmatic theory principles and contextual analysis. The most prominent pragmatic objective discernible in the situation (such as depersonalisation, prestige building, ideological framing, or face-saving) was used to identify the dominant function. The classification in this study was based on the predominant communicative orientation seen in the context, even though some euphemisms may potentially serve several pragmatic purposes. This context-sensitive assessment made it possible to determine the main purpose that a euphemism served, such as reducing social sensitivity, reframing wealth, improving image, or abstracting reference. The possibility of cross-functionality was acknowledged but managed by prioritising the most prominent pragmatic goal served *in situ*.

The functional-pragmatic approach was chosen due to its capacity to account for the use of language in goal-oriented discourse. This is particularly relevant in business discourse, since reference to economic reality here must be narrated in consonance with institutional interests and public expectations. The functional-pragmatic approach permits a context-sensitive interpretation of euphemistic meaning, as it recognises that the same lexical item may serve different pragmatic functions depending on the context and intended audience.

4. Results

The sampling process involved the qualitative examination of approximately 400 business articles published between 2020 and 2025, representing an estimated corpus size of 700,000 words. The total sample consists of 134 euphemistic occurrences related to wealth and wealthy individuals in English-language business discourse. These expressions varied in their lexical structure and contextual use but consistently fulfilled distinct discursive purposes. Based on the functional-

pragmatic analysis, four primary pragmatic functions were specified: (i) mitigating social sensitivity (N = 28, 20.9%), (ii) strategic reframing (N=35, 26.1%), (iii) positive image construction (N=42, 31.3%), and (iv) abstraction (N=29, 21.6%).

4.1. Mitigating social sensitivity

This category includes euphemisms that reduce the perceived social distance between wealthy individuals and the general audience. These expressions are particularly frequent in editorial commentary, where reputational risk and public perception are important considerations.

Table 1. Examples of euphemisms serving to mitigate social sensitivity

EUPHEMISM	TYPICAL CONTEXT	PRAGMATIC EFFECT
Well-off	Business editorials, economic opinion columns	Softens direct reference to affluence
Comfortable lifestyle	Commentary on consumer behaviour	Presents affluence as normal lifestyle choice
Financially secure	Commentary on savings trends	Frames wealth as financial prudence, not surplus
Economically advantaged	Business education and inequality reporting	Describes privilege neutrally without judgment
Secure financial future	Retirement planning, personal finance articles	Focuses on future stability rather than current wealth
Living comfortably	Market analysis of consumer behaviour	Depicts affluence in relatable, moderate terms
Economic resilience	CSR reporting, executive communications	Frames wealth as responsible resource management
Privileged background	Entrepreneurial profiles, success stories	Acknowledges a person's social and professional advantage while stressing the person referred to comes from a rich family background
Financial cushion	Personal finance advice columns	Describes wealth as a protection against the effects of an economic crisis or downturn but not excessive

These euphemisms function to attenuate the explicitness of wealth, making it more palatable within discussions of corporate ethics and income distribution.

4.2. Strategic reframing

Euphemisms in this group serve to recontextualise wealth in terms of planning or autonomy. The purpose is to present affluence as earned and legitimate, especially in entrepreneurial profiles, investment strategy pieces, and leadership-focused discourse.

Table 2. Euphemisms for strategic reframing

EUPHEMISM	TYPICAL CONTEXT	PRAGMATIC EFFECT
Financial freedom	Investment strategy articles, retirement planning features	Reframes wealth as personal autonomy rather than privilege
Financial independence	Wealth management advice columns	Constructs wealth as a prudent long-term goal
High earners	Labour market analysis, tax policy debates	Shifts focus from asset ownership to active income generation
Well-positioned financially	Market commentary, personal finance advice	Frames wealth as the result of foresight and strategic planning
Capital accumulators	Entrepreneurial success stories, venture capital reports	Presents wealth as a result of disciplined financial activity
Wealth creators	Startup profiles, business leadership interviews	Attributes wealthy peoples' success to innovation and entrepreneurial effort
Asset builders	Personal investment advice, real estate investment features	Depicts wealthy people as responsible and achievers of systematic asset growth
Market winners	Financial analysis of top-performing investors	Frames wealth as the outcome of skill and competitive acumen
Financial architects	Executive leadership profiles, business consulting reports	Associates wealth with professional mastery and financial design
High-value individuals	Client segmentation in investment services	Frames wealth as intrinsic worth based on economic contribution

This reframing helps correlate wealth with individual agency and responsibility, avoiding language that might imply inequality or inherited advantage.

4.3. Positive image construction

This category includes expressions that describe wealthy individuals in a way that aligns with professional credibility or market influence. These euphemisms appear in investment commentary, client profiling in wealth management, and executive summaries in CSR documentation.

Table 3. Euphemisms for positive image construction

EUPHEMISM	TYPICAL CONTEXT	PRAGMATIC EFFECT
Affluent client	Private banking, client profiling in investment firms	Commercially elevates the client's status
Premier client	Executive communications, wealth management marketing	Affirms elite status and desirability
Strategic investor	Startup funding reports, M&A coverage	Frames wealthy individuals as drivers of market innovation
Wealth management client	Personal finance advice columns, executive banking	Positions the wealthy as responsible financial stewards

EUPHEMISM	TYPICAL CONTEXT	PRAGMATIC EFFECT
Sophisticated investor	Venture capital reports, hedge fund profiles	Associates wealth with financial acumen and expertise
Impact investor	Sustainability investment articles, CSR reports	Links wealth with ethical responsibility and positive influence
Financial thought leader	Business leadership profiles, keynote event coverage	Equates wealth with visionary economic thinking
Philanthropic leader	Corporate social responsibility communications	Frames wealth as enabling positive societal contributions
Discerning investor	Luxury goods investment, fine asset management reports	Associates affluence with taste, expertise, and exclusivity

These euphemisms help create positive associations with wealth, as they portray the wealthy as contributors to economic activity and innovation rather than as passive beneficiaries.

4.4. Abstraction

In this final category, wealth is referenced indirectly through abstract or institutional language, primarily in economic commentary, financial forecasting, or regulatory analysis. The use of such terms often reflects an intention to preserve objectivity or depersonalise socioeconomic stratification.

In this category, euphemisms reflect semantic abstraction, in the sense that they depict wealth via impersonal, institutional, or statistical language, rather than via personal agency or emotive vocabulary. This kind of abstraction often relies on nominalisations, bureaucratic expressions, or quantitative descriptors that remove the individual from the financial concept and portray affluence as a system-level feature. The function here is not just to be indirect, but to depersonalise wealth-related references.

Table 4. Euphemisms for abstraction

EUPHEMISM	TYPICAL CONTEXT	PRAGMATIC EFFECT
Top income brackets	Tax reform articles, income inequality features	Frames wealth as a statistical category rather than personal attribute
Resource-rich individuals	International business reporting, economic development coverage	Depersonalises affluence into possession of valuable resources, intellectual and possibly economical
Capital advantage	Financial market analysis, economic competitiveness discussions	Frames wealth as an operational economic asset
Strong balance sheet	Corporate performance analysis, executive communications	Transfers personal wealth into the language of corporate stability
Asset concentration	Wealth distribution reports, global inequality analyses	Presents individual wealth as impersonal economic aggregates

EUPHEMISM	TYPICAL CONTEXT	PRAGMATIC EFFECT
Capital allocation efficiency	Investment strategy reports, venture capital evaluations	Treats wealth as a neutral financial optimisation issue
Upper economic tiers	Labor economics coverage, taxation debates	Presents wealthy individuals as fitting into hierarchical economic positions
Investment capacity	Private equity analyses, wealth management articles	Frames affluence as a technical measure of liquidity or opportunity
Financial assets under management (AUM)	Investment fund reporting, client portfolio analyses	Institutionalises wealth within technical asset metrics
Wealth flows	Global financial market reports, policy discussions	Depersonalises wealth into anonymous financial movements

These euphemisms operate to neutralise the moral dimension of wealth by embedding it in technical or operational discourse.

To summarise the distinctions among the four identified pragmatic functions, the following table presents a comparative overview of their communicative orientation, pragmatic effects, and typical examples.

Table 5. Comparative overview of pragmatic functions, pragmatic effects, and typical examples of wealth-related euphemisms

PRAGMATIC FUNCTION	PRAGMATIC EFFECT	TYPICAL EXAMPLES
Mitigating Social Sensitivity	Normalising or downplaying affluence in socially sensitive contexts	well-off, comfortable lifestyle, financially secure, economically advantaged
Strategic Reframing	Legitimising wealth as earned, deserved, or strategically achieved	financial freedom, wealth creators, asset builders, high earners
Positive Image Construction	Valorising wealth by associating it with expertise, leadership, or ethical responsibility	high-net-worth individual, impact investor, financial thought leader, discerning investor
Abstraction	Neutralising personal associations with affluence by presenting wealth as impersonal or operational	top income brackets, resource-rich individuals, capital advantage, wealth flows

The euphemisms identified across these business-oriented sources consistently reflect a preference for measured representations of wealth. The pragmatic functions they serve (whether to downplay, reframe, valorise, or depersonalise) indicate a high level of linguistic control in managing audience perception of economic privilege. This controlled vocabulary is consistent with the rhetorical demands of business discourse, where public image must be carefully maintained.

The tables above show the distribution of euphemisms and the pragmatic impact they have. These findings reveal that euphemistic expressions cluster around distinct communicative purposes, allowing them to be grouped into functionally

coherent categories. Each category demonstrates a typical discursive strategy used to manage references to wealth. The Discussion section will offer further interpretation of these functions.

5. Discussion

The study's conclusions support the notion that euphemistic allusions to wealth are not incidental in business discourse. On the contrary, they fulfil purposeful practical purposes being systematically embedded into the rhetorical construction of economic narratives. The analysis has shown how euphemisms modify the conversation about wealth to meet institutional objectives and control audience expectations. Granted, earlier scholarship has credibly established the face-saving and ideological functions of euphemism in areas such as downsizing or financial crisis communication (e.g., Fairclough 1995, BurrIDGE 2012). To add to the existing body of knowledge, the present findings reveal that the linguistic management of positive economic states – particularly affluence – follows a distinct and previously underexplored set of pragmatic patterns, showcasing that euphemisms related to wealth found in English-language business discourse operate not only to shield but also to affirm and legitimise economic privilege.

This observation adds to previous critical reports and supports findings that covert linguistic structuring can influence how addressees process and evaluate institutional discourse (Grishechko & Tomalin 2025). Although euphemism performs vital social work by handling face-threatening realities, as BurrIDGE (2012) points out, the current study demonstrates that when euphemism is used in relation to affluence, it goes beyond simple social management and participates in ideological reinforcement. Additionally, Holmes (1995) emphasises that institutional discourse tends to normalize power asymmetries, and the present analysis shows how euphemisms for wealth help normalise privilege by rephrasing it linguistically as aspiration, competence, or technical merit. It is noteworthy that Allan and BurrIDGE (2006) noted that euphemism studies have been disproportionately concerned with loss and decline, rather than privilege and gain. Challenging this assumption, this study concentrated on how wealth (a gain-related notion) is discursively treated so that we could broaden the study of euphemism into areas that are typically thought of as ideologically “neutral”.

The implications of each functional category are examined in this section in light of accepted theoretical viewpoints. In doing so, the study provides a more accurate functional-pragmatic analysis that identifies the kinds of euphemistic expressions that are employed as well as their pragmatic effects in formalised business contexts. Euphemisms should be understood as ideologically impregnated forms that fulfil complex pragmatic tasks, as Crespo-Fernández (2014) emphasises. This conceptualisation forms the basis of the multifunctional framework presented here.

The importance of face-saving in business discourse is demonstrated by the use of euphemisms to reduce social sensitivity. Euphemisms in this category are

examples of positive politeness strategies that help to lessen potential friction between corporate or media messaging and public sentiment, according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. These euphemisms reduce the possibility of coming across as elitist and unconcerned with societal issues while enabling organisations and commentators to acknowledge phenomena related to wealth. A purposeful institutional calibration of linguistic tone in light of growing public sensitivity to inequality is suggested by this finding, which also supports Clyne's (1994) claim that euphemisms preserve social harmony by "protecting" interlocutors from uncomfortable truths. As Hanks (2009) rightfully observes, in corporate discourse, face-saving strategies are rarely about individuals; they are about preserving the legitimacy of the institution itself. The wealth-related euphemisms categorised under social sensitivity mitigation in this study clearly reflect this idea. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) more comprehensive understanding of rapport management, which goes beyond face-saving to encompass the upkeep of harmonious social relationships, is also consistent with this pragmatic manoeuvre. In the context of business discourse, where reputational risks are heightened, maintaining positive rapport with a diverse readership becomes a critical concern, which is why the need for mitigated references to wealth appears to be paramount. As Haugh (2015) notes, face management in institutional discourse is often as much about preserving the institution's perceived legitimacy as it is about maintaining interpersonal relations, a point that the euphemistic portrayal of wealth clearly supports. The continued importance of researching the linguistic materialisation of politeness strategies in modern English, particularly through euphemistic practices that seek to strike a balance between institutional messaging and sensitivity, is further accentuated by recent research (Leontovich & Nikitina 2024).

The deliberate rephrasing of wealth illustrates a functional change in language from descriptive to ideologically generative. Discourse not only reflects but also reproduces social structures and ideologies, according to Fairclough (1995). Euphemisms in this instance reinterpret wealth as the outcome of meritocratic achievement. Instead of serving as a symbol of systemic inequality, wealth becomes a reward for individual accountability. Without raising ethical questions, this semantic shift makes it easier to equate wealth with aspiration. Lakoff (2004) noted that framing works best when it goes unnoticed, allowing new cognitive structures to supersede preexisting moral interpretations. This resemanticization of wealth is reminiscent of this. According to the study's findings, euphemistic rephrasing actively contributes to the construction of wealth as a personal achievement devoid of any political contextualisation, rather than a structurally conditioned phenomenon, supporting Hart's (2010) argument that evaluative frames can obscure the agentive origins of inequality. This is also in line with Van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of legitimation through moral assessment and authorisation, which holds that language choices implicitly validate preexisting social structures by portraying them as justified or natural. As Van Dijk (1998) aptly observes, control of discourse means control of the mind, and in this case, the rewording of wealth-

related notions directs public cognition towards acceptance of economic stratification as an outcome of personal virtue rather than structural privilege.

When it comes to euphemisms contributing to positive image construction, in addition to avoiding offense, these euphemisms actively lend authority and prestige and equate wealth with skill. Koller (2005) has noted the centrality of prestige in business discourse, and the current findings suggest that euphemisms perform a similar symbolic function, as they enable the business world to present wealth not as social excess but as a sign of strategic excellence. In business discourse, this intentional use of language is similar to more general trends seen in other persuasive genres. For example, studies of online social advertising have shown that language strategies of persuasion, with carefully constructed expressions intended to motivate action and influence audience perception, predominate in modern promotional communication (Popova 2018). Likewise, the euphemistic reinterpretation of wealth in business discourse serves as a persuasive tool, supporting ideological constructs of legitimacy and meritocracy. Positive image construction through euphemism is not limited to branding or marketing discourse. It also appears in financial and journalistic reporting, as we have seen.

Professional discourses systematically construct expertise and credibility, as noted by Bhatia (2005), and the euphemistic framing of wealth as competence is a good example of this type of image-building in business media narratives. In this way, Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of symbolic capital (which holds that distinction and prestige are socially and linguistically constructed to legitimise differential status) is reflected in the euphemistic construction of the wealthy. In a similar vein, Wodak (2009) points out the practice of discursive self-legitimation by business elites by telling their success stories in a way that disentangles wealth from past inequalities and instead traces it back to social contributions or entrepreneurial ingenuity.

This correlates with the concept of semantic prosody (Stewart 2010; Hunston 2007), where euphemistic terms for wealth routinely co-occur with positive evaluative language (success, freedom, empowerment) reinforcing an association between affluence and virtue. Such framing mechanisms contribute to the naturalisation of socio-economic hierarchy by embedding wealth in culturally valorised narratives. Thus, the current results empirically support Louw's (1993) claim that semantic prosodies align lexemes with ideological preferences, showing that euphemisms associated with wealth are rarely neutral and actually bear an evaluative load that justifies socioeconomic inequality. The recurring positive lexical collocations pertaining to wealth in the business discourse under study demonstrate that the cumulative effect of semantic prosody is ideological reproduction through linguistic habitus, as Thompson (2014) puts it.

Euphemisms that function through abstraction, such as “top income brackets” and “capital advantage”, illustrate another important ideological function: the depersonalisation of wealth. These terms shift the discursive focus from individual agents to statistical categories, economic units, or institutional resources. Van

Dijk's (2011) work on elite discourse shows how such abstraction can serve to distance powerful actors from moral scrutiny, rendering social privilege invisible under the guise of technocratic neutrality. In business discourse, where objectivity and professionalism are paramount, euphemisms fulfil the dual purpose of rhetorical detachment and reputational protection. This abstraction process is a reflection of anonymization strategies, as defined by Wodak (2009), which obscure agency while preserving hierarchical structures. Quite similar to Piketty (2014), who studied technocratic language surrounding wealth accumulation, the current analysis shows that such anonymisation is a proactive reorganisation of discourse that makes inequality legible only through sanitised, impersonal metrics.

Furthermore, abstraction plays a crucial role in institutional self-preservation. If organisations manage to avoid emotionally charged terms like “rich” or “wealthy”, they can maintain a tone of impartiality while simultaneously legitimising policies or client segmentation based on financial capital. The term “strong balance sheet”, when euphemistically extended to individuals or families, frames wealth as a rational financial outcome rather than a sociopolitical issue. This abstraction, though not too much on-the-nose, contributes to what Bourdieu (1991) refers to as symbolic power: the ability to name and classify reality in ways that reproduce existing hierarchies without overt coercion. Therefore, this study supports Bourdieu's (1991) claim that symbolic power is the power to make things with words, demonstrating how euphemistic abstraction creates an interpretive framework that makes economic privilege seem normal and morally acceptable. Harvey (2005) goes on to say that neoliberal discourse is heavily reliant on this linguistic naturalisation of market outcomes, which is exemplified by the euphemisms analysed here.

Although the four pragmatic functions were considered analytically distinct, it should be noted that some euphemistic expressions showed potential for functional overlap, but their classification was based on the communicative goal that was most contextually salient. For example, although terms like “economic resilience” and “financial cushion” may have connotations of strategic planning or autonomy, their usage in the contexts under analysis primarily served to downplay privilege and mitigate reputational risk. This further supports the notion that pragmatic function is not a lexical item's inherent property but rather arises from the communicative intent.

Taken collectively, the euphemistic representations identified in this study form a lexical repertoire that reinforces the dominant ideological assumptions of contemporary business culture. These include the idea that wealth is the result of individual effort, smart financial planning, objective measurement, or refined consumer taste. Through careful word choices, business discourse often hides how wealth is actually acquired and presents it as fully legitimate and deserved. In this way, euphemisms help reinforce these beliefs by embedding them in the everyday language used to talk about wealth in professional and financial contexts. Given that it incorporates values and presumptions in the language of business discourse, euphemism serves as a discursive tool for ideological reproduction.

6. Conclusion

Euphemisms denoting wealth and the wealthy in English-language business discourse have been investigated in this study using a functional-pragmatic approach. The results show that euphemisms for wealth are used to convey affluence in terms of aspiration and merit and to lessen social sensitivity. These euphemisms associate wealth with qualities such as competence and institutional legitimacy, while replacing terms that might be considered socially sensitive or offensive. Euphemisms fulfil four key pragmatic functions (abstraction, positive image construction, mitigation, and reframing), which puts the spotlight on the relationship between linguistic form and communicative intent in business discourse.

When language is employed to preserve the legitimacy of financial institutions, these patterns reflect the ideological orientations of business discourse in the English language. Euphemisms have been demonstrated to function at the nexus of diplomacy, ideology, and persuasion, helping to discursively manage privilege in ways that are frequently subtle but structurally important.

This study adds to the body of knowledge on euphemism and business discourse by focusing on the positive framing of wealth itself rather than on negative financial events like budget cuts or layoffs. Additionally, it demonstrates the usefulness of functional-pragmatic analysis in locating the rhetorical devices used in a high-stakes argument.

Future research may expand upon these findings by investigating the reception and interpretation of wealth-related euphemisms among different stakeholder groups, or by conducting comparative studies across languages and cultures. A diachronic perspective could also illuminate how the euphemistic framing of wealth evolves in response to shifting economic conditions and public sentiment. Furthermore, a comparative viewpoint across various varieties of English could be advantageous for future research. Considering that English has experienced substantial localisation processes across the globe (Grishechko et al. 2021, Akopova 2024), linguistic pragmatics, including euphemistic practices, can differ significantly based on historical, cultural, and regional influences (Akopova 2021). This implies that, in contrast to the mainstream Anglo-American variety examined in this study, wealth-related euphemisms in business discourse may show distinct pragmatic effects or functional realizations in localised Englishes.

Additionally, findings from studies on other figurative devices conclusively point out how crucial cognitive processes and rhetorical techniques are in influencing language use in various discursive contexts (Murashova 2021). While euphemistic constructions in business discourse are the focus of this study, a similar focus on the pragmatic and cognitive foundations of language could help us better understand how language influences ideology and perception in business discourse.

Given the growing scrutiny of economic inequality and corporate influence, further attention to the language of affluence remains both timely and necessary.

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