Agnonymy As A Communicative Problem: Cognitive, Pragmatic, And Ethical Dimensions Of Obscure And Manipulative Language Use

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Abstract: This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of agnonymy as a communicative problem that disrupts the clarity, accuracy, and ethical integrity of discourse. Agnonymy refers to the use of obscure, ambiguous, or misleading linguistic forms that conceal rather than convey meaning. It manifests across multiple domains—linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural—affecting interpersonal communication, political rhetoric, and media narratives. Through the application of discourse analysis, semantic theory, and pragmatics, the study identifies the mechanisms and consequences of agnonymic communication. Findings suggest that agnonymy functions both as a symptom of cognitive deficiency and as a manipulative rhetorical strategy, undermining mutual understanding and communicative ethics.

Keywords: Agnonymy, communication, ambiguity, semantics, discourse analysis, linguistic manipulation.

Introduction: Communication is a dynamic and multifaceted process in which language acts as the primary tool for the transmission of thought. Effective communication presupposes transparency, coherence, and mutual comprehension between interlocutors. However, language can also serve to distort meaning, obscure reality, or mislead the listener. This phenomenon is known as agnonymy, a term derived from the Greek a- (without), gnosis (knowledge), and onyma (name), meaning 'without clear naming or knowing.' Agnonymy differs fundamentally from natural linguistic phenomena such as polysemy or homonymy, as it often arises from pragmatic intentions or sociocultural manipulation rather than from lexical evolution. Its relevance has grown in the context of post-truth communication, where emotional appeal frequently outweighs factual accuracy.

Agnonymy occupies an interdisciplinary space between linguistics, philosophy of language, and communication studies. In semantics, it challenges the denotative and connotative relationship between word and meaning. From a pragmatic perspective, it represents a violation of Grice's Maxims of Quality and Manner, as speakers who use agnonymic language fail to be truthful or clear. Philosophically, agnonymy resonates with Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, which argues that rational communication is grounded in mutual understanding. When agnonymy infiltrates discourse, this rational basis collapses, giving rise to communicative distortions.

Agnonymy manifests at several linguistic levels: lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. For instance, lexical agnonymy occurs when a speaker chooses a vague or euphemistic word instead of a precise one, while syntactic agnonymy involves structural ambiguity that distorts intended meaning.

Context	Agnonymic Expression	Intended Meaning / Effect

Political speech	"Collateral damage occurred."	Euphemism for civilian deaths during military operations.
Media reporting	"Irregularities were observed in the voting process."	Concealment of the term *fraud* or *violation*.
Academic writing	"Certain aspects remain under debate."	Avoidance of explicit disagreement or uncertainty.
Everyday communication	"Let's just say it's complicated."	Evasion of direct explanation or confession.

From a cognitive perspective, agnonymy may result from conceptual vagueness or incomplete knowledge. When individuals lack precise terminology, they tend to rely on approximate or general words, leading to communicative fuzziness. Psycholinguistic research indicates that memory limitations, emotional stress, and low linguistic competence contribute to such occurrences.

Agnonymy becomes particularly dangerous when it transforms into a deliberate strategy of manipulation. Political discourse provides abundant examples where agnonymic phrasing is used to obscure responsibility or generate ideological confusion. For example, the phrase 'We are implementing an adaptive security framework to ensure population stabilization' conceals potential restriction of civil liberties. In such cases, agnonymy operates as a tool of discursive control, aligning with Orwell's concept of doublethink and Lakoff's theory of framing.

The research applies qualitative discourse analysis to a corpus of 150 samples drawn from political speeches, media reports, and interpersonal dialogues. The selection criteria focused on occurrences where linguistic obscurity directly affected communicative outcome. Data were analyzed according to three parameters: degree of vagueness, communicative intent, and perceived comprehension by recipients. The methodology combines semantic-pragmatic interpretation with contextual and psychological evaluation.

The findings indicate that agnonymy is pervasive across both institutional and interpersonal communication. Approximately 68% of analyzed texts contained at least one agnonymic structure, with 47% intentional usage. 72% of respondents reported misunderstanding such statements, while 83% considered deliberate agnonymy ethically problematic. While it may serve pragmatic goals such as politeness or conflict avoidance, its long-term effects include erosion of trust, distortion of meaning, and communicative inefficiency.

The results reinforce the hypothesis that agnonymy disrupts communicative transparency at both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, it interferes with interpersonal understanding, while at the macro level, it enables institutional manipulation. Findings also reveal a correlation between educational level and agnonymic tolerance, suggesting that linguistic awareness reduces susceptibility to ambiguous discourse.

Agnonymy is a multifaceted communicative problem combining linguistic ambiguity, psychological defense, and rhetorical manipulation. It reflects not only individual linguistic limitations but also broader sociocultural tendencies toward obfuscation and control. Understanding agnonymy is essential for improving communication ethics and fostering linguistic precision. Future research should include

computational approaches for detecting agnonymic expressions.

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