

Euphemisms in English Language

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บทคัดย่อ

เป็นที่ทราบกันว่า นักเรียนไทยเรียนภาษาอังกฤษมาตั้งแต่อายุน้อย 3 ขวบ ซึ่งจะใช้เวลาในการเรียนต่อเนื่องก่อนจะจบการศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีประมาณ 15 ปี แต่ความสามารถด้านภาษาอังกฤษก็ยังไม่ดีนัก ในฐานะที่ผู้เขียนเป็นครูภาษาอังกฤษมาเป็นเวลาหลายปี ได้ค้นพบว่าปัจจัยหนึ่งที่มีผลต่อความสามารถด้านภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนไทยคือขาดความรู้ด้านคำศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษ สิ่งนี้จะนำไปสู่ความยุ่งยาก เมื่อต้องอ่านเอกสารสิ่งพิมพ์ที่เป็นภาษาอังกฤษ คำที่ใช้ในเอกสารเหล่านี้บางครั้งไม่ได้สื่อความหมายโดยตรง เพราะผู้เขียนหรือผู้พูดต้องการหลีกเลี่ยง ไม่ให้ผู้อื่นรู้สึกลำบากใจ คำประเภนี้เรียกว่า คำสุภาพ หรือคำนุ่มนวล (Euphemisms) โดยจะใช้แทนคำที่ไม่สุภาพ เป็นคำที่มีความหมายไม่ตรงตามตัวอักษรที่สื่อออกมา (Idiomatic Expressions) และใช้ในประโยคที่ต้องการปกปิดความไม่สุภาพ ด้วยเหตุนี้ นักเรียนไทยซึ่งไม่ใช่ผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ จึงไม่สามารถตีความสิ่งที่อ่านหรือสิ่งที่ฟังได้เข้าใจ ดังนั้นผู้เขียนจึงได้นำเสนอบทความเรื่อง การใช้คำนุ่มนวลในภาษาอังกฤษ (Euphemisms in English Language) เพื่อให้เห็นความสำคัญของคำประเภนี้ในภาษาอังกฤษ และเหตุผลว่าทำไมผู้สอนและผู้เรียน ควรศึกษาเรื่องนี้อย่างจริงจัง

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Abstract

It is known that Thai students study English since they were at least three years old. It takes about fifteen years studying English before graduating from universities. Unfortunately, their English proficiency is still limited. As a teacher of English for several years, the author has found that one of the factors affecting students' proficiency in English is the lack of English vocabulary. This factor leads to difficulties when reading English printed materials. The words used in English reading materials sometimes do not represent direct meanings because the writer or the speaker wants to avoid others' embarrassment. These types of words are called euphemisms. Euphemisms are used to replace the words which are impolite. They are considered as the idiomatic expressions that lose their literal meaning and they are used in the sentences to hide the unpleasantness. As a result, Thai students, who are non-native English speakers, sometimes cannot interpret what they have read or even listened. The author, therefore, presents the article on "Euphemisms in English Language" in order to provide the importance of euphemisms in English language and why we, as teachers of English and English learners, have to study them seriously.

Keywords : Euphemisms, English Language

Introduction

A euphemism or doublespeak is a polite word or expression that is used to refer to things which people may find upsetting or embarrassing to talk about, for example sex, the human body, or death. (Collins Dictionary, 2018). This word comes from *the Greek* euphemismos meaning 'speaking well'. (King, 2015). The first euphemisms were said to be more religious in characters because they described religious events and were related to social aspects of people's lives. Even in a modern society, people in some cultures have superstitious beliefs that words are capable of attracting something negative. For example, "cancer" might sound to some people spiritually imperiling, so they avoid mentioning it.

Taking all this into consideration, many linguists link the phenomenon of taboo to euphemisms. Taboo emerged as a result of prohibition of doing certain activities and, according, discussion of forbidden topics. People face difficulties in making a choice simply because they need to decide what is good and what is bad about a definite statement. Hence, taboo itself is an eventual product of individual's thinking ability. (Fataliyeva, 2017)

Euphemisms occur in everyday conversation, both personal conversations and business talk. In order to avoid making hearers embarrassed, or because the speaker does not want to hurt anybody's feeling, euphemisms are intentionally used.

However, some people do not like using euphemisms because they think that euphemisms hide the truth. In writing, euphemisms often make sentences longer. They can also take away clarity – especially in writing. For these reasons, writing style guides often recommend that writers not use euphemisms or indirect language and they give plenty of some warnings about using euphemisms. In academic writing, euphemisms should be avoided because they can make the writing sound wordy and pretentious. However, some people consider the euphemism as polite words. Americans often use euphemisms when talking about sensitive topics–death, love, body processes, anything they might not want to hurt other people's feelings. (VOA Learning English, 2017). We, as non-native English speakers, therefore, may be unable to comprehend the message conveyed through printed or online reading materials,

conversations, or even when writing. Because of this, euphemisms should be seriously studied.

Reasons for the Use of Euphemisms in English Language

Euphemisms are all around in English. They are used in reading, writing, and speaking. They play a vital roles in English language. As stated above, euphemisms are used to avoid direct expressions in some topics such as death, religions, or other sensitive topics, the apprehension of a meaning can be difficult, especially for non-native English speakers. Reasons studying of euphemisms in English are to:

1. understand the truth behind the message that is conveyed through reading English written materials, such as newspapers, magazines, articles, books, research, online, etc.
2. be more aware of euphemisms used in everyday conversations, listening to the radio, watching television, political opinions, and so on because misusing of them can lead to misinterpreting of the communication.
3. use English skills more fluently and accurately.
4. enhance cultural understanding in various situations such as when communicating, dealing with a business, presenting, etc.
5. avoid hurting others' feelings
6. help writers use words that are not allowed to be published due to social censorship, political regulations, etc.

Euphemisms are useful and in everyday English expressions. The obvious usefulness of euphemism can be seen in political context. In a political context, stripping language of its imagery has long been used as a tool for seizing and maintaining control of the masses. (Noronha, 2017 and Nordquist, 2018).

Classifications of Euphemism

Here, the author classifies euphemisms into various topics in order to make it easier for the readers or the users of English to make use of them.

Euphemisms Related to Death

Death is a kind of loss. This brings sadness to family and friends. Try not to mention the death of their beloved person directly by using the words that soften the sorrowful feelings. Some of euphemism words used instead of death are as follows:

pass away, departed, negative patient outcome *instead of* death
put to sleep *instead of* being killed
late-term abortion *instead of* murder of unborn babies
capital punishment *instead of* death penalty

Euphemisms Related to Politeness

Euphemisms for politeness are mostly used for some places, some activities or general terms. Even if the actual words are not considered impolite, it seems more suitable to use another word to replace them. Examples of these are as follows:

Places

restroom, lavatory, WC, *instead of* toilet
substandard housing, an economically depressed neighborhood, culturally deprived environment *instead of* slum
correctional facility, relocation center *instead of* jail or prison camp

General terms

adult entertainment *instead of* pornography
adult beverages *instead of* alcohol
comfort woman *instead of* prostitute
pre-owned vehicle *instead of* used car
unmotivated *instead of* lazy
Senior citizen *instead of* old person
emerging nation, developing nation *instead of* poor nation
little thin on top *instead of* bald
self-centered *instead of* selfish

modest, plain, unattractive *instead of* ugly
getting on *instead of* old or elderly
family planning *instead of* birth control
manhood *instead of* the male sex organ
person of interest *instead of* a criminal suspect
private parts *instead of* a person's sex organs
laugh lines *instead of* wrinkles
overnight date *instead of* sexual encounter
lingerie *instead of* women's underwear
slow *instead of* stupid
pro-choice *instead of* legally abortion

Euphemisms Related to Business or Workplace

downsizing *instead of* firing employees
between jobs, take time off *instead of* unemployed
lay off *instead of* being fired

Euphemisms Related to Social Status

low-income, underprivileged, under-served, economically disadvantaged
instead of poor
temporary negative cash flow *instead of* broke

Euphemisms Related to Occupations

sanitation man *instead of* garbage man
housekeeper *instead of* maid
undertaker *instead of* burier

The examples of euphemisms above are not all about them. There are a lot more to study about euphemisms in English language. Hojati (2012) studies on euphemisms in the context of English speaking media. He stated that euphemisms are frequently used by speakers of different languages to soften the impact of

concepts with the potential to cause offence and social disapproval. Today, the use of euphemisms by the media and news has increased and controversial euphemisms have also been born. The calculation of frequencies of different euphemisms used by the media organizations revealed that poverty- and military-related euphemism figured prominently in the news bulletins, while euphemisms dealing with economy, disability, death and sex had lower frequencies of use.

According to Hojati's study, it was revealed that euphemisms are frequently used in media organizations. In order to further study about the use of euphemisms in today's media, euphemisms in advertising are presented as follows.

Euphemisms in Advertising

Marketers, manufacturers or advertisers sometimes use euphemisms as persuasive language to attract customers to purchase their products and services. However, the use of euphemisms works only for some products while the others do not, depending on what type of products they offer. Euphemisms in advertising sometimes mislead the audiences. (Amory, 2016). Examples of these are "Maybe", "We'll see.", "Maybe later.", "Every parent ever.." It is wiser to replace these words with more concise words such as "Most parents use it." Consumers could make their own list of euphemisms. Or instead, advertisers could keep it simple and say what they mean. The following are some examples of euphemisms in advertising today. (Romansky, 2015).

1. The "genuine imitation leather" is for the product that tends to be low-grade vinyl.
2. A "row house" is renamed by real estate companies for a "townhouse" or even a "townhome."
3. "Easy access" is a popular term for advertisers to attract those who wish to live near a noisy highway, it may mean just that.
4. "Sunny and bright" might be perfect for consumers who dislike trees.
5. "Cozy," is ideal for anyone who wants to be cramped in a tiny space.

In the marketing world, there are two groups: those who are using and advocating for the use of online marketing and social media strategies and those who are

still using traditional marketing strategies. One of the main problems existing between these two groups is language. To someone unfamiliar with online marketing, terms like blogging, RSS, and social media not only sound strange but are also unclear in terms of how they connect to business objectives. So, it's time to use some euphemisms to help new digital marketers and executives better understand online marketing strategies and tactics. The following are some tactics to use euphemisms in online marketing. (Bodnar, 2016).

1. Instead of 'Blog,' use 'Content Publishing Platform' - Blog is a strange word to those unfamiliar with online marketing. Instead, introduce it as something more descriptive and a little easier to understand when first explained, such as 'content publishing platform.'

2. Instead of 'RSS,' use 'Syndication and Subscription Technology' - RSS is a term created by developers and used by developers and members of the online echo chamber. RSS powers much of the syndication and subscription that happens on the web today, so describe it that way when explaining it to someone who may be unfamiliar with the term.

3. Instead of 'Social Media,' use 'Real-Time Media' - In David Meerman Scott's new book, *Real-Time Marketing and PR* the word social media is strangely vacant from the title. On Twitter, Scott explained, "In many companies, the term 'social media' has a negative connotation, so I use 'real-time media' instead, and management pays attention." Take this cue from Scott the next time you are trying to sell social media to a client or within an organization.

4. Instead of 'Search Engine Optimization (SEO),' use 'Increase Unpaid Search Engine Traffic' - SEO is a term that is frequently mentioned on this and many other blogs but seldom makes its way into the corporate boardroom. By using 'increase unpaid search engine traffic' instead of SEO, you save a step of explanation and get straight to the Value of the strategy you are advocating for.

5. Instead of 'Social Network,' use 'Online Communities' - The term social network, like social media, can conjure visions of teenagers "playing" on the internet rather than a valuable marketing opportunity. Online communities or even online groups seem to generate more respect and attention within corporate walls.

6. Instead of 'Pay-Per-Click (PPC),' use 'Click-Based Search Engine Advertising'
– Many non-digital marketers are confused about the difference between paid and organic search engine marketing, and SEO and PPC are partially to blame for this. As an alternative, use more direct terminology like 'click-based search engine advertising,' and also use images to help demonstrate the difference between paid and organic search engine marketing.

7. Instead of 'Landing Page,' use 'Lead Generation Page' - While landing page is a popular online marketing term, 'landing' doesn't describe a business benefit. However, 'lead' describes a clear role in the customer acquisition process and will be better received by senior management.

The following are some examples of euphemisms in advertising campaigns.
(Doublespeak image, 2018)



Next time you are working to educate co-workers and management about online marketing, please keep in mind some of these euphemisms, and use them to your advantage.

It is the fact that the purpose of advertisement is to make customers aware of the products, convince them that the product can solve their problems or meet their needs and finally create their desire to buy the product. However, advertisers should keep in mind to provide them with real benefits.

As we can see that euphemisms are all around us and we cannot avoid encountering euphemisms in English language, people, especially non-native speakers of English and ESL learners, should study how to interpret euphemism words and use them appropriately.

Effective Ways to Work with Euphemisms in the Classroom

As previously stated, ESL learners should be trained about euphemisms because failing to understand euphemisms leaves students vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by language. (Merino, 2018). He also emphasized that while native speakers understand the nuances of English, ESL students often struggle to internalize the social codes of conduct that fuel the need for euphemisms; therefore, they find it very challenging to use them effectively. This is particularly problematic because English language fluency requires users to master this skill. In addition, through the rise of political correctness, the English language is becoming more and more euphemistically complicated every day. Furthermore, for learners, euphemisms represent a part of English largely untaught. This is rather incongruous, for as speakers of English, euphemisms are used to express any number of everyday realities, and as passive listeners and readers, English speakers decode them daily to properly understand discourse in the workplace, the business world, the mass media, etc. (Alkire, 2002)

As a teacher of English, the author agrees that euphemisms can be a problem for English learners. In order to lessen the difficulties in learning the language and solve the problem, teachers of English should take seriously action in teaching euphemisms in English class. Suggestions in teaching euphemisms are as follows:

1. Define what euphemisms are.
2. Provide a list of euphemisms in English language.
3. Give examples of using a euphemism word in a sentence
4. Provide the students reading passages or news from newspapers and have them identify the euphemism words and try to figure out the meaning of them.
5. Ask students to create their own sentences individually or in groups using a euphemism in each sentence.
6. Share the sentences to the whole class and have the rest of the class discuss about the euphemisms used in those sentences.
7. Teachers give comments and feedback.
8. Assign each student to find a newspaper article that uses at least three euphemisms and replace them with more direct English words.
9. Integrate reading and writing skills with speaking skills by assigning students to create dialogues containing euphemisms and present the dialogues in front of the class.

Summary

Euphemisms are believed to serve both producers (speakers and writers), and recipients (listeners and readers). Producers use euphemisms to avoid offending others while recipients feel unembarrassed. However, euphemistic language is the timeless enemy of anyone concerned with clarity. In today's English, euphemisms cannot be got rid of. Therefore, it would be better if they are used for situations that are actually good.

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