

## **On Enlightenment of Euphemism in English Language Teaching**

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**Key words:** Euphemism, Classification, Formation reason, English language teaching.

**Abstract.** With the economic globalization, communications between persons, enterprises and countries become more and more frequent. As a cultural phenomenon and an important rhetorical device, euphemism is a reflection of social mentality in language, and has been widely used in various fields all over the world. Euphemism is a common linguistic means of creating harmonious atmosphere to ensure smooth linguistic communication, and education relates to talent cultivation, in particular to cross-culture communication talents. Hence, discussing the usage of euphemism in English language teaching is of great practical significance.

### **Introduction**

Euphemism was derived from linguistic taboo, and coexists with the latter in various cultures including English culture. It is a linguistic means of creating harmonious atmosphere to ensure smooth linguistic communication. In interpersonal communication, the adoption of a proper communication method or proper euphemism can avoid unnecessary trouble, awkwardness, or unhappiness, which can lead to effective and successful communications.

As everyone knows, euphemism is a part of culture, and has become one of the objects of cross-culture study. English contains a large number of euphemisms, covering various aspects. The euphemisms in English have reflected the social culture and conventions and values in English-speaking countries in varying degrees. Especially, in today's society where politeness holds an indispensable status, euphemism becomes more important. So far, there are quite many researches on English and Chinese euphemisms, but few researches on euphemism teaching. Therefore, it is imperative to discuss the usage of euphemism in English language teaching.

### **Euphemism and Classification**

Euphemism refers to an inoffensive expression uttered in an implicit and roundabout way for being substituted for one that is considered offensive out of various considerations in communication process. It usually used for politeness in circumstances where some unpleasant and even embarrassing topics are talked about. It is also a rhetorical device, and also a cultural phenomenon.

Usually euphemism can be classified into two types: positive euphemism and negative euphemism. Positive euphemism refers to glorifying euphemism, namely glorifying the "low" or "bad" to be "good", covering occupation, institution or respectful appellation words. Negative euphemism refers to fuzzy euphemism, namely speaking of terrible or excessive things in a moderate way, such as honorifics of god, alternative name of savage animal and self-abasing terms, and so on.

### **Formation Reason of Euphemism**

Euphemism was formed for three reasons: politeness; concealing and disguise; taboo.

In the process of interpersonal communication, especially in formal occasions, some words don't harmonize with the occasion at all. To avoid offense or impoliteness, euphemism is indispensable.

For example, there are many expressions for stating some functions of human body (defecating or urinating) out of politeness, such as "go to the toilet; go to the rest room; to wash one's hands.

Because the expression form of euphemism can dilute the fact and is of great fuzziness and fraudulence, it is often adopted by people in the political, commercial and even military circles in the west, who have coined a large quantity of euphemisms to conceal and disguise themselves. For example, in the beginning of the century, the labor-capital relationship in the west was strained, and strikes often occurred. They stated strike with a phrase of industrial action. In wars, euphemism is also common for disguise. For example, invasion is referred to as military mission, while massacre to as wasting the enemy.

In the early phase of human civilization, human were superstitious and worshiped gods and spirits. In the west, religious people can be found everywhere. Religious taboos have restrained the function of some specific words. In view of this, people must find some words that are inoffensive to the gods and spirits for substitute, and euphemism emerged.

### **Enlightenment of Euphemism in English Language Teaching**

Language teaching is an interaction between teacher and students. Proper use of euphemism is helpful for teacher and students to achieve a good communication effect in exchange of thoughts and feelings, text explaining, and cultural communication, make teacher's language more expressive and persuasive. Therefore, proper use of euphemism is good for bilateral activities between teacher and students, and improving the effect of English classroom teaching.

A qualified educator should not only have great leaning and good quality, but also understand the mental and physical growing processes of students. More importantly, educators should properly apply the face theory and politeness principle of euphemism in education and teaching, to establish a good psychological health education mechanism, create a harmonious and relaxing campus environment, promote teacher-students communication and smooth teaching process, explore an effective and innovative education mode, penetrate and apply the relative property of English and Chinese euphemisms into subjects, make contributions to overall implementation of quality-oriented education in schools, cultivate innovative cross-culture communication talents with an international view, and output education talents with cross-culture communicative competence. Therefore, in English language teaching, proper use of English and Chinese euphemisms can largely improve the classroom atmosphere and teaching effect.

### **Necessity of Euphemism in English Language Teaching**

Firstly, euphemism is helpful for assessing students' performance of knowledge acquirement, and helps students to avoid the awkward circumstance where some questions are out of their beyond. More importantly, euphemism is useful to save students' face. Almost everyone in the society is afraid of losing face, without exception for students. In the event that a teacher is about to assess a student who has made a mistake, or produced the wrong answer or performs poorly in learning, the teacher should take account of students' inner feeling and psychological enduring capacity, and try best to get his opinions, comments, and suggestions across. Thus, the teacher should make a comprehensive consideration, and pay attention to students' psychological needs. Students need to be praised and recognized. Hence, it is better to adopt euphemisms for assessing students, so as to save students' face, and reflect teachers' self-restraint and cultivation. Thus, students' can accept any assessment with pleasure, and the classroom efficiency can be largely improved. Of course, students love to hear words of praise. In this way, the more they learn, the more they love learning, and the more positive they are. The proper use of euphemism in such a circumstance exactly conforms to the politeness principle of euphemism. In this way, students' self-esteem is protected, students also have learned something, smooth communications between teachers and students have been achieved and teachers' thought accomplishment and language accomplishment can be improved. In classroom, the gap between teacher and students can be shortened, the classroom atmosphere can be improved, and the affections between teacher and students will become deeper. Unpredictable awkwardness and

unpleasantness always occur from time to time. To avoid the awkwardness and unpleasantness, we should learn more euphemisms of both Chinese and English. Anyhow, it is important to analyze and explain the composition of euphemisms to students in English language teaching, and it is necessary to teach students to apply euphemism in communication.

Secondly, euphemism can remove psychological obstacle in language study process. In English learning, many students who are not good at English will feel down, anxious and even depressed. One of the tasks of teachers is to help students to overcome the psychological obstacle. Teachers can use euphemism to give confidence and courage to students to encourage and arouse their sense of positive participation, create a good English environment and atmosphere, and cultivate their sense of achievement of English use. For example, teachers can assign students to deliver 3 to 5 minutes of presentation before class, covering speech, statement, story, joke, or group debate. Teachers should not be grudging of giving compliments once any student is found to get progress, to arouse the student's confidence. For those who have not make much progress or perform poorly in English language expression and application, teachers should take measures to communicate with them, to learn about their needs, show care for them, make friends with them, help them, encourage them, give enlightenment directly and politely, and point out their mistakes in the form of positive evaluation in negotiable tone. Especially, teachers should praise and recognize students' every progress with incentive words, such as Not bad! Good! Well done! Good point! Good idea!. Thus, students can feel teachers' concern and recognition, which can arouse their potential and shining points, and give them a sense of achievement. As time passes, their psychological obstacle can be removed.

Thirdly, teachers should guide students to grasp more English euphemisms, which is helpful for students to understand the natural conditions, social customs, and cultural knowledge of various countries. We can, based on students' desire for knowledge, teach more euphemisms common in life to students. For example, many people take death as a taboo, so there are a large number of euphemisms for talking about death, such as pass away, go to west, depart, in heaven, with god, be no more, etc. Illness is another taboo, for which the euphemisms include a big C (for cancer), Hansen S disease (for leprosy), sightless (for blind), and social disease (for venereal disease). For the disabled, the euphemisms include physically handicapped/disabled/the inconvenienced (for crippled), imperfect hearing/hard of hearing (for the deaf), and so on. The euphemisms for verbal communication include Would you please...? Would you like to...? Would you mind...? "Thank You for Not Smoking Here!" "Thank You for Being Quiet.", and so on. Militarily, for purpose of concealing the nature of invasion, euphemisms also are adopted, such as active defense/preventive war (for aggression) and air support (for air raid), and so on. Diplomatically, euphemisms also are very important. Especially, state leaders and diplomatic personnel should pay attention to their wordings in diplomacy, because they usually handle with relations with other countries representing their own country. If they use wrong words, it is liable to result in intensity of international situation, and even bring about immeasurable consequences. Hence, diplomatic language usually contains fuzzy words, which give a fuzzy impression to the public. If a serious and candid discussion is mentioned, it means there is a major difference in discussions. The details of euphemisms can arouse students' learning interest, and make them attach more importance to the use of English euphemisms. Meanwhile, euphemisms can make an immeasurable role in daily life.

Fourthly, full understanding of euphemisms is helpful to expand our scope of knowledge. Language is an embodiment and basis of culture, and language is closely related to culture. As an indispensable part of culture, euphemism is also closely related to culture. In different countries with different cultures, the use and cultural connotation of euphemism also are different. For euphemism teaching, the movie of *Forrest Gump* can be taken as an example, in which there is a situation: "Now, remember how I told you that Jenny never seemed to want to go home? Well, she lived in a house that was as old as Alabama. Her mama had gone up to heaven when she was five and daddy was some kind of a farmer." This sentence shows us that *Forrest Gump* and Jenny had been being good friends since childhood. *Forrest Gump* had been running in all his life, and had never changed his love to Jenny. Therefore, in this sentence, to show respect to Jenny's mother and sympathy to Jenny, he didn't

said "die", but said gone to heaven, to show his miss and care for Jenny. Teaching with example is visual and helpful to make students realize the importance of English euphemism.

### **Euphemism Expression in Common Use in Teaching**

#### 1. Unique grammars of English:

Some English verbs have rich morphological forms, and we can show euphemism via tense. For example, simple past tense can be used to express euphemism: If you had known the truth, I would have told you.

#### 2. Negative:

Negative tone is another way of expressing euphemism in English. For example, "I don't think he was wise." is more polite than "He is Foolish.". Besides, adverbs of degree also are a device for expressing euphemism via negative tone, such as quite, really, too, particularly, etc. For example, I don't really know what to say.

3. For inherent shortage of a student, "The student is plain." is more polite than "The student is ugly.", and "He is a bit slow for his age." is more polite than "The student is obtuse."

4. For students' bad habits, "He is likely to embroider the truth a bit." is more polite than "He lies."

5. For behavior guidance, "You need to develop quieter habits of communication." is more polite than "You are noisy."

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, euphemism teaching is useful for learning cultures of various countries, cultivating cross-culture communication talents, learning to express our ideas, knowing others' intentions, keeping a good interpersonal relationship, and promoting smooth verbal communication. Proper use of euphemism in teaching can leave a good impression on students, and win students' respect; save students' face, and promote the smoothness of classroom teaching; create a pleasing atmosphere for students to receive English language knowledge and skills and show teachers' language accomplishment and cultivation. Therefore, euphemism is of great practical significance and reference value in English language teaching.

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