

An intercultural study of euphemistic strategies used in Saudi Arabic and American English

Fadi Al-Khasawneh

Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Guraiger, Abha, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

People often use euphemistic utterances or expressions to avoid offensive or tabooed topics, to make them more implicit and considerate. This paper explores the euphemistic strategies used in Saudi Arabic and American English. The sample of this study includes 145 college students (78 Saudis and 67 Americans). A questionnaire adopted from Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) was used to collect the data of the present study. The results revealed various strategies used by the participants, such as deletion, synonyms, metaphor, understatement, part-for-whole, overstatement, and jargons. The most frequent strategies used by the Saudis were 'part-for-whole', 'understatement', and 'general-for-specific'. The American participants tended to use 'taboo words', 'general-for-specific' and 'synonyms' more frequently than the other strategies. The findings also showed that there is no relationship between strategy choice and gender. The findings suggest that Saudi Arabic seems to use euphemistic strategies more than the Americans. These results could be referred to cultural and religious beliefs and values. The study recommends raising the awareness of euphemism strategies for more active communication.

Keywords: euphemism; euphemistic strategies; linguistic taboos; pragmatics

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INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential part of our existence as human beings. Language is a way in which people communicate with each other in different situations and contexts. Language represents the culture and inheritance of the society of that language. The linguistic features of any given language are in fact present the cultural values and beliefs (Al-Azzeh, 2010). Those values and beliefs form the ground of using a variety of words and expressions in the language. Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) point out that language is influenced by nations' traditions, cultures, religions, social issues, and psychological orientations. Therefore, "any development in one of these areas will be reflected in the expressive tool-language" (Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni,

2012, p. 730). For that reason, language is considered as a carrier of cultures and peoples' history record (Wafi, 1983). Language speakers attempt to avoid and cover-up certain words or expressions prohibited by individuals, societies, or religions. In addition, people tend to replace certain words of negative meanings with more favorable ones that have a better influence on the hearers (Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012, p. 730). The negative meanings involve taboo expressions which speakers try to avoid. Therefore, language users have long attempted to enrich their languages with novel linguistic expressions such as concepts, collocations, idioms, and euphemisms. Euphemism is a universal phenomenon which implies substituting an insulting word or phrase in indirect way. More specifically,

* Corresponding author:

Email: fadialkhasawneh@yahoo.com

Euphemism is a courteous way in which a harsh, inappropriate, or offensive word is replaced by a more polite one (Allan & Burridge, 1991).

There is a growing number of studies that concern with the use of euphemism in different languages. This might be attributed to the increasing number of euphemistic expressions in those languages, and the challenges EFL learners face while trying to use the proper euphemistic expression in a particular situation (Altakhaineh & Rahrouh, 2015). The previous literature has paid a considerable attention to the euphemistic expressions used by foreign language learners who belong to different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Little attention, however, has been given to euphemistic expressions used by Arab EFL learners when responding to particular situations. Furthermore, very little attention has been given to intercultural studies that compare between native and non-native speakers in employing euphemistic expressions and the strategies they follow when doing so. Hence, this study aims at investigating euphemistic expressions and strategies employed by Saudis and Americans with respect to three situations (i.e., death, lying, and bodily functions). The respondents' linguistic strategies in responding to those situations are correlated to their gender. The present study also aims at finding differences in euphemistic strategies between native and non-native speakers of English. Finding these differences assist communicators in both cultures to communicate effectively without any sort of misunderstanding, especially foreign or second language communicators. Specifically, research questions have been formulated as follows: (1) what euphemistic strategies do Saudi speakers of Arabic and American speakers of English use in responding to the situations of death, lying, and bodily function?, and (2) do the euphemistic strategies used by Saudis and Americans vary across gender? The findings of this study would help learners to equip themselves these euphemistic strategies so as to avoid any embarrassing situations. The findings would also help in facilitating cross-cultural communication and save face of both speakers, since using tabooed expressions is considered as a face-threatening act.

Definition of Euphemism

The word euphemism is originally derived from the Greek word *eupheme* which consists of two parts: "*eu*", which means "*good*", and "*pheme*" which means "*speaking*" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2012). A number of linguists have provided different definitions for euphemism. Allan and Burridge (1991) defines euphemism as "an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offense, that of the audience, or of some third party" (p. 11). Cruse (2006) defines euphemism as "an expression that refers to something that people hesitate to mention lest it cause offence, but which lessens the offensiveness by referring indirectly in some way" (p. 57). Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2012) defines euphemism as "the

substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant". It is apparent that the above mentioned definitions imply avoiding certain social situations which contain tabooed words and expressions. Therefore, people tend to use soft, indirect, and socially acceptable expressions to substitute unacceptable words or expressions (Bani Mofarrej & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2015).

Politeness Theory

Politeness is a universal phenomenon; every language and culture has its own way of showing respect, avoiding tabooed expressions, saving face, and reducing the negative effect of impolite expressions (Al-Azzeh, 2010). Ide (1989) defines linguistic politeness as follows:

The language usage associated with smooth communication realized first through the speaker's use of intentional strategies to allow his or her message to be received favorably by the addressee and second through the speaker's choice of expressions to conform to the expected and/or prescribed norms of speech appropriate to the contextual situation in individual speech communities. (p.225)

The most recognized theory of politeness is that of Brown and Levinson (1987) who have built their theory from Grice's Cooperative Principle. In their theory, they argue that communicators in all languages need face saving as a major aspect of human communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that speakers tend to employ polite strategies to express respect, solidarity, and keep a positive face between senders and receivers. Brown and Levinson propose "a Model Person" endowed with intellectuality and face. They also introduce the "Face Concept" which is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, p. 66). In this context, face might be defined as "the social value that an individual has taken to strengthen social ties with other members of his society (Ghounane, Mortad, & Rabahi, 2017, p. 219). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the term "face" is divided into two aspects: positive face and negative face. Positive face is defined as "the positive consistent self-image or "personality" (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 66). The theory of "face" originates the idea of reflecting abstract things such as hate, love, sadness, and greed. Brown and Levinson states that face aspects are "basic wants, which every member knows every other member desires, and which in general is in the interests of every member to partially satisfy" (p. 66). On the other hand, negative face is defined as "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and rights to non-distraction— i.e. to freedom of action from imposition". In other words, negative face is "the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others" (p. 66). They also argue that the

notion of speaker's "want" is "highly culture-specific, group-specific, and ultimately idiosyncratic" (p. 64), and claim that while the cultural value of face itself may differ, the "want" to understand and "satisfy members' public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction are universal" (p. 62).

In contrary to "face" concept, Face Threatening Act (FTA) is also a part of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) define FTA as verbal or non-verbal act that contrasts with the definition of face; it is a performance that is against the want of the speaker or hearer. The speaker normally chooses face-rectifying strategy to save the hearer's and speaker's face and reduce the force amount of the FTA by balancing three wants: "(a) the want to communicate the content of the FTA, (b) the want to be efficient or urgent, and (c) the want to maintain the hearer's face to any degree. Unless (b) is greater than (c), the speaker will want to minimize the threat of the FTA" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 68). In addition, they argue that threat acts would lead to damaging the speaker's face, thus damaging the public-self-image. Bouchara (2009) points out that insult expressions and abuse terms are actually threaten the speaker's negative face and ultimately his public self-image. He adds that FTA is connected to certain variables that include the interaction context, the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, and the imposition amount that an act contains. Brown and Levinson (1987) introduce negative and positive politeness where positive politeness is used to create a solidarity feeling between the speaker and the hearer, while negative politeness is used to preserve the hearer's negative face desires.

Although politeness is essential in all societies, different cultures express politeness in different ways. Al-Okla (2018) states that some cultures refer to indirectness as a way of expressing politeness, while other cultures do not. For example, the Japanese culture associates indirectness to politeness. However, it is not necessary to be indirect in the American culture to be considered polite. Therefore, "politeness can only be judged relative to a particular context and particular addressees' expectations" (Meier, 1995, p. 352). Thus, the notion of politeness might vary from one culture to another. Likewise, euphemism, as a type of speech act where politeness is required, might differ from one context to another and from language to another.

Euphemism Strategies

It is apparent that both politeness and face are important notions for most cultures that must be taken into consideration in daily conversation. Essentially, there are different strategies that people use to maintain face and politeness including honor and the others' image. Edward and Guth (2010) point out that "honor dignity and self-respect are 'sacred' concepts among Arabs since pre-Islamic times, and are considered taboos, which should not be abused by anybody" (p. 33). The present study selects different euphemism strategies based on prior studies on euphemism (Allan &

Burridge, 2006; Huang, 2005; Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012; Warren, 1992). These strategies include formal innovation strategies, phonemic modification, and semantic innovation strategies. Formal innovation strategies include word formation mechanisms such as derivation, blends, acronyms, clipping, compounding, and onomatopoeia (Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012; Warren, 1992). Derivation is used when modifying a loan word through inserting a native affix to its root such as "celibacy" from "celibatus" (life without sex/love). Blending is a word formation process where the beginning of a certain word and the end of another word are joined together to form a new word, such as "brunch" (breakfast + lunch). Acronyms are defined as combining the initial letter of certain words and pronounced as a single word such as NASA for "National Aeronautics and Space Administration". Clipping refers to words formed by dropping one or more syllables from a longer word or phrase with no change in meaning as flu from influenza. Compounding refers to the process of joining two or more words together to form a new word as homework (home + work). Onomatopoeia is defined as the formations of a word from a sound associated with what is named as piss for urinate.

Phonemic modification strategies refer to modifying the form of an offensive tabooed word. These strategies include rhyming slang, back slang, abbreviation, deletion, and phonemic replacement. Huang (2005) defines rhyming slang as forming euphemisms through phonetic rhyme with unwanted coordinate such as this for piss (urinate). Back slang is a process in which words are spoken as though they were spelled backwards (e.g., redraw for warder) (Warren, 1992). Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) refer to abbreviation in euphemism as indirect or inoffensive expression that is substituted for one that is considered tabooed or too offensive (e.g., WTF for what the f...ck). Deletion in euphemism refers to excluding the forbidden words by pausing the conversation or failing to provide facts about the forbidden issue, both of which need contextually based inference by the listener to be understood (e.g., did you? – for did you have sexual intercourse?) (Ham, 2005, p. 241). In written language, the taboo words or expressions are replaced by "quasi-omissions" using some non-lexical expressions like dashes and asterisks for the tabooed terms (Allan & Burridge, 1991, p. 17). Phonemic replacement refers to remodeling of forbidden words through matching part of them with semantically unrelated ones (e.g., sugar and shoot for shit) (Allan & Burridge, 1991, p. 15).

The last major category of euphemistic strategies is semantic innovation. This category includes euphemisms which are symbolic and exposed to semantic change (Warren, 1992). One example of semantic innovation strategies is 'particularization' that is used when a term is particularized within the context to refer to an issue said to be taboo (e.g., satisfaction for orgasm and innocent for virginal). It differs from metonymy in that both the euphemism and the taboo

term are semantically unrelated whereas both are belonging to the same semantic field in metonymy (Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012, p. 732). Another strategy of semantic innovation is metaphor which is defined by Neaman and Silver (1983) as the metaphorical transfer as the induction of a concept, usually euphemistic, standing for forbidden terms through comparison. Metaphorical expressions include red or cavalry's come for menstruation (Allan & Burrige, 1991). Baldick (2004) defines understatement as a way of introducing a forbidden issue as less important than it really is (e.g., as in sleep for die). In contrast, overstatement is defined as the exaggerated language for emotional effect in which forbidden terms are deformed by making them better and bigger than they really look like (e.g., flight to glory for died and visual engineer for window cleaner). General-for-specific strategy uses an overall entity to denote a part of it (e.g., I'll go to bathroom for go to excrete) (Allan & Burrige, 1991, p. 18). Huang (2005) defines fuzzy words as the use of ambiguous terms that have elastic meaning and can be explained in different ways as the terms related to genitals. Using proper nouns or "names" is another common euphemistic strategy used by people. It refers to using a name of a certain person to denote a forbidden term (Warren, 1992). Warren's examples include 'John Thomas' [Prick or penis], 'Roger' [having sexual intercourse] and 'Lady Jane' [cunt] (p. 427). Geographical adjectives are euphemisms used if geographical directions refer indirectly to a taboo notion. Examples of these include 'Essex girl' [sexually available woman] and 'Dutch cap' [contraceptive diaphragm or condom] (Allen & Burrige, 1991, p. 88). Words like lavatory or toilet are considered inappropriate; therefore, they are replaced with bathroom, water closet or washroom.

Related Studies to Euphemism Strategies

Euphemism strategies have drawn the attention of some researchers (Al-Azzam, Al-Ahaydib, Alkhwaiter, & Al-Momani, 2017; Bani Mofarrej & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2015; Ghounane, 2014; Ghounane, Mortad, & Rabahi, 2017; Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012). Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) investigate the euphemistic strategies employed in British English and Saudi Arabic. The sample of this study includes 300 students (150 Saudi college students and 150 British college students). The researchers developed a questionnaire contained six conversational situations about three tabooed topics (lying, bodily functions, and death). The results of this study revealed that Saudi respondents reported using euphemism strategies, such as overstatement, part-for-whole, deletion, understatement, general-for-specific, metaphor, and jargons. The British respondents reported using general-for specific, learned words and jargons, metaphors, deletion, and understatement. The study also shows no relationship between euphemism strategy choice and gender. Ghounane (2014) studied the euphemistic strategies and linguistic taboos in the Algerian society. The sample of this study included ten

informants from Tlemcen speech community. A questionnaire and personal interview were used to collect the data of this study. The research instruments contained items related to the informants' views and attitude towards taboo language, and some euphemistic expressions regarding the topics of sex and death. The findings of this study revealed that the percentages of both euphemistic usage and taboo words are roughly equal, and the informants' attitudes towards taboo language are highly positive. The findings also showed that Algerian people tend to deal with taboo topics in single sex groups depending on their gender and age. Lastly, these results prove that sex has remained as the most tabooed topic, whereas death topic is also treated with care in Algerian society.

In a similar vein, Bani Mofarrej and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2015) explored the euphemistic expressions related to death topic in the Jordanian society. This study also examined the effect of social variables (i.e., gender, age, and region) on the employment of these expressions. To achieve the objectives of this study, a developed questionnaire was developed and administered to 130 male and female respondents randomly chosen from two regions (i.e., Irbid and Mafraq). The findings of this study revealed a high level of using euphemistic expressions related to death reported. In addition, the social variables affect the use of euphemistic death expressions in certain situations only. For instance, the above 30 year-old participants used more euphemized expressions than those who are 30 years old or under. In addition, males and females used different expressions only when trying to reduce the painful effects of someone's death. The results also showed that Bedouin participants used different expressions from those used by rural participants when referring to the condoling house. Al-Azzam et al. (2017) investigate the social and cultural euphemism in Saudi Arabic. The aim of this study is to understand the Saudi culture concerning the use of euphemisms and illustrate how some linguistic expressions are basically the products of cultural and social pressures. To achieve the previously mentioned goals, the study analyzes and classifies examples of the most frequently used Saudi Arabic euphemism, based on various topics. The study shows that the social and cultural factors are very influential in expressing euphemism. It also reveals a clear and a huge shift in the use of euphemism in the Saudi culture, where Saudis did not apply euphemisms frequently in the past, as they are applying these days. Because of the new development of the country's economy, openness, interfaith dialogue, cultural communication, new lifestyles have emerged and called for more prestigious linguistic behavior. It is hoped that the study would uncover why there are certain sensitive situations where euphemism is needed, such as those of religion, social circumstances, and death situations. Ghounane et al. (2017) studies the politeness strategies used by Tlemcen community speech-Algeria to avoid taboo topics and face threatening act when discussing certain taboo themes. The data of this study was made

with the help of a questionnaire and a focus group interview. The findings of this study revealed that politeness constitutes an inefaceable part in Tlemcen culture. Tlemcen speakers employed politeness strategies in both family and society to show respect and protect their faces. The results also revealed that they had recourse to polite forms to euphemize sexual matters that are considered to be the most tabooed subject in Tlemcen culture.

METHODS

Sample

The population of this study includes students enrolled in the department of English in two universities (i.e., King Khalid University and University of Houston, Texas). The sample of this study encompasses 78 Saudi college students (40 male and 38 female students) who were randomly chosen from King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. The American respondents were 67 college students (38 male and 29 female college students) who were randomly chosen from the University of Houston, Texas, USA. The researcher used simple random sampling technique in order to give equal chance for population to participate in this study, and to avoid any bias that might appear in the selection process.

Data Collection

A questionnaire adopted from Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) was used to collect the data of the present study. Two versions of the questionnaire were used; one was designed in Arabic for the Saudi respondents, and the other was designed in English for the American respondents. The format of the questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section involves demographic information such as the faculty name, age, and gender. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of 3 conversational situations representing the three tabooed topics (bodily functions, lying, and death). The respondents were requested to provide as many proper responses as they can with regard to the tabooed topics. Being aware of research ethics and confidentiality, the respondents were asked not to write their names on the paper and they have been informed that their data will be handled confidentially as some of the respondents are known to the researcher. The respondents were informed about their right to withdraw from participating in this study if they felt stressed or unwilling to do so.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data of the present study involves classifying the students' responses into various categories of euphemism strategies, taking into account the definition of each strategy and the provided examples in the literature review section. To ensure the reliability of the findings, the classification has been reviewed three times in order to check its accuracy. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were presented to explore the most frequent

strategies employed by both (Saudis and Americans) respondents in the three tabooed topics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency of euphemism strategies employed in Saudi Arabic and American English

Lying

Table 1 below presents the frequency of euphemistic strategies employed by Saudis and Americans that are related to lying.

Table 1. Frequency of euphemistic strategies related to lying

Strategy	Saudis		Americans	
	N	%	N	%
Deletion	42	20.19	37	19.89
Synonyms	16	7.69	03	1.61
Metaphor	28	13.46	15	8.06
Understatement	67	32.21	65	34.94
Taboo	55	26.44	66	35.48
Total	208	100.00	186	100.00

As illustrated in table 1, Saudi participants recorded using 'understatement' strategy in 67 instances which accounts for around 32% of the responses provided for lying situation. The euphemistic expression 'kawiyah' (It is strong) is an example of understatement strategy used by Saudis to avoid direct expressions that clarify their attitudes towards lying situation. The second frequent euphemistic strategy used by Saudis in lying situation was 'taboo' which accounted for around 26% (55 instances). Deletion is used in 42 instances (around 20%) among Saudi participants. This is apparently shown when a participant says "Elli tguhah is... (What you are saying is...)". There were also hesitations and specific facial expressions that indicate untruthfulness. Metaphorical expressions are also used considerably (28 instances). Expression like 'Kunbilah' (bomb) was used to describe a lie by Saudi respondents. Synonyms were the least frequent strategy used by Saudis. Euphemistic expressions like 'mu sahih' (incorrect) and 'laisa sahihan' (not right) are examples of such a strategy. American participants, on the other hand, tended to use taboo terms very frequently. Taboo strategy used in 66 instances which accounts for around 35% of the overall responses to a 'lie'. 'Understatement' is employed in 65 instances which accounts for around 35% of the answers provided for lying situation. Expressions like 'I think what you said is misstatement', and 'that is not the truth' were frequently used among Americans. Deletion and metaphor were among the frequently used strategies by Americans. Expressions like 'sorry, but what you are saying is..., and that is not the...' are examples of the deletion strategy. 'You are a carnival mirror' is an example of metaphorical expressions used by Americans. The findings revealed that the Saudis and the Americans employed a number of euphemistic strategies to inform the person what he is saying is a lie. These results are in consistent with Rabab'ah and Al-

Qarni (2012) who affirmed that lying is one of the diversified sins. They suggested that people tend to trivialize the lie by using certain strategies. They also pointed out that people might euphemize or not according to cultural differences which all rely heavily on their life beliefs and styles.

Death

Death is considered to be painful to most people and the fear of it is actually universal among human beings. Table (2) shows the frequency of euphemism strategies used by Saudis and Americans to deal with death situation.

Table 2. Frequency of euphemistic strategies related to death

Strategy	Saudis		Americans	
	N	%	N	%
Deletion	14	7.32	39	21.66
Synonyms	30	15.70	54	30.00
Metaphor	02	1.04	01	0.55
Understatement	21	10.99	12	6.66
Taboo	13	6.80	41	22.77
Part-for-whole	75	39.26	33	18.33
Overstatement	36	18.84	-	-
Total	191	100.00	180	100.00

As shown in table 2 above, the Saudi respondents reported using a number of euphemism strategies to address death topic. The most frequently employed strategy was ‘part-for-whole’ which has been used in 75 instances and this accounts for around 39% of the overall strategies. Expressions like ‘*athama allahu ajrakum*’ (May God glorify your reward) exemplifies this strategy. Overstatement was the second frequent strategy employed by the Saudis. This strategy has been recorded in 36 instances (around 19%). Death euphemism like ‘*intakala Illa Jiwari Rabih*’ (He left to his God) is an example of using this strategy. It is apparent that strategies like metaphorical and taboo expressions were the least frequent strategies used by the Saudi respondents. These findings concur with Rabab’ah and Al-Qarni (2012) who indicated part-for-whole as the most dominant strategy used among Saudis regarding death topic. However, the findings of the present study are inconsistent with Elyyan (1994) and Al-Shamali (1997), who both found the ‘synonyms’ strategy is the most used strategy among Jordanians in death topic. Jordanians used utterances like ‘*tawaffa*’ which is in fact a synonym of ‘passed away’. Rabab’ah and Al-Qarni (2012) interpret these findings due to the strict implementation of Islamic laws in all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia compared to other Arabian and Islamic countries. As for American participants, the table above showed a variety of strategies used by them to deal with death topic. The findings revealed that ‘synonyms’ was the most employed strategy and it has been mentioned in 54 instances (30%). Utterance like ‘passed away’ is an example of using such euphemism strategy. Interestingly, the American participants tend to

use taboo utterances to handle the topic of death. Taboo expressions occur in 41 instances (around 23%) of the overall strategies used in this category. In addition, the ‘deletion’ was used considerably by the Americans (around 22%) of overall death euphemisms. Utterances like “I do not know what to say but...” exemplifies this strategy. The American participants did not use any ‘overstatement’ strategy and used the ‘understatement’ and ‘metaphor’ strategies very rarely to deal with this tabooed topic. The results related to death topic are similar to Frajzyngier and Jirsa (2006) who listed some English euphemistic expressions to refer to death like ‘He is not with us’, ‘he passed away’, or ‘he met his maker’. This result indicates that the American participants show a mixed feelings towards death, and this was evident through the high frequency of using synonyms (fear of death) and the high frequency of using taboo utterances (unfear of death). This can be attributed to the distance between the speaker and the listener (formal or informal). Speakers tend to use taboo utterances in the informal situations, whereas synonyms are used in the formal situations (Rabab’ah & Al-Qarni, 2012).

Bodily Functions

Bodily functions are considered one of the most severe taboos in many social situations (Al-Shamali, 1997). Hence, people tend to euphemistically refer to those functions since any breach of such a matter is said to be an impoliteness sign (Rabab’ah & Al-Qarni, 2012). Table 3 below presents the frequency of euphemistic strategies employed by Saudis and Americans that are related to bodily functions.

Table 3. Frequency of euphemistic strategies related to bodily functions

Strategy	Saudis		Americans	
	N	%	N	%
Deletion	19	12.50	22	20.95
Jargons	10	6.57	12	11.42
Metaphor	57	37.50	04	3.80
Taboo	05	3.28	01	0.95
General-for-specific	61	40.13	66	62.85
Total	152	100.00	105	100.00

As shown in table 3 above, the most frequently used strategy was ‘general-for-specific’ which occurred in 61 instances, representing around 40%. The participants used expressions like “*thahibun illa dawratil miyah*” (To the water cycle). ‘Metaphor’ ranked the second frequently employed strategy; it reported 57 instances, representing 37.50% (e.g., *bait al adab* for politeness room). The third most used strategy was ‘deletion’ which recorded 19 instances, representing 12.50% (e.g., I am going to the...). The least frequently used strategies were ‘jargons’ and ‘taboo expressions’. These findings lend support to the prior studies that emphasized this topic as a severe taboo (Al-Shamali, 1997; Kristeva, 1982; Rabab’ah & Al-Qarni, 2012). Abrantes (2005) states that bodily functions are source of embarrassment and concealing

this subject is a face-saving strategy. As for the American participants, the results showed that Americans resorted to ‘general-for-specific’ strategy when handling tabooed topics related to bodily functions. General-for-specific strategy recorded 66 instances which accounts for around 63% of the overall strategy used in this category. Utterances like ‘bathroom’ and ‘comfort station’ were used frequently as these utterances enable the speakers to refer to certain places through mentioning a general location in which the action takes place. ‘Deletion’ ranked the second frequently employed strategy and it reported 22 instances (around 21%). Expression like “sorry but I need to go to the...” exemplifies this strategy. ‘Metaphor’ and ‘taboo’ were the least frequently used strategies in which very few instances recorded these

strategies. The findings showed similarities between the Saudis and the Americans in the bodily functions euphemisms. These findings support the previous research on this topic (Al-Shamali, 1997; Rabab’ah and Al-Qarni, 2012; Roth, 2007). These studies state that bodily functions are severe taboos in all cultures, which should never be violated. Also, these taboos (i.e., bodily functions) can be appalling or repugnant behaviors or actions.

Euphemism Strategies and Gender

The use of euphemism strategies may differ according to gender. Table 4 below presents the distribution of most employed euphemism strategies due to gender of the Saudi respondents.

Table 4. Distribution of most employed euphemism strategies by the Saudis due to gender

Topic	Strategy	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Lying	Understatement	Male	27	40.30
		Female	40	59.70
	Taboo	Male	41	74.54
		Female	14	25.46
Death	Deletion	Male	27	64.28
		Female	15	35.72
	Part-for-whole	Male	23	30.67
		Female	52	69.33
Bodily Functions	Overstatement	Male	20	55.55
		Female	16	44.45
	Synonyms	Male	14	46.66
		Female	16	53.34
Bodily Functions	General for Specific	Male	27	44.26
		Female	34	55.74
	Metaphor	Male	23	40.35
		Female	34	59.65
Deletion	Male	07	36.84	
	Female	12	63.16	

Table 4 reveals no variance in the participant’s gender and euphemism strategies. Both males and females used the same strategies for each tabooed topic. The most frequently used strategies to euphemize lying were ‘understatement’, ‘taboo’, and ‘deletion’ consecutively. Females tended to use ‘understatement’ and ‘deletion’ strategies more frequently whereas ‘taboo’ was used more frequently by males in lying topic. Regarding death topic, males and females employed ‘part-for-whole’ more frequently followed by ‘overstatement’ and ‘synonyms’. Female participants surpassed their male counterparts in using death euphemisms. Similarly, ‘general for specific’ was the most frequent strategy employed by males and females followed by ‘metaphor’, and ‘deletion’. Females used the aforementioned strategies more frequently than males.

As for the American participants, both males and females used the same strategies of euphemizing the three tabooed topics. Taboo utterances were used frequently by the participants to euphemize lying topic. Male participants used taboo words more frequently than females ones. Females used ‘understatement’ and ‘deletion’ more frequently than males to avoid lying

situation. Females were superior in using ‘synonyms’ and ‘deletion’ to handle death situation, whereas males recorded a high usage of taboo words to deal with the same topic. Concerning bodily functions topic, both males and females used general- for-specific more frequently to avoid this situation with more usage among females. Males and females were equal in using ‘deletion’ strategy and females used more jargons than males to handle this tabooed topic. It can be noticed from the results above that males and females employed exactly the same strategies to deal with tabooed topics (i.e., lying, death, and bodily functions). Female participants used more strategies compared their males counterparts. These findings disagree with some previous research findings that assumed gender as an affective factor on speech events. Al-Shamali (1997) indicates that this variable affects the use of certain euphemism strategies over other strategies. Other researchers state that women and men develop different speech patterns and women use more polite language (Holmes, 1998; Lakoff, 1975). Yet, these findings agree to Crawford and Chaffin (1987), Rabab’ah and Al-Qarni (2012) who found that topic determines speech aspects but with no gender differences in style or production.

Table 5. Distribution of most employed euphemism strategies by the Americans due to gender

Topic	Strategy	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Lying	Taboo	Male	42	63.63
		Female	24	36.37
	Understatement	Male	30	46.15
		Female	35	53.85
Death	Deletion	Male	16	56.75
		Female	21	43.25
	Synonyms	Male	24	44.44
		Female	30	55.56
	Taboo	Male	21	51.21
		Female	20	48.79
Bodily Functions	General for Specific	Male	18	46.15
		Female	21	53.85
	Deletion	Male	25	37.87
		Female	41	62.13
	Jargons	Male	11	50.00
		Female	11	50.00
		Male	03	25.00
		Female	09	75.00

CONCLUSION

The present study aims at exploring the euphemism strategies employed in Saudi Arabic and American English. It also aims at investigating the relationship between the strategy choice and gender. The findings showed that the participants used almost the same strategies in the three tabooed topics. However, the Saudis used ‘understatement’ more frequently to euphemize lying topic whereas ‘taboo’ was the strategy that the Americans resorted to. ‘Part-for-whole’ was the most used strategy among the Saudis to deal with death topic. The Americans tended to use ‘synonyms’ to deal with the same topic. Both the Saudis and the Americans preferred to use ‘general-for-specific’ as a strategy to handle the tabooed topic ‘bodily functions’. The results also revealed that female respondents employed more euphemism strategies than their male counterparts. In other words, they were more disposed than males to avoid tabooed topics. This result proves that the language produced by females is said to be more polite (Greene, 2000; Lakoff, 1975). Euphemism usage is connected to the culture; different strategies are used due to the different culture and society. These different aspects are viewed and reflected in the results of the present study.

The use of euphemisms and taboo words is a natural phenomenon in all cultures and it is observed and rooted in all human interactions and societies (Rabab’ah & Al-Qarni, 2012). People tend to use alternative expressions to avoid being dull. Therefore, the use of those alternatives is the minimum requirement to save their face (Frajzyngier & Jirsa, 2006). The present study shows the existence of euphemism in the Saudi and the American answers. It was apparent the religious values and beliefs, and customs play a vital role in the speakers’ choice of strategy. For instance, the Saudis use “*intakala illa rahmatil lah*” (he left to the God’s mercy) to euphemize death topic. Another example is the high frequency of using taboo words among the Americans especially in

lying and death topics. This shows how different life-styles, customs, values, the degree of formality, and beliefs affect the use of euphemism strategies. In the light of these findings, it is highly recommended to equip the EFL textbooks and provide the syllabus designers with the euphemism instances due to its importance in communicating with the native speakers of English and being able to convey a tabooed topic. In addition, comparing or contrasting between euphemistic strategies used in different cultures may help to understanding these cultures and use the information in cross-cultural communication.

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