
Practical usage and teaching of english euphemisms

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A euphemism is a generally harmless word, name, or phrase that substitutes an offensive or suggestive one [1]. Some euphemisms intend to amuse, while others intend to give positive appearances to negative events or even mislead entirely. Euphemisms also often take the place of [profanity](#). [11]

The word euphemism comes from the [Greek](#) word (euphemia), meaning “the use of words of good omen”, which in turn is derived from the Greek root-words eu, “good/well” + pHEME “speech/speaking”. The eupheme was originally a word or phrase used in place of a religious word or phrase that should not be spoken aloud; etymologically, the eupheme is the opposite of the [blaspheme](#) (evil-speaking). Primary examples of taboo words requiring the use of a euphemism are names for deities, such as [Persephone](#), [Hecate](#), or [Nemesis](#). The term euphemism itself was used as a euphemism by the ancient Greeks, meaning “to keep a holy silence” (speaking well by not speaking at all).[]

Since human are often named after everyday things, this leads to the swift development of euphemisms. New names are frequently required when an old one becomes taboo. These languages have a very high rate of vocabulary change.

A euphemism is an expression intended by the speaker to be less offensive, disturbing, or troubling to the listener than the word or phrase it replaces.

Euphemisms are widely used to hide unpleasant or disturbing ideas, even when the literal term for them is not necessarily offensive..

The English language contains numerous euphemisms related to dying, death, burial, and the people and places which deal with death. The practice of using euphemisms for death is likely to have originated with the “magical” belief that to speak the word ‘death’ was to invite death. People who have died are referred to as having passed away or passed or departed. Deceased is a euphemism for ‘dead’, and sometimes the deceased is said to have gone to a better place, but this is used primarily among the religious with a concept of heaven.

There are many euphemisms for the dead body. Modern funerary workers use terms such as the loved one or the dearly departed. (They themselves have given up the euphemism funeral director for grief therapist, and hold arrangement conferences with relatives.) A recently dead person may be referred to as the late John Doe. The terms cemetery for graveyard and undertaking for burial are so well established that most people don’t even recognize them as euphemisms.

Contemporary euphemisms for death tend to be quite colorful, and someone who has died is said to have passed away, passed on, checked out, bit the big one, kicked the bucket, bitten the dust, bought the farm, cashed in their chips, croaked, given up the ghost, gone south, shuffled off this mortal coil (from Shakespeare’s Hamlet), or assumed room temperature. When buried, they may be said to be pushing up daisies, sleeping the big sleep, taking a dirt nap, or six feet under.

Expressions which are used to sound intentionally harsh are known as dysphemisms.

Doublespeak refers to euphemisms used by government, military, or corporate institutions in an attempt to confuse and conceal the truth. An example of doublespeak is the use of friendly fire

as a euphemism for being attacked by your own troops.

Other common euphemisms include: restroom or bathroom for toilet; acting like rabbits, making love, getting it on, doing it, or sleeping with for having sexual intercourse; motion discomfort bag and air-sickness bag for vomit bag; sanitary landfill for garbage dump; third-party unauthorized use for cracking (computer crime); ill-advised for very poor or bad; pre-owned vehicles for used cars correctional facility for prison the big C for cancer; the crab for cancer due to the constellation Cancer; bathroom tissue, t.p., or bath tissue for toilet paper (Usually used by toilet paper manufacturers) custodian or caretaker for janitor; sanitation worker (or, sarcastically, sanitation engineer) for “garbage man”; Where can I wash my hands? or Where can I powder my nose? for Where can I find a toilet?. (This is an Americanism. A person asking this in Europe may be directed to a room

There are plenty of words for places we need but would like to avoid in polite conversation:

Brothel: common bawdy house, house of entertainment, house of ill-repute, massage parlor, red-light establishment, (where littering and loitering are strictly prohibited).

Garbage Dump: Sanitary landfill, municipal refuse yard

Jail: hoosegow, holding unit, secure facility

One Room Living Unit: alternative lifestyle choice, smart-growth choice, studio suite, efficiency unit, granny suite, transit-oriented young lifestyle choice

Bathroom: ablution hut, boghouse comfort station, garderobe, gentleman’s quarters, “his” and “hers”, House of Honor, ladies room, lavatory, men’s room, necessarium, place of convenience, place of ease, porcelain palace, public washroom, powder room, privy, room 100, the john, the jakes, the redorter, throne room, washroom, water closet, W.C.

References

1. [Euphemism](#) Webster’s Online Dictionary