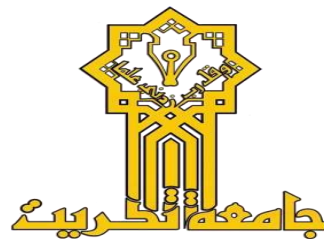


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Taboo and Euphemism

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Language is used to avoid saying certain things as well as to express them. Certain things are not said, not because they cannot be, but because **‘people don’t talk about those things’**; or, if those things are talked about, they are talked about in very **roundabout ways**. In the first case we have instances of **linguistic taboo**; in the second we have the employment of **euphemisms**.

Taboos and Euphemisms are two common and closely related language phenomena, and they are also a common **cultural phenomenon**. In daily communication, people always have different ideas. Sometimes they are unwilling or unable to express their wishes **directly**, thus in this way taboos are produced.

1.2 Taboo

Taboo is the **prohibition or avoidance** of behavior, believed to be **harmful** to its members in that it would cause them **anxiety, embarrassment, or shame**. Taboos arise out of **social constraints** on the individual’s behaviour, where it can cause **discomfort, harm or injury**.”

Taboos can be found in people’s behavior and speech. For instance, it is a taboo behavior in some Arab countries **to walk with your shoes** on when entering your host’s house, or to **walk on paper written in the Arabic script** since the latter has acquired sanctity by being the language of the Holy Koran. In most Arab countries, the word for

“cancer” is unspeakable along with many other words known as **“dirty”** ones. (Allan and Burridge ,2006: 1)

Breaking a taboo is considered to cause **misfortune** in different today's societies. A taboo breach does, however, carry certain consequences. Depending on how big the taboo breach is considered, the other members of the society **may punish** the breaker of a taboo with **isolation** and **ostracism**. In such cases as **incest**, **legal punishments** also follow. Even if the taboo breaker would not cause a strong reaction from the other members, the taboo breaker him/herself may feel **guilty**, **disgust** and **shame** (Abdul- Majeed, 2016:403).

An example of taboos, when a **special leader dies**, some communities will **avoid** terms of reference that made up part of **his or her name** (Meyerhoff ,2011:158).

1.2.1 Types of Taboos

No taboo is known to be universal, but some occur in the majority of societies. Taboos exist in different kinds of societies and are visible in different forms:

1-Taboo of Politics and Military

The political and military fields are two of the most crucial areas of taboo, such as **“war”** that was replaced by **armed aggression**, **intervention**, **military operation** (Hughes, 1988: 212).

2-Taboo of Religion

Religion is one of the areas that need to be mentioned **politely and carefully**. The consumption of **alcohol** is a major **sin** or “**haraam**” in Islam.<https://www.sociologygroup.com/taboo-meaning-examples-types/>

3. Food and Drink Taboo

Various religions forbid the consumption of certain types of food. For example, Islam has laws, dividing foods into haram (forbidden) and halal (permitted) (Abdul-Majeed, 2016:401).

4-Taboo of Decency

In every language, there seems to be certain words of such strong powerful connotations that **cannot be used in polite contexts**. It is true that standards of taboo differ from place to place, from time to time, and from situation to another. This is because ideas of taboo intensely affect language. The two main fields immediately influenced by this group of taboo are functions of the **body**’, and ‘**swearing**’. These areas have to be brought under the **decency**. (Ullmann ,1962:208)

5- Taboo of Delicacy

It is believed, generally speaking, that delicacy is one of the important elements of conducting speeches in everyday use of a language, especially in polite situations. It covers many social areas, such as **age**, **physical/mental disability** and **professions/occupations**,

1.Age, For example, people, especially females, who dislike to be asked about his/her age that is regarded as a sign of oldness,

particularly in the western communities, as in the use of the words

wrinkly, wrinkled, fossil, middle- aged, etc .

1. Physical/Mental Disability

There are several similar examples of delicacy concerning the people who have either physical or mental defects, such as (**hearing impaired**) for deaf, unable to speak or (**speech-impaired**) for dumb, (**mentally challenge**) for retarded. For example: **Reproduction**’ is one of the matters of delicacy. To refer to a lady ‘ **who is going to have a baby** it has become inappropriate to use the word ‘**knocked up**’ and ‘**pregnant**’, because of the **lack of delicacy**. These two words can be replaced by other words or phrases, such as ‘**expecting**’, ‘**anticipating**’, ‘**mother-to-be**’, ‘**lady in waiting**’, etc.

3) Money

Money has also become another subject which people avoid talking about. Why money is so difficult to talk about in some societies or situations? When some people talk about money they never talk **about money only**. This is because people come to believe that money is a reflection of a personal value and **social strength**. This means that you have it and you are **good**, you do not and you are not, or at least **not good** as you could be (Sparks,1997: 54).

1.3 Four – letter words

The phrase "four-letter word" refers to a set of English-language words composed of four characters which are considered **profane**. The best-known examples include **slang terms** for **excretory functions, sexual activity** and **genitalia**, and sacrilegious terms relating to **hell** and **damnation**. While not all four-letter words are considered offensive, there are enough four-letter "**swear words**" in the English language that the term is widely used to refer to this category of profane monosyllables.

1.4 Euphemism

Euphemism 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**. Euphemism becomes the best choice for expression when thinking about how to accurately express things or things that people don't want to express **directly** (Hua, 2020:17).

Euphemistic words and expressions allow us to talk about **unpleasant things** and disguise or neutralize the unpleasantness. **For example:** the subjects of **sickness, death and dying, unemployment, and criminality**. They also allow us to give labels to unpleasant tasks and jobs in an attempt to make them sound almost attractive.

We are constantly **renaming** things and **repackaging** them to make them sound '**better**'. We all probably have a few things we refuse to talk about and still others we do not talk about **directly**. We may have some words we know but never – or hardly ever – use because they are too **emotional** for either **us** or **others**. (Wardhaugh, 1896:39-40).

1.4.1 The Classification of English Euphemisms

With the passage of time and language changes, euphemism has become an important communicative language. Some people have divided euphemism into the following categories:

1. **Euphemisms closely related to taboo words**, There are some taboo things like **birth, old, sick, dead, buried**, etc. If expressed directly, it will give people a **rude, blunt, harsh** feeling. On the other hand, if it is expressed **indirectly** in an elegant, subtle way, it will not be unpleasant. For example, the old people are often referred to as the **elderly, senior citizen, venerable people, get on years**, and so on.

- 2. Euphemisms Related to Courtesy,** Euphemism is also often used to express words that cannot be said or spoken. When people are not willing to say it **directly**, euphemism is used to show **politeness**, **to seek cooperation**, **to commemorate some unpleasant things**. For example, people often use **big, plump, stout or over-weight** instead of **fat**; use **thinner or slim** instead of **thin**; use ordinary, **homely or plain** to refer to **ugly**.
- 3. Euphemisms Related to Politics,** in recent years, euphemism has been widely used as a **rhetorical device** in **social activities, political affairs, and business cooperation**, and has continued to produce new euphemisms. For instance, in the United States, people refer to **blacks** as **African Americans**, Indians as **Native Americans**, and Mexicans as **Mexican Americans**, on the one hand, to show equality for everyone, and on the other hand to benefit the unity of all nations.
- 4. .Euphemisms Related to Occupation,** in order to decentralize the traditional **"low-level occupation"**, some industry-related euphemisms must be used in life, such as people calling waiter or waitress as **dining-room attendants** and the plumber is called a **pipe engineer**. (Hua,2020:19).

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