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Using Euphemism Towards Death and Cancer in Iraqi Arabic Spoken in Al-Anbar Province

ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to investigate how the speakers of Iraqi Arabic in AL-Anbar use euphemism for death and cancer in their social interactions. The sample consisted of 50 participants (males and females) who live in AL-Anbar and chosen randomly. The age average was between 20-60 years old. The used instrument for data collection was a questionnaire that consisted of 15 questions with 3-5 given answers. The findings revealed that the speakers of Iraqi Arabic in AL-Anbar use euphemism an alternative to direct expressions that shock and insult the addressees. The study revealed that the use of euphemism in AL-Anbar is also based on Islamic principles.

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1. Introduction:

People around the world have languages in which they can communicate with each other. Through language, they can demonstrate their identities, and represent how they view the world they live in. Language reflects their social and cultural aspects within their societies (Ghounane, 2013). Thus, in order to understand a language and make successful social relationships with its speakers, it is needed to recognize their social culture to help the speakers to use the language appropriately and politely (Hammodi, 2018).

1.1. Politeness & Euphemism:

Politeness is an important element in human daily interaction as it enables speakers to communicate and interact smoothly and appropriately by showing respect and concern to others' feelings. Speakers can use politeness to mitigate the "negative effects" and enforce the "positive effects" of what they say to the hearers (Cruse, 2006, p.131). Politeness helps to minimize the breakdown between the addressees which may cause misunderstanding, and it facilitates the way people communicate with each other (Lakoff, 1990).

Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson is the most famous one. It gives much attention to the concept of 'face' which is defined as the "public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61). Thus, speakers should take care to save their and the addressees' face (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

In order to show politeness when talking about sensitive or tabooed topics, people tend to use indirect linguistic ways through daily communication to avoid causing offences or insults for others. Accordingly, euphemism is a crucial tool that people use to save their social relationships (Seger, 2019). Euphemism allows speakers to use new expressions and words to substitute impolite or unacceptable ones to talk about social topics and categories of communication which are considered sensitive, shameful, embarrassing or unpleasant (Khanfar, 2012).

1.2. Death & Cancer Euphemisms:

Death and cancer are two unpleasant topics people strive to avoid talking about directly. Instead, they try to use alternative euphemistic expressions and phrases. In relation to death, in English, for example, speakers use 'passed away' as an alternative expression of 'died' to avoid shocking the hearers (BaniMofarrej & Al-Haq, 2015). Death is related to the human instinct of fear as people do not like to lose the ones they love and they fear of corrupting their bodies. That means death is a "fear-based taboo" (Allan & Burridge, 1991, p.153).

Speakers recognize through the knowledge of their language that talking about death directly is considered socially impolite since it may insult, harm or shock the hearers. Therefore, they try to use euphemisms to substitute direct expressions when communicating about death (Williams, 1975).

In Arabic, there are various euphemistic expressions people use to mention death in their speech. For example, instead of saying (مات) 'died', they prefer saying (انتقل إلى رحمة الله) 'he moved to the mercy of God'. Instead of saying (الميت) 'the dead', they say: (الفقيد) 'the missed'. Using such indirect expressions allow the speakers to communicate freely about death (Seeger, 2019).

For cancer, people also avoid pronouncing the term (سرطان) 'cancer' directly, they substitute it by saying (هذا المرض) 'that disease' or (مرض خبيث) 'malignant disease' to express themselves freely about this disease (Yousif, 2017). Cancer is a fatal disease in the world since it causes death for the patient, therefore, people feel uncomfortable to talk about it directly and consider it a taboo (ibid: 2019).

1.3. Iraqi Arabic variety of AL-Anbar:

This study is an attempt to investigate the use of death and cancer euphemisms in the Iraqi Arabic variety that is used specifically in AL-Anbar province. AL-Anbar is the largest province in Iraq which lies on the Euphrates River and constitutes the Western part of Iraq (Al-Jassim, 2016). As it is known, Iraqi Arabic is classified into two dialects; *qeltu* and *gilit*. The two dialects are derived from the Arabic verb '*qultu*' which means 'I said' (Versteegh, 1997). The dialect of *gilit* is considered of a nomadic type (Al-Wer & De Jong, 2009).

As native speakers of Iraqi Arabic, the researchers of the current study have noticed that most people of AL-Anbar use the dialect of *gilit*, like the people of Baghdad, whereas some towns such as Heet, A'ana and Rawa use *qultu* dialect. Additionally, it is important to mention that the researchers noticed that the influence of the Islamic religion on how the people use the language in contexts is very clear since the majority of citizens are Muslims.

2. Definition of Euphemism:

The origin of the term 'euphemism' is Greek, "eu" refers to "good", while "phemi" means "speaking". The entire term means "speaking well" (McArthur, 1992, p.387). Euphemism is "an inoffensive expression substituted for another that may offend or suggest something unpleasant" (Merriam Webster, 1989). It is "a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be harsh or blunt when referring to

something unpleasant or embarrassing” (New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998, p.634). Euphemism substitutes an expression that looks offensive by another smooth one.

The main aim of using euphemism through social communication is to save and enforce the social relationships among speakers because without using euphemisms, languages become imperfect tool of communication (Enright, 1985).

In Arabic, the term ‘metonymy’ (كناية) is so close to the term ‘euphemism’ in English. Other Arabic terms of euphemism could be discussed under the terms; (التلفظ) ‘euphemism’ and (المحسن اللفظي) ‘verbal beautification’ (Khadra & Hadjer, 2017). By using (الكناية) ‘metonymy’, the Arabic speakers can hide unpleasant expressions by using accepted and pleasant ones (Al-Mubarid, 1997).

3. Previous Studies:

Many Arabic studies have been conducted by Arabic researchers to investigate the use of euphemism in the Arabic societies. Al-Azzeh (2010) investigated the use of euphemism in the Jordanian society. She attempted to shed lights on the euphemisms the Jordanian speakers of Arabic use to talk about taboos such as death, disability, sex and dangerous diseases. Her study revealed that the Jordanians employ various euphemisms to talk about the mentioned taboos through their everyday communication. She found that most of the speakers use the euphemism (أعطاك عمره) ‘he gave you his life’ highly to refer to the death of someone, whereas the direct term of cancer (سرطان) ‘Cancer’ was mostly used.

Al-Moayidi (2018) tried to study how the speakers of two Saudi regional dialects use euphemisms through talking about tabooed topics such as death, body parts and sex. The study concluded that the Saudi speakers give much attention to others’ feelings as they use various strategies during their daily communication. One of these strategies is using euphemisms in order to show politeness and avoid directness when communicating about the tabooed topics. He stated that the Saudi speakers try to use many euphemisms to talk about death. For example, they use (ربنا افكره) ‘God remembered him/her’ which indicates that someone has died.

Ghounune (2013) investigated the attitudes of the speakers of Tlemcen in Algeria towards topics such as death and sex which are categorized as taboos in the Algerian Arabic variety. The study has found out that the use of taboos varies from a speaker to another as there are some social factors that influence such use, such as age, gender and level of education. Also, it was revealed that most of the speakers tend to use

euphemistic expression as a polite strategy through interaction with others. The researcher also has noticed that death, for example, is not considered a taboo for some of the speakers in which they use some terms of death directly such as (الميت) 'the dead' or (الموت) 'death'.

4. Methodology:

4.1. The Participants:

The participants of this study were 50 native speakers of Iraqi Arabic in AL-Anbar province. They were 25 males and 25 females. The average of their age was between 20-60 years.

4.2. Data Collection and Analysis:

The study adopted a quantitative research method. The data of this study was collected through a questionnaire which consisted of two sections. The first section included introductory information about the aim of the study and demographic questions. The second section consisted of 13 closed-ended items with 4 given answers. The participants have been asked to add other expressions they may use in their communication. The questions concentrated on death and cancer euphemisms which are used by the speakers of Iraqi Arabic in Al-Anbar province. The answers have been conducted since they are native speakers of Arabic and live in AL-Anbar itself. The data have been collected and encoded, and then analyzed descriptively into the computer software Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS.

5. Discussion:

In this section, the findings of the study are shown and explained according to the frequencies of each question depends on the responses of the participants to the questions of the designed questionnaire. Each question was given three to five responses.

Table 5.1

Expression	دائماً	بعض الأحيان	نادراً	أبداً
Frequency	17	20	7	6

The first question in the questionnaire was (هل تستخدم عبارات تلطيفية) 'Do you use euphemisms towards death'. As shown in the table above, 17 of the participants *always* use euphemisms, 20 of them *sometimes* use euphemisms, 7 of them *rarely* use euphemisms, and 6 participants *never* use euphemisms for talking about death. From this finding, it was revealed that most of the participants always or sometimes try use euphemisms in their talking about death.

Table 5.2

Expression	المتوفى	الميت	المرحوم	الراحل	عبارات أخرى
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Frequency	11	4	28	5	1
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The second question was (كيف تصف الشخص الميت عندما تتحدث عنه) 'How do you describe a dead person'. As in the table above, 11 of the participants used the euphemism (المتوفى), 4 participants did not use euphemisms by selecting (الميت) that is a direct expression, 28 participants used (المرحوم), and 5 participants used (الراحل). The finding here showed that most of the participants try to use euphemism to describe a dead one.

Table 5.3

Expression	انتقل إلى رحمة الله	خلصت خبزته	مات	اجتني ساعته	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	27	4	7	5	6

The third question was (كيف تعبر عن موت شخص ما) 'How do you talk about the action of someone dying'. The table above shows that 27 participants euphemize their expression by saying (انتقل إلى رحمة الله), 4 participants chose the euphemism (خلصت خبزته), 7 participants used a direct expression (مات), and 5 participants used the euphemism (اجتني ساعته), whereas 6 participants used other euphemisms. The finding here shows that most of the participants try to use euphemisms to talk about someone death.

Table 5.4

Expression	انقتل	استشهد	قدم حياته في سبيل الوطن	طلعت روحه بالحرب	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	11	37	1	0	0

The fourth question was (كيف تتحدث عن شخص مات مقتولاً في الحرب) 'How do you talk about someone who was killed in the war'. The table above shows that 11 participants chose the direct expression (انقتل), 37 participants chose the euphemism (استشهد), and only one participant chose the euphemism (قدم حياته في سبيل الوطن). The finding shows that most of the participants use euphemism to talk about someone who was killed in war.

Table 5.5

Expression	آخر الأحران	البقية بحياتكم	أحسن الله عزاءكم	الله يرحم موتاكم	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	12	22	15	0	1

Question five was (بأي عبارة تعزي أهل الميت) 'Which sentence do you use to express your condolences to the family of the dead'. Table 5.5 shows that 12 participants preferred the euphemism (آخر الأحران), 22 participants chose (البقية بحياتكم), 15 participants chose (أحسن الله عزاءكم), and no one chose the sentence which includes the term of death (الله يرحم موتاكم) even it is considered a euphemism. This finding suggests that the participants tried not only to euphemize their condolences, but also, they strived to eliminate mentioning death.

Table 5.5

Expression	منتهي	ينازع	ساعاته معدودة	بآخر أنفاسه	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	12	9	6	16	5

The sixth question was (كيف تعبر عن شخص على فراش الموت) 'How do you express about someone who is about to die'. Table 5.5 shows that 12 participants did not pay attention to euphemize their expression by choosing (منتهي), 9 participants also chose a direct expression (ينزع), 6 participants used the euphemism (ساعاته معدودة), and 16 participants used the euphemism (بآخر أنفاسه). The finding shows that most of the participants strived to use euphemisms to this human state as it causes fear and depression for them.

Table 5.7

Expression	ينعون فلان	يذيعون خبر موته	يبلغون بوفاته	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	9	28	8	4

The seventh question was (كيف تعبر عن خبر موت شخص ما) 'how to tell people about someone dying'. This question was given three choices, as well as, if there are other expressions. 9 participants used the euphemism (ينعون فلان), 28 participants used the common euphemism (يذيعون خبر موته), 8 participants used the euphemism (يبلغون بوفاته), and 4 participants also suggested other euphemisms. This finding reveals that the participants used euphemisms when they wanted to inform about someone death. This state of death informing is common in Iraq in general, when someone dies, people begin to tell each other formally and informally face-to-face, calling the informing via mosques speakers, and by social media applications such as Facebook. It is shown that the participants tend to use euphemism in this situation.

Table 5.8

Expression	ترملت	مات رجلها	فارقها زوجها	خلاها وراح	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	29	15	2	3	1

The eighth question was (كيف تتحدث عن زوجة مات زوجها) 'How to talk about a widow woman'. Table 5.8 shows that most of the participants (29) used the euphemism (ترملت), 15 used a direct expression (مات رجلها), 2 participants chose the euphemism (فارقها زوجها) and 3 participants chose (خلاها وراح) as a euphemism. The finding shows that most of the participants tended to use euphemism. The term (أرملة) is common in Iraqi Arabic since the speakers try to treat the woman who loses her husband kindly and mercifully because they recognize that this woman is going to face the difficulties of life alone without a husband. This kindness includes paying much attention to calling such a woman, therefore, they use this term as a euphemism.

Table 5.9

Expression	راح يقبروه	راح يدفنوه	راح يطموه بالتراب	راح لمتواه الأخير	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	0	28	0	19	3

The ninth question was (كيف تتحدث عن شخص ميت تم تشييعه إلى المقبرة) 'How do you talk about transferring a dead body to the cemetery'. Table 5.9 shows that 28 participants preferred the euphemism (راح يدفنوه), 19 participants preferred the euphemism (راح لمتواه الأخير), and 3 participants chose other expressions. It is shown in the table that the participants did not prefer direct expressions such as (راح يقبروه) and (راح يطموه بالتراب) in which they are harsh expressions. This shows that the participants try to use smooth expressions to talk about transferring a dead body to the cemetery. It is important to mention that such those harsh direct expressions are used when talking about the death of hated or unwanted people.

Table 5.10

Expression	لا قدر الله	لا سمح الله	بعيد الشر عنه	لا أستخدم أيّاً منها	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	11	24	6	3	6

The tenth question was (أي عبارة تستخدم عندما تشير للموت بشكل مباشر) 'which expression do you use when you mention death directly'. It is shown from the table above that 11 participants chose (لا قدر الله), 24 participants chose (لا سمح الله), 6 participants chose (بعيد الشر عنه), whereas 3 participants preferred (لا أستخدم أيّاً منها) as they do not use any of the above expressions. This finding suggests that the participants added warm expressions to mitigate talking about future bad news towards death.

Table 5.11

Expression	خطية بعده جاهل	ما شاف شي من حياته	مات صغير	طير من طيور الجنة	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	21	4	5	18	2

The eleventh question was (كيف تتحدث عن شخص مات وهو صغير بالعمر) 'How to talk about the death of a small boy'. It is shown in Table 5.11 that most of the participants tried to use euphemisms to talk about the death of a small boy, as 21 participants preferred (خطية بعده جاهل), 18 participants preferred (طير من طيور الجنة), and 4 participants chose (ما شاف شي من حياته), while only 5 participants chose a direct expression (مات صغير). This finding shows that the participants strived to euphemize their expressions in this situation.

Table 5.12

Expression	دائماً	بعض الأحيان	نادراً	أبداً
Frequency	24	14	4	7

Question number 12 in the questionnaire was (هل تستخدم عبارات تلطيفية) 'Do you use euphemisms to talk about cancer'. The majority of the participants *always* (24) or *sometimes* (14) use euphemisms to talk about cancer, 4 participants responded that they *rarely*

use cancer euphemisms and 7 participants *never* use euphemisms in this category of communication.

Table 5.13

Expression	هذاك المرض	سرطان	مرض خبيث	اللي ما يتسمى	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	16	11	21	1	1

The thirteenth question was (ماذا تسمى مرض السرطان) 'What do you call cancer'. Table 5.13 shows that 16 participants used euphemism (هذاك المرض), 11 participants did not prefer to euphemize their expression by using the direct term of this disease (سرطان), 21 participants preferred the euphemism (مرض خبيث), and only one participant chose the euphemism (اللي ما يتسمى). This finding shows that most of the participants avoided mentioning the disease of cancer directly.

Table 5.14

Expression	يحارب السرطان	يضرّب كيميائي	ياخذ جلسات إشعاع	مريض وديتعالج	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	10	15	8	16	1

The fourteenth question was (كيف تتحدث عن شخص يتعالج من السرطان) 'How do you talk about a patient gets cancer treatment'. Table 5.14 shows that 10 participants euphemized their expression by using (يحارب السرطان), 15 participants did not use euphemism by choosing (يضرّب كيميائي), 8 participants also used a direct expression (ياخذ جلسات إشعاع), and 16 participants used euphemism (مريض وديتعالج). It is important to say that the cancer patient who attends treatment sessions for cancer becomes very sensitive due to the side effects which follow the sessions such as hair fall and nervous mood.

It was expected that the participants were aware to this reality but it was revealed that many of them did not euphemize their expressions. Globally, the usual used euphemism for this action is 'fighting cancer' but for the participants of this study, this euphemism was not used much.

Table 5.15

Expression	أنت بطل، لا تيأس	لا تقلق، محنة وتعدي	الله يشافيك، توكل على الله	لا أستخدم أي عبارة تشجيعية	عبارات أخرى
Frequency	9	9	28	2	2

The last question in the questionnaire was (ما هي العبارة التي تستخدمها) 'What do you use to encourage a cancer patient'. The table above shows that most of the participants used the expression (الله يشافيك، توكل على الله) with 28 responses, 9 participants chose (أنت بطل، لا تيأس), 9 participants chose (لا تقلق، محنة وتعدي), and only 2 participants responded that they do not use any encouraging expression. This finding demonstrates that most of the participants preferred to use encouraging terms to encourage the patients of cancer.

6. Conclusions:

Based on the findings of study, it could be concluded that the speakers in AL-Anbar try to use euphemisms in various categories in their communication. Particularly, the use of euphemism for talking about death and cancer is highly touchable since those two categories are considered taboos and should not be mentioned directly among the addressees in order to keep themselves safe from being shocked or afraid.

It could be said that both death and cancer are related to fear in which death means losing close people and cancer, as it is common, leads to death. So, the two topics cause sadness and fear to the speakers and hearers if they communicate freely and directly about those topics.

According to this fact, the speakers in AL-Anbar try to use alternative expressions to talk about death and cancer issues indirectly. For death, their linguistic choices are directed to expressions which are not only indirect expressions but also, they are based on religious concepts since the society follows the Islamic principles and believe in the life after death. For example, the speakers use (انتقل إلى رحمة الله) as an alternative expression to (مات). This expression is not solely used as a euphemism, but it also gives a smooth meaning that this is not the end of the dead's life but he transferred to the mercy of God, and this idea leads the thought of the hearer that the dead will find more merciful and peaceful place than that in his life.

This is also found in preferring the euphemism (استشهد) 'martyred' for the soldier who was killed in wars. The word (شهيد) is religious in itself. It is found in Islamic and even Christian religions. This use reflects the positive effect of the religion in how the speakers in AL-Anbar use their language.

For cancer, calling this disease by its direct name is related to fear in AL-Anbar. Therefore, the speakers try to avoid talking or mentioning cancer directly by using alternative expressions such as (هذا المرض) or (مرض خبيث). At the same time, the speakers believe that encouraging the cancer patients by using positive expressions is what the society should present for the patients to help them to face the pain of cancer as a self-support.

Lastly, it was found that the speakers are not so aware to the negative effects of the cancer treatment sessions that the patients get through the journey of the disease. It is noticed that the use of direct expressions such as (يأخذ جلسات إشعاع) and (يضر ب كيمياوي) is common in the social language. It could be concluded for this point that the speakers of Iraqi Arabic in AL-Anbar need more awareness about the hard physical and emotional problems that the patients face during the treatment sessions.

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