

# Dysphemism

## Definition of Dysphemism

Dysphemism is originated from the Greek word *dys*, means “miss,” or “none,” and *pheme*, which means “reputation,” or “speech.” It is a [figure of speech](#) that is defined as the use of disparaging or offensive expressions instead of inoffensive ones. Dysphemism is the use of negative expressions instead of positive ones. A [speaker](#) uses them to humiliate or degrade the disapproved person or [character](#). Dysphemism examples may be classified according to the following types.

## Types of Dysphemism

**[Synecdoche](#)** – It is used to describe something as a whole like, “she is a prick.”

**Dysphemistic Epithets** – The use of animal names, such as “pig,” “bitch,” “rat,” “dog,” or “snake.”

**Euphemistic Dysphemism** – This is when a soft expression is used without offending.

**Dysphemistic [Euphemism](#)** – It is used as a mockery between close friends without any animosity.

**“-ist” Dysphemism** – Targeted at a particular ethnicity.

**Homosexual Dysphemism** – These terms are used regarding homosexuality like, “gay,” “faggot,” and “queer.”

**Name Dysphemism** – It is used when someone is called by his name, rather than by using his proper title, such as “How are you Bill?” (Instead of “Uncle Bill”).

**Non-verbal Dysphemism** – It is used when offending someone with gestures.

**Cross-cultural Dysphemism** – Different [slang](#) terms are used as dysphemistic in one culture; on the other hand, they might have a totally different meaning in other cultures. For instance, “fag” is a slur used for gay man in American English, whereas, in British English it is used for a cigarette.

## Opposite to Euphemism

Euphemism is a mild and positive expression used to replace an unpleasant or negative one. Whereas dysphemism is the opposite of euphemism; it is the replacement of a positive or neutral expression with an unpleasant or negative one.

## Examples of Dysphemism in Literature

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### Example #1: *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (By James Joyce)

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“Let him remember too, cried Mr. Casey to her from across the table, the language with which the priests and the priests’ pawns broke Parnell’s heart and hounded him into his grave. Let him remember that too when he grows up.

“— **Sons of bitches!** cried Mr. Daedalus. When he was down they turned on him to betray him and rend him **like rats in a sewer**. **Low-lived dogs!** And they look it! By Christ, they look it! They behaved rightly, cried Dante. They obeyed their bishops and their priests. Honour to them!”

In this excerpt, Mr. Daedalus uses very harsh words in order to express his anger. Though he could have used less offensive words, Joyce has employed the dysphemistic technique. These humiliating expressions are shown in bold.

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### Example #2: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

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**HAMLET**

“Oh, that this too, too **sullied flesh** would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
Or that the **Everlasting had not fixed**  
His [canon](#) ‘gainst self-slaughter! O God, God...  
Fie on’t, ah fie! ‘Tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed...

So excellent a king, that was to this

Hamlet feels despondency about his mother's second marriage to his uncle. Hence, he uses harsh language to state that his flesh could have melted away, or that God has not forbidden suicide, and "fie on't" means "damn it." His father is like a god (Hyperion), and his uncle is like a beast (satyr).

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### Example #3: *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (By James Joyce)

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"Whatever else is unsure in this **stinking dunghill of a world** a mother's love is not..."

Stephen Daedalus, in this excerpt, uses a harsh and disparaging term for a world that is a "stinking dunghill," while comparing it to a mother's love which is opposite to that, being pure and free of such negativities of the world.

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### Example #4: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

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**OTHELLO**

"By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in 's hand.  
O **perjured woman**, thou dost stone my heart..."

**DESDEMONA**

"Alas, he is betrayed and I undone."

**OTHELLO**

"Out, **strumpet**! weep'st thou for him to my face?"

**OTHELLO**

"Down, **strumpet**."

Here, Shakespeare uses the first type of dysphemism, which is Synecdoche, which means he describes the character of Desdemona as a sinful person by calling her a "perjured woman," and a "strumpet," which is an offensive word meaning "whore."

## Function of Dysphemism

Dysphemism is used as a device for degradation, minimization, or humiliation of individuals who are disapproved of or condemned. When a speaker uses this technique, he uses marked form directed towards a group or the listeners. The purpose is to express anger or social distance from a particular group. It is frequently employed in literary texts, political speeches, and colloquial expressions. Sometimes, dysphemism could be the result of hatred and fear, though disapproval and contempt might also motivate dysphemism to be used.