

Euphemism

Euphemism Definition

The term euphemism refers to polite, indirect expressions that replace words and phrases considered harsh and impolite, or which suggest something unpleasant. Euphemism is an idiomatic expression, which loses its literal meanings and refers to something else, in order to hide its unpleasantness. For example, “kick the bucket” is a euphemism that describes the death of a person. In addition, many organizations use the term “downsizing” for the distressing act of “firing” its employees.

Euphemism depends largely on the social [context](#) of the speakers and writers, where they feel the need to replace certain words that may prove embarrassing for particular listeners or readers in a particular situation.

Techniques for Creating Euphemism

Euphemism masks a rude or impolite expression, but conveys the concept clearly and politely. Several techniques are employed to create euphemism.

It may be in the form of abbreviations, such as *O.* (body odor), and *W.C.* (toilet).

Foreign words may be used to replace an impolite expression, such as *faux* (fake), or *faux pas* (foolish error).

Sometimes, they are abstractions, such as *before I go* (before I die).

They may also be indirect expressions replacing direct ones that may sound offensive, such as *rear-end* (one’s back side or buttocks), *unmentionables* (underwear or lingerie).

Using longer words or phrases can also mask unpleasant words, such as *flatulence* (farting), *perspiration* (sweat), or *mentally challenged* (stupid).

Using technical terms may reduce the rudeness exhibited by certain words, such as *gluteus maximus* (backside, butt, or buttocks).

Deliberately mispronouncing an offensive word may reduce its severity, such as *darn* (damn), and *shoot* (shit).

Euphemism Examples in Everyday Life

Euphemism is frequently used in everyday life. Let us look at some common euphemism examples:

You are becoming a little *thin on top* (bald).
Our teacher is *in the family way* (pregnant).
He is *a little tipsy* (drunk).
We do not hire *mentally challenged* (stupid) people.
He is a *special child* (disabled or learning challenged).

Examples of Euphemism in Literature

Example #1: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

Examples of euphemism referring to sex are found in William Shakespeare's *Othello*. In Act 1, Scene 1, Iago tells Brabantio:

"I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now *making the beast with two backs*."

Here, the expression "making the beast with two backs" refers to the act of having sex.

Example #2: *Antony and Cleopatra* (By William Shakespeare)

Similarly, we notice Shakespeare using euphemism for sexual intercourse in his play *Antony and Cleopatra*." In Act 2, Scene 2, Agrippa says about Cleopatra:

"Royal wench!
She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed.
He *plowed* her, and she *cropped*."

The word "plowed" refers to the act of sexual intercourse, and the word "cropped" is a euphemism for becoming pregnant.

John Donne, in his poem *The Flea*, employs euphemism. He says:

“Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou denies me is;
It suck’d me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.
Thou know’st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pamper’d swells with one blood made of two;
And this, alas! is more than we would do.”

In order to persuade his beloved to sleep with him, the [speaker](#) in the poem tells her how a flea bit both of them and their blood got mixed in it. This is a euphemism.

Example #4: *Animal Farm* (By George Orwell)

The Squealer, a [character](#) in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, uses euphemisms to help the pigs achieve their political ends. To announce the reduction of food to the animals of the farm, he says:

“For the time being,” he explains, “it had been found necessary to make a *readjustment* of rations.”

Substituting the word “reduction” for “readjustment” was an attempt to suppress the complaints of other animals about hunger. It works because reduction means “cutting” the food supply, while readjustment implies changing the current amount of food.

Function of Euphemism

Euphemism helps writers convey those ideas that have become a social taboo, and are too embarrassing to mention directly. Writers skillfully choose appropriate words to refer to and discuss a subject indirectly that otherwise might not be published due to strict social censorship, such as for

Thus, euphemism is a useful tool that allows writers to write figuratively about the difficult issues.