

**Speaking Softly: An Investigation into Euphemism Usage and its Pedagogical
Implications in an Educational Context**

Assem Akhmetzhanova

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Applied Linguistics

MAQSUT NARIKBAYEV UNIVERSITY

School of Liberal Arts

May, 2025

Word Count: 17311

© Copyright by Assem Akhmetzhanova

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned Assem Akhmetzhanova grant to MAQSUT NARIKBAYEV UNIVERSITY the right to store and distribute my submission in print and electronic format.

I confirm that I am the sole author of this thesis, and that it does not infringe any copyright. This thesis is the result of my own original work, except where due acknowledgement has been made.

MAQSUT NARIKBAYEV UNIVERSITY will clearly identify my name(s) as the author(s) of the submission, and will not make any alteration, other than as allowed by this agreement, to your submission.

I hereby accept the terms of the above Author Agreement.

Author's signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Assem Akhmetzhanova', with a checkmark at the end.

Date: 07.05.2025

«APPROVED»

Dean of School of Liberal Arts
Candidate of Philological
Sciences

Ibrayeva A. B.

«__» _____ 2025

TECHNICAL ASSIGNMENT

for Master Thesis

« Speaking Softly: An Investigation into Euphemism Usage and its Pedagogical Implications in an Educational Context »

I. Justification of the relevance, originality, and novelty of the topic.

This study is relevant because it addresses the development of pragmatic competence in English language teaching. Alongside grammatical knowledge, students in today's multilingual and multicultural classrooms also need to learn how to communicate with politeness and respect. Euphemisms help people talk about sensitive topics in a softer way.

The originality of the study lies in its focus on euphemisms within an educational context. It examines how students understand and interpret euphemistic expressions. The novelty of this study lies in being the empirical investigation in Kazakhstan into the impact of explicit euphemism instruction on students' awareness within the educational setting of English language classrooms. Unlike existing studies, which are limited to theoretical or translational analysis, this research implements a pedagogical intervention and evaluates its influence on the development of students' pragmatic competence.

II. Research objectives, research question(s), hypothesis (if any)

The purpose of this study is to explore how students understand and perceive euphemisms in academic settings. It also investigates how their understanding changes after a specially designed instructional lesson on this topic. The research aims to determine whether explicit teaching helps students communicate more politely, thoughtfully, and clearly. It also explores whether such instruction can improve classroom interaction in multilingual educational environments.

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are students' initial understandings of euphemisms?
2. How do students' understanding and perceptions of euphemisms evolve after the lesson?
3. How can the lesson inform future teaching practices for euphemisms in multilingual classrooms?

III. Scope, order, and terms of work performance.

Stage 1. Conducting an analysis of the existing literature on the selected topic.

Stage 2. Description of the research methodology, justification for the choice of method (quantitative, qualitative).

Stage 3. Description of the tools of data collection (interviewing, document analysis, survey).

Stage 4. Description of the results of the study.

Stage 5. Description of the conclusion, recommendations.

IV. Thesis quality indicators

a) The use of relevant regulatory documents and literature at the time of writing master thesis;

b) Writing a master thesis in accordance with the MT Guidelines;

c) Compliance with the requirements of the Academic Integrity Policy regarding anti-plagiarism is implied.

V. The responsibility matrix

Explanation: the matrix of responsibility can be built in the form of a table, diagram or otherwise, allowing to determine the degree of involvement in the implementation of each individual design stage.

Thesis name: "Speaking Softly: An Investigation into Euphemism Usage and its Pedagogical Implications in an Educational Context".

Stages	Supervisor's full name	Student's full name
<p><i>Stage 1. Conducting an analysis of the existing literature on the selected topic.</i></p> <p><i>1.1 Collecting literature in this field</i></p> <p><i>1.2 Creating Literature matrix</i></p> <p><i>1.3 Writing a literature review</i></p> <p><i>December, 2024</i></p>	Anna Tonkikh	Assem Akhmetzhanova
<p><i>Stage 2. Description of the research methodology, justification for the choice of method (quantitative, qualitative).</i></p> <p><i>2.1 Analyzing the previous works' methodologies</i></p> <p><i>2.2 Explaining the methods</i></p> <p><i>2.3 Describing research sample, design, and instruments</i></p> <p><i>February, 2025</i></p>	Anna Tonkikh	Assem Akhmetzhanova
<p><i>Stage 3. Description of the means of data collection (interviewing, document analysis, survey).</i></p> <p><i>3.1 Data collection (March 2025)</i></p> <p><i>3.2 Analysis of collected data (April 1–7, 2025)</i></p>	Anna Tonkikh	Assem Akhmetzhanova
<p><i>Stage 4. Description of the results of the study.</i></p> <p><i>4.1 Writing findings</i></p> <p><i>4.2 Writing the discussion part</i></p> <p><i>April 7–15, 2025</i></p>	Anna Tonkikh	Assem Akhmetzhanova
<p><i>Stage 5. Description of the conclusion, recommendations.</i></p> <p><i>April, 2025</i></p>	Anna Tonkikh	Assem Akhmetzhanova

VI. Thesis Completion Form.

Thesis Completion Form:

I, the undersigned, agree to use this terms of reference as an agreement on the creation and use of a work of science, concluded between me and MAQSUT NARIKBAYEV UNIVERSITY, according to which the student undertakes to transfer to MAQSUT

NARIKBAYEV UNIVERSITY the exclusive property right to the created work of science, as well as the exclusive right to use the work at its own discretion in any form and under any name in any country in the world, including the right to reproduce the work; distribution of the original or copies of the work through sale or other transfer of ownership; import of copies of the work; public display of the original or copy of the work; other communication of the work to the public; translation of the work into another language; processing and/or other alteration of the work and any other types of use not prohibited by the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Supervisor's full name, position, signature: Anna Tonkikh, Senior Lecturer 

Student's full name, program, signature:

Assem Akhmetzhanova, Master's Student, Applied Linguistics 

Abstract

Speaking Softly: An Investigation into Euphemism Usage and its Pedagogical Implications in an Educational Context

This study explores the use of euphemisms in educational communication and examines the potential benefits of incorporating them into language teaching. Euphemisms are expressions that allow speakers to discuss uncomfortable or sensitive topics more softly and respectfully. They are often used to maintain politeness, avoid misunderstandings, and support effective interaction both in and beyond the classroom. Despite their frequent use in everyday language, euphemisms are rarely addressed directly in language education.

The objective of this research is to explore students' views and interpretations of the topic, as well as how their understanding evolves following a specially designed instructional lesson. The study was conducted as a one-cycle action research project with 37 university students. Data were collected through surveys and reflective writing tasks. Thematic analysis was employed to examine changes in student perception and to explore their views on the relevance of euphemisms in educational settings.

Before the lesson, most participants had only a basic understanding of what euphemisms are. Their responses indicated a limited awareness of how euphemisms function in real-life or academic situations. After the lesson, many students demonstrated a deeper understanding and noted that euphemistic language helps facilitate sensitive discussions, promotes respectful dialogue, and encourages more careful expression. Some students related the topic to practical situations—group projects, presentations, and classroom discussions—where word choice plays a significant role.

The findings suggest that integrating euphemisms into language education fosters more mindful, tactful, and effective communication. Teaching students to identify and use euphemisms contributes to the development of pragmatic competence and cultural

sensitivity. The study recommends that pragmatic topics such as euphemisms be included in language and teacher education programs, especially in multilingual and multicultural learning environments. Future research may explore the long-term application of euphemisms and cross-cultural differences in their use.

Keywords: euphemisms, language education, action research

Аңдатпа

Жұмсақ тілмен айту: эвфемизмдерді қолдану және олардың білім беру контекстіндегі педагогикалық маңыздылығы туралы зерттеу

Бұл зерттеу эвфемизмдердің білім беру коммуникациясындағы қолданылуын және оларды тіл үйрету процесіне енгізудің ықтимал пайдасын қарастырады.

Эвфемизмдер – адамдарға жағымсыз немесе сезімтал тақырыптарды жұмсақ әрі сыпайы түрде талқылауға мүмкіндік беретін тілдік қолданыстар. Олар көбінесе сыпайылықты сақтау, түсініспеушіліктің алдын алу және сынып ішінде де, одан тыс жерде де тиімді қарым-қатынасты қамтамасыз ету үшін қолданылады. Күнделікті тілде эвфемизмдер жиі қолданылғанымен, тіл үйрету барысында олар сирек тікелей оқытылады.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – студенттердің эвфемизм тақырыбына деген көзқарасын талдау және арнайы әзірленген сабақтан кейін олардың түсінігінің қалай өзгеретінін анықтау. Зерттеу бір циклды әрекеттегі зерттеу (action research) ретінде 37 университет студентінің қатысуымен жүргізілді. Деректер сауалнамалар мен рефлексивтік жазбалар арқылы жиналды. Студенттердің эвфемизмдерге деген көзқарасының өзгерісін және оларды білім беру контекстінде қаншалықты маңызды деп санайтынын талдау үшін тақырыптық (тематикалық) талдау әдісі қолданылды. Сабаққа дейін қатысушылардың көпшілігі эвфемизм ұғымын тек жалпы деңгейде түсінді. Жауаптар олардың эвфемизмдердің шынайы өмірдегі немесе академиялық жағдайлардағы қызметін жеткілікті түсінбегенін көрсетті. Сабақтан кейін көптеген студенттер эвфемистік тілдің сезімтал тақырыптарды талқылауға, сыпайы диалог жүргізуге және ойды мұқият жеткізуге көмектесетінін айтты. Кейбір қатысушылар эвфемизмдерді топтық жобаларда, презентацияларда және сыныптық талқылауларда сөз таңдау маңызды рөл атқаратын практикалық жағдайлармен байланыстырды.

Зерттеу нәтижелері эвфемизмдерді тіл үйретуге енгізу ойластырылған, сыпайы әрі тиімді коммуникацияны дамытуға ықпал ететінін көрсетеді. Студенттерді эвфемизмдерді анықтауға және қолдануға үйрету прагматикалық құзыреттілік пен мәдениетаралық сезімталдықты арттырады. Зерттеу нәтижелері эвфемизм сияқты тақырыптарды тілдік және мұғалімдерді даярлау бағдарламаларына енгізуді ұсынады, әсіресе көптілді және мультимәдени білім беру жағдайларында. Болашақта эвфемизмдерді ұзақ мерзімді қолдану жолдарын және әртүрлі мәдениеттердегі қолданылу ерекшеліктерін зерттеу маңызды болып табылады.

Кілт сөздер: эвфемизмдер, тілдік білім беру, іс-әрекеттегі зерттеу

Аннотация

Мягкая речь: исследование использования эвфемизмов и их педагогическое значение в образовательном контексте

Данное исследование посвящено использованию эвфемизмов в образовательной коммуникации и анализу потенциальной пользы от их включения в процесс преподавания языка. Эвфемизмы — это выражения, позволяющие говорить на неудобные или чувствительные темы более мягко и уважительно. Они часто используются для поддержания вежливости, предотвращения недоразумений и обеспечения эффективного взаимодействия в рамках учебного процесса и в реальных коммуникативных ситуациях. Несмотря на широкое распространение эвфемизмов в повседневной речи, в языковом образовании они редко становятся предметом прямого изучения.

Цель данного исследования — проанализировать, как студенты воспринимают тему эвфемизмов и как меняется их понимание после специально разработанного учебного занятия. Исследование проводилось в формате одноциклового педагогического исследования в действии (action research) с участием 37 студентов университета. Сбор данных осуществлялся с помощью опросов и рефлексивных письменных заданий. Для анализа изменений в восприятии студентов и их взглядов на актуальность эвфемизмов в образовательной среде был применён метод тематического анализа.

До проведения занятия большинство участников имели лишь общее представление о том, что такое эвфемизмы. Их ответы свидетельствовали об ограниченном понимании функций эвфемизмов в реальных или академических ситуациях. После урока многие студенты продемонстрировали более глубокое осознание того, что эвфемистический язык способствует обсуждению чувствительных тем,

поддерживает уважительный диалог и формирует более осмысленное и тактичное речевое поведение. Некоторые участники связали тему с практическими ситуациями — групповыми проектами, презентациями и обсуждениями в классе — где выбор слов играет важную роль.

Результаты показывают, что интеграция эвфемизмов в обучение иностранному языку способствует формированию более внимательной, тактичной и эффективной коммуникации. Обучение студентов распознаванию и использованию эвфемизмов способствует развитию прагматической компетенции и культурной чувствительности. В исследовании рекомендуется включать темы, такие как эвфемизмы, в программы подготовки учителей и курсы по изучению языка, особенно в многоязычной и мультикультурной образовательной среде.

Ключевые слова: эвфемизмы, преподавание языка, исследование в действии

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Technical Assignment.....	ii
Abstract	v
Аңдатпа	vii
АННОТАЦИЯ.....	ix
Introduction	1
Background of the Study.....	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	4
Significance of the Study	5
Summary	6
Literature Review.....	7
Historical Background and Definitions of the Concept of "Euphemism"	8
Pragmatic Functions of Euphemisms.....	10
Role of Euphemisms in Education.....	12
Euphemisms in Language Teaching Practice	17
Conclusion.....	21
Methodology	23
Introduction	23
Research Design.....	23
Methods and Data Collection.....	27
Data Analysis	31
Ethical considerations	33
Benefits	34
Findings.....	35
Descriptive Analysis	35
Themes Identified in the Final Survey.....	41
Thematic Analysis of Student Reflections after Instruction	47
Reflection	50
Conclusion.....	53
Discussion	55
Initial Understanding of Euphemisms.....	57
Shifts in Awareness and Attitudes after the Lesson.....	59

Pedagogical Implications and Future Applications.....	62
Limitations	64
Conclusion.....	67
References	69
Appendix A	77
Appendix B.....	80

Introduction

This chapter starts with an introduction to the background information of the study being examined, then addresses the research topic and the research's purposes.

Additionally, it outlines the research inquiries that establish the structure of the study and articulates the importance of the research.

Background of the Study

Imagine a scenario in which you had to discuss something delicate or taboo. How did you choose the words? Would you pronounce the words directly, or would you use substitute words in your speech? I think if you had to answer forbidden topics, you would try to discuss them delicately and correctly. In this case, there are more than simply substitutes called euphemisms; they represent how we communicate, what we value, and what we feel embarrassed to express (Keyes, 2010). For instance, rather than saying that someone "died," English speakers often use the phrase "passed away," which sounds more tactful and emotionally sensitive.

Euphemisms are typically understood as more polite or less direct expressions used to substitute language that might be considered harsh or offensive (Merriam-Webster, The study of such expressions dates back to the late 19th century and has engaged both local and international linguists. Among the most influential international scholars are Warren (1992), who examined euphemisms as outcomes of semantic reformulation, and Allan and Burridge (2006), who investigated their connection to taboo and linguistic censorship. Holder (1996) contributed a comprehensive dictionary of euphemistic expressions, providing a systematic classification. Enright (1985) emphasized the social and communicative functions of euphemisms. Southerland and Katamba (1997) focused on their relevance in contemporary linguistics and intercultural interaction.

In parallel, interest in euphemisms has also emerged in Central Asian linguistic scholarship. An early example is the study by Laude-Cirtautas (1976), who analyzed euphemistic usage in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek languages. The work considered local taboos, cultural norms, and ethnolinguistic factors that influence euphemistic expression in Turkic societies. Together, these contributions highlight the importance of euphemisms as communicative tools across languages and cultures.

In contemporary educational contexts, developing students' communicative competence is widely recognized as a critical aspect of academic and professional preparation. This competence involves not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to prevent communicative conflicts and foster respectful, comfortable interactions. One effective way to support this goal is through the pedagogical use of euphemisms. Euphemisms serve as linguistic tools that help speakers soften direct or potentially offensive language. This allows for more tactful and inclusive communication. Their use is especially important in educational settings. Such environments often emphasize emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and respectful classroom discourse.

As noted by Bloch-Rozmej (2023), euphemisms play an important role in teacher–student communication, directly shaping the quality of interpersonal interactions in academic settings. Kazakhstan's recent educational reforms emphasize inclusion, equity, and respectful dialogue (UNESCO, 2021). In this context, teaching euphemisms is especially relevant, as it fosters tactful and culturally sensitive communication. Euphemisms allow educators to address sensitive topics more delicately. They also support diversity, reduce communicative tension, and contribute to a more supportive classroom environment.

Previous research confirms the significance of euphemisms in educational discourse. Mamatova (2020) found that teaching euphemisms strengthens students'

communicative competence and minimizes the risk of classroom conflict. Yıldız (2021) observed that euphemisms are widely used in the everyday speech of young people, reinforcing their importance in social interaction. Frigillano (2020) demonstrated that euphemistic expressions in academic communication can reduce bias and encourage empathy. However, despite these findings, empirical research remains limited regarding the impact of explicit instruction in euphemisms, particularly in multilingual and culturally diverse classrooms. This study addresses this gap by investigating how focused euphemism instruction influences students' awareness and perception in a multilingual educational environment.

Problem Statement

In Kazakhstan, euphemisms have predominantly been studied from linguistic, cultural, and contrastive perspectives. Researchers have explored their semantic features, cultural symbolism, and cross-linguistic equivalents, often focusing on media discourse or broader sociolinguistic issues (Akhmetov, 2015; Khudaybergenova, 2022; Alimzhanova, 2022; Tadjibayeva, 2016; Kashkinbayeva et al., 2014; Kenzhebaeva, 2015; Toxanbayeva & Kenzhekhanova, 2020; Koblandina et al., 2025; Yekhsanova et al., 2020). These studies have contributed to understanding how euphemisms reflect values, taboos, and politeness norms in Kazakh, Russian, and English. However, the role and function of euphemisms within educational contexts remain largely underexplored.

To date, there has been insufficient empirical investigation in Kazakhstan examining the use and interpretation of euphemisms in academic communication, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. This represents a visible gap, given the heightened attention to communicative competence in tertiary education. In the absence of explicit instruction or meaningful discussion of such

expressions, students may struggle to understand and appropriately use euphemisms. This may lead to miscommunication and reduce the effectiveness of academic interaction.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating university students' awareness of euphemisms and their perceptions of euphemistic language in educational contexts. Furthermore, it explores whether targeted instruction can support the development of pragmatic competence and enhance students' ability to interpret and apply improving students' ability to use euphemisms in academic settings in Kazakhstan.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine university students' awareness and perception of euphemisms in educational settings and evaluate the effectiveness of explicit instruction on euphemism usage in English language classrooms. The study will propose recommendations for educators on effectively using euphemisms as communication tools.

The main aims of this research include the following:

- To examine university students' initial understanding of euphemisms and how they interpret euphemistic expressions in educational settings;
- To explore students' reflections and attitudes toward the use of euphemisms following explicit classroom instruction;
- To evaluate the extent to which focused instruction on euphemisms can enhance students' awareness and communicative competence;
- To provide pedagogical recommendations for integrating euphemisms into English language teaching.

Research Questions

For this study, the following research questions were developed:

1. What are students' initial understandings of euphemisms?

2. How do students' understanding and perceptions of euphemisms evolve after the lesson?

3. How can the lesson inform future teaching practices for euphemisms in multilingual classrooms?

The study will be conducted using a qualitative action research approach. In Kazakhstan, action research was strongly promoted as a national priority approximately a decade ago, supported by government initiatives and international collaboration with the University of Cambridge (University of Cambridge, 2014). It became an essential part of professional development programs, enabling teachers to reflect and refine their teaching strategies. In line with this tradition, the current study adopts an action research framework to improve teaching practices in a multicultural educational environment. The research methodology is described in more detail in the Methodology Chapter.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the study provides valuable insights into pragmatic aspects of educational communication. It highlights how euphemisms can be used to promote respectful and inclusive interaction in the classroom. Practically, it offers methodological insights for educators seeking to implement euphemism instruction as part of their teaching practice. As a result, the study helps students develop greater awareness and improve their ability to use language appropriately and sensitively. Its findings are valuable for curriculum developers and policymakers aiming to improve teacher training and professional development programs.

By connecting linguistic concepts with classroom practices, this study underscores the potential of euphemisms as a practical tool for enhancing communication in education.

Summary

The structure of the dissertation, following the introduction, comprises several key chapters. The Literature Review chapter examines existing scholarship on euphemisms, highlighting key theoretical perspectives and findings from previous research relevant to the study. A qualitative action research design is described in the Methodology chapter, focusing on the exploration of euphemism use and their communicative roles in teacher–student interaction. It includes a description of the sampling procedures, data collection instruments, methods of analysis, and ethical considerations. The Findings chapter presents the results of the study, focusing on participants’ awareness, use, and interpretation of euphemisms within the classroom setting. The Discussion chapter interprets these findings to the research questions and the existing literature, offering insight into the educational implications of euphemism use. Finally, the Conclusion chapter synthesizes the main findings of the research and outlines potential avenues for future exploration and pedagogical practice.

Literature Review

Due to the lack of research on euphemisms in the educational context, this study will fill this gap and enhance the understanding of their use in teaching practice. Studying euphemisms in teacher-student communication will show how they help address sensitive topics, prevent conflicts, and create a positive learning atmosphere. Euphemisms have historically played an important role in human communication, allowing people to handle delicate themes while maintaining societal harmony. This literature review enables a systematic assessment of existing research and scholarly works to identify the characteristics and functions of euphemisms in educational communication and their impact on teacher-student interactions. The present study focuses on synthesizing key theoretical and empirical works on euphemisms in educational communication, with particular attention to their definitions, pragmatic functions, and pedagogical relevance. This review responds to three research questions: (1) How do students initially understand euphemisms? (2) How does their perception change after instruction? (3) How can teaching euphemisms inform multilingual pedagogical practices? As the study adopts an action research design, the reviewed literature also includes classroom-based instructional studies relevant to qualitative educational inquiry.

The study is based on the works of several foreign scholars. These researchers have made important contributions to the understanding of euphemisms. Throughout the chapter, the literature is drawn from a diverse range of scholars who have contributed to the understanding of euphemisms from linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical perspectives. These include Enright (1985), Allan and Burridge (2006), Wang (2013), Gómez (2009), Ismailova (2022), Brookhart (2008), Katermina (2018), Gulamova (2023), among others. This foundation provides a comprehensive review, covering the historical background, definitions of the concept of "euphemism", their pragmatic functions, as well as the role of

euphemisms in education and euphemisms in teaching language. This chapter begins by defining key concepts related to euphemisms. It then discusses their pragmatic functions, educational relevance, and pedagogical applications. Finally, the chapter concludes with the presentation of the conceptual framework that underpins the current research.

Historical Background and Definitions of the Concept of "Euphemism"

The term “euphemism” was introduced into the English language by lexicographer Thomas Blount back in the 17th century, forming it from the Greek roots “eu” (good) and “phemi” (I say), replacing a word with an unpleasant connotation, or superstitious avoidance of words of bad omen. It was in the ancient period that euphemisms played a role in ensuring the euphony and ethics of speech, so as not to harm the interlocutor (Enright, 1985).

People use euphemisms in speech to replace offensive words or phrases to preserve their dignity or avoid offending the audience (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Southerland & Katamba, 1997). Hughes (2006) also emphasises the importance of euphemisms as ways of expressing politeness; he defined euphemisms as words used not only out of fear but also as a sign of mutual respect. Jamet et al. (2012) used the concept of "euphemism" as a linguistic tool and as part of the broader phenomenon of maintaining social coherence in communication. Also, the scientist Wang (2013) defines euphemisms as words that affect everyday communication, softening sharp topics, making awkward conversations more enjoyable, and adhering to social and communicative norms in society.

The variety of definitions reflects the complex nature of euphemisms as a linguistic and social phenomenon. Many scholars take into account ethical norms of behaviour when explaining their emergence and use. For instance, Lutz (1987) refers to euphemism as “the morality of rhetoric” (p.21), underscoring its ethical and persuasive dimensions. Similarly, Fernández (2005) views euphemisms as a form of verbal behavior, embedded in habitual

speech and everyday conversation. Fairclough (1992) further supports this perspective, describing euphemism as a widespread and functional element of social discourse, which helps maintain social relations and mitigate conflict.

When considered together, these definitions show that euphemisms serve a vital communicative function, acting both as linguistic instruments and as reflections of wider cultural and social processes. They help individuals manage sensitive topics, avoid offence, and express politeness in nuanced ways. Euphemisms contribute to the construction of socially acceptable discourse by aligning speech with ethical norms, emotional awareness, and situational appropriateness.

Through carefully chosen language, speakers can soften uncomfortable truths, maintain social harmony, and adapt to the expectations of different audiences. As such, euphemisms are not mere stylistic devices. They are deeply rooted in communicative practice, shaping how meaning is constructed and interpreted within diverse social and cultural contexts.

Euphemisms are very closely interrelated with taboo words and expressions, as one replaces the other. The word “taboo” – deeply rooted in the mentality of primitive peoples and still present in developed civilizations- originates from the belief in the inner or magical power of a word that can evoke precisely what it means (Gómez, 2009, p.734). Thus, primitive superstitions determined the development of the oldest layer of euphemisms – permissible names that hide their subject. This inextricably links euphemisms to the taboo words studied in ethnography.

The term “taboo” originates from Polynesian languages, where it translates to “forbidden” and encompasses a wide range of restrictions, including social norms, directives from leaders, and warnings to children against touching the belongings of their elders (Radcliffe-Brown, 1939, p. 5). This term, having been adopted into Western

academic studies, has become a key concept for describing prohibitions, the violation of which often results in social or spiritual consequences. Thus, in modern language, the phenomenon of taboo has not disappeared but has taken other forms, and euphemisms have arisen in response to the need for substitution. Expanding on this anthropological perspective, Mocanu (2017) emphasises that linguistic taboos represent socially constructed prohibitions rooted in superstition, emotion, and religious fear. These taboos are deeply embedded in early mystical and totemic beliefs and remain active in modern societies. According to Mocanu, euphemisms function as linguistic buffers designed to avoid the direct naming of such taboo realities, especially in religious and cultural communication. For instance, euphemisms related to death, disease, or the devil are used to “name without naming,” thereby shielding both speaker and listener from perceived harm or discomfort

These foundational definitions are central to answering the first research question, which explores how students initially conceptualize euphemisms before any instructional lesson. By analyzing how euphemisms are linked to taboo, politeness, and social norms, this study evaluates whether students demonstrate only superficial awareness or deeper understanding of euphemisms' communicative functions.

Considering the above information, it is stated that the idea of euphemia is an experience of generalising various understandings of euphemisms that are included in the works of most linguists on this problem.

Pragmatic Functions of Euphemisms

Euphemisms play significant pragmatic roles in language. From a pragmatic perspective, euphemisms function as strategies for maintaining interpersonal harmony and managing face. In situations that call for tact and sensitivity, they help speakers convey difficult messages while preserving respect and social balance. Euphemisms align with the

principles of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. This framework provides useful insight into how softening expressions contribute to respectful and motivating communication between teachers and students.

Zhu and Hu (2018) highlight that euphemisms are effective in delivering constructive feedback without causing offense. For example, saying "Could you speak more clearly?" instead of "You're not speaking loud enough" reduces the threat to the student's self-image. This choice promotes a more supportive and respectful classroom environment, helping to maintain student confidence.

Ismailova emphasizes the role of euphemisms in professional contexts such as business and healthcare. She demonstrates how expressions like "seeking new opportunities" (for "unemployed") or "under the weather" (for "sick") reduce discomfort while preserving clarity. Although her study is not focused on education, her findings apply to teaching. For instance, replacing "you failed" with "additional preparation is needed" helps teachers offer honest feedback while protecting student dignity.

Rahayuningsih et al. (2020) examine how Indonesian EFL teachers use politeness strategies such as mitigation, indirectness, and impersonal constructions. These strategies reduce tension and foster a more positive classroom climate. While euphemisms are not their direct focus, such approaches share similar functions: they guide teachers in framing speech in ways that protect the listener's face and maintain a respectful tone in classroom discourse.

Cao (2020) offers a detailed classification of euphemistic functions, including taboo avoidance, politeness, concealment of truth, refinement of speech, and humor. She emphasizes that euphemisms are not fixed words but context-sensitive strategies shaped by cultural and interpersonal expectations.

A cross-cultural perspective is provided by Boltaboyeva (2025), who compares euphemistic expressions in English, Russian, and Uzbek. Despite differences in form, she finds that euphemisms consistently support politeness, reduce directness, and foster respectful communication. In multilingual and multicultural classrooms, euphemisms help navigate cultural norms and create a communicative space where students feel acknowledged and respected, even when discussing sensitive topics.

Bulusan (2019) contributes a sociopragmatic view based on ESL students' use of euphemisms and taboo expressions. His findings show that learners prefer euphemisms in formal settings, such as school or religious spaces, but use more direct language among peers. This suggests that euphemisms are socially regulated and context-driven. Students apply them to adjust for social distance, power dynamics, and communicative appropriateness. In this way, euphemisms support effective interpersonal communication.

Together, these studies show that euphemisms play a practical and socially grounded role in classroom communication. They help manage sensitive topics, reduce directness, and promote respectful interaction. Euphemisms are not stylistic extras; they are deliberate strategies for maintaining politeness and emotional balance.

When integrated into teaching, euphemisms support students in expressing ideas more tactfully, handling disagreement, and avoiding offense. They also help learners adapt to different audiences and navigate cultural expectations. Through this, students develop clearer, more respectful, and more confident communication skills that are essential in both academic and real-world contexts.

Role of Euphemisms in Education

Euphemisms play an important role in communication between teachers and students, especially when discussing sensitive topics or providing constructive criticism. They help reduce student stress by creating a space for more open and respectful

communication. This approach is supported by Brookhart (2008), who emphasizes that the right choice of words, tone, and structure in feedback helps reduce conflicts and increases student engagement. Brookhart notes that soft and supportive formulations can soften criticism, improve perception, and create a safe learning environment. This reflects the broader role of euphemisms in promoting respectful and constructive teacher–student interaction. Both the use of euphemisms and Brookhart’s recommendations focus on improving interactions in educational contexts.

As Alimzhanova (2022) notes, English euphemisms like “let go” or “downsizing” are deliberately used in professional contexts to soften the impact of dismissal, making the experience less traumatic for the individual involved. These expressions replace blunt terms, contributing to a more respectful and emotionally considerate form of communication. Kovaleva (2008) also highlights the function of euphemisms in shaping socially acceptable language. She explains that euphemisms help speakers avoid direct references to uncomfortable or sensitive topics. Instead, they allow for more tactful and respectful phrasing. In education, euphemisms serve a comparable purpose. For example, teachers may say “challenging behavior” instead of “disciplinary problems” to avoid stigmatizing students. Such expressions reduce stress and help create a more constructive and inclusive classroom environment. A similar example is found in other studies exploring euphemistic strategies in educational contexts. For instance, during a parent meeting, a primary school teacher described a hyperactive child by saying, “Sasha sits quietly. He listens. Well done,” instead of directly commenting on his lack of academic achievement. This choice of words allowed the teacher to shift the focus from academic performance to behaviour, thereby preserving the parent’s dignity and fostering a respectful communicative tone (Gryzina, 2021).

In our university, comparable strategies have also been used to support student development. Instead of directly referring to “low grades,” phrases like “room for growth” or “not yet reaching full potential” are preferred. Issues like plagiarism are addressed with terms such as “improper citation practices.” In academic institutional documents, direct expressions such as “failed the course” or “did not pass” are often replaced with euphemisms to maintain a formal and respectful tone. For instance, instead of stating that a student “failed”, the academic policy describes the “Incomplete” grade as temporary and granted under special circumstances (M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University, 2020).

However, several scholars have raised concerns about the potential drawbacks of euphemistic language. Halmari (2011) argues that the overuse of euphemisms can obscure meaning and reduce the clarity of communication. For example, expressions like “person with disability” – though intended to be respectful – may introduce unnecessary vagueness. “Special needs” tends to evoke more negative associations and less precision in meaning compared to “disabled” (Gernsbacher et al., 2016). Their findings suggest that euphemisms may unintentionally reinforce stigma rather than reduce it. Likewise, Pryadilnikova (2006) emphasises that euphemisms can lose their mitigating function over time and may evolve into neutral or even dysphemistic terms. Similarly, Hojati (2012) points out that euphemisms can act as a double-edged sword: they may facilitate polite communication but also distort reality. These perspectives highlight the importance of using euphemisms with caution and critical awareness. Although these studies focus mainly on media language and formal discourse, their insights are highly relevant to education. In the classroom, clarity and respectful language are essential for effective learning and meaningful feedback. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance. Euphemisms should promote sensitivity and inclusion, but not at the expense of understanding.

In the study conducted by Bloch-Rozmej (2023), it was noted that many professors observed limited use of euphemisms in their students' speech. However, some respondents mentioned that students occasionally use euphemisms. Examples included replacing “the text was boring and I didn’t want to read it” with “the text was difficult,” and “he’s a liar” with “he’s creative with the truth.” These examples demonstrate how euphemisms can soften criticism and allow for more flexible expression in the classroom. However, according to teachers’ observations, such utterances remain isolated and generally unintentional.

This impression is reinforced by empirical data from Salih (2017), who, based on questionnaire responses, reveals significant gaps in students’ awareness of euphemistic language and its functions. Most participants were unable to provide suitable euphemistic alternatives in response to everyday communicative scenarios, particularly those requiring tact or sensitivity. The study also found that teachers rarely use such expressions during classroom interaction. Salih (2017) identified limited teacher engagement with euphemisms in secondary classrooms, with minimal modelling and low student awareness. As a result, euphemisms remain peripheral in educational discourse, despite their communicative potential.

A similar pattern is described by Abugharsa et al. (2023), who report that euphemisms are insufficiently integrated into English language instruction in Libyan schools. In their study, the authors explored students’ awareness and use of euphemistic expressions through a combination of vocabulary testing and semi-structured interviews with English majors. While some students were able to recognize familiar phrases such as “passed away”, they showed uncertainty when faced with less common or more idiomatic alternatives. For example, only a minority of learners associated expressions like “in a family way” with pregnancy. Interviews further revealed that students rarely used

euphemisms in spontaneous speech. Most preferred direct or literal expressions, even for sensitive topics. In some cases, their word choices sounded too blunt or socially inappropriate. This was observed even among final-year students with a relatively advanced level of English. When asked to rephrase using softer language, many hesitated or gave unclear responses. This suggests a lack of confidence and limited classroom exposure to euphemistic strategies. These results indicate that euphemisms are not sufficiently embedded in language instruction, which limits students' ability to apply them confidently and appropriately in real communication.

Taken together, the findings of Salih (2017) and Abugharsa et al. (2023) highlight a consistent gap between the perceived value of euphemisms in developing pragmatic competence and their limited presence in classroom practice. Both studies emphasize the need for more explicit and systematic instruction. Such instruction should help learners understand euphemistic expressions, recognize them in context, and use them intentionally. This support is essential across a range of communicative situations where sensitivity, nuance, and social awareness are required.

Katermina (2018) examines how euphemisms are used as a tool for manipulation in pedagogical discourse, focusing on their role in creating a positive classroom atmosphere and improving communication between teachers and students. Her study shows that euphemisms help ease tense situations and make learning more effective. For example, teachers might say, "Could you share your opinion on this topic? I'm sure you have something valuable to say," to make students feel more comfortable during discussions. Similarly, Gulamova (2023) emphasizes the dual role of euphemisms as both linguistic and pedagogical tools in educational contexts. She highlights that euphemisms help maintain respect and minimize the negative impact of sensitive topics, while also fostering linguistic sensitivity and cultural awareness among students. This connects well with future research,

which aims to explore how euphemisms address delicate issues and foster a space for open conversation.

Overall, the reviewed studies show that euphemisms are an important tool in educational communication. They help teachers address sensitive topics, manage students' emotions, and build more effective interactions. Despite their clear pedagogical value, research points to a gap between the potential benefits of euphemisms and their limited use in practice. This highlights the need for more systematic instruction and teacher modeling of such strategies. These studies lay the foundation for the present study, which examines how students perceive, understand, and use euphemistic expressions in real educational contexts.

Euphemisms in Language Teaching Practice

This section addresses the third research question, which investigates how euphemism instruction can inform future pedagogical practices. Integrating euphemisms into language teaching supports key pedagogical goals in English education. These include developing pragmatic competence, building intercultural awareness, and fostering polite and effective communication. Wedlock (2020) argues that teaching sensitive or taboo language, such as swear words, provides students with practical tools for real-world interaction. Dutková (2023) similarly notes that respectful discussion of delicate topics encourages critical thinking and empathy in intercultural communication. These perspectives highlight the importance of not just exposing students to euphemisms but actively teaching them how to use such expressions appropriately. This is essential for preparing learners to communicate with nuance, awareness, and cultural sensitivity in both academic and everyday settings.

Several theoretical studies explore the pedagogical relevance of euphemisms, emphasizing their role in building communicative sensitivity and fostering polite

expression. Gulamova (2023), for instance, presents euphemism instruction as a valuable addition to lessons on synonyms and lexical variation. Additionally, she suggests activities such as compiling euphemistic dictionaries, which engage students in exploring how euphemisms function in real-life interactions. These insights are particularly relevant for understanding the role of euphemisms in classroom communication, as well as the cultural factors that shape their use in educational settings. A related initiative was undertaken by Akyлтаev et al. (2023), who compiled a thematic dictionary of English euphemisms as part of their undergraduate research. The project involved gathering student feedback and organizing euphemisms into categories such as medical, political, emotional, and workplace-related expressions, accompanied by definitions, examples, etymology, and bilingual translations. Although this work was not part of formal classroom instruction, it highlights the potential of student-created dictionaries as supplementary teaching tools.

Similarly, Wang (2013) proposes several methods for teaching euphemisms. One method is the use of contextual examples, where students are introduced to real-life situations to understand how euphemisms are applied. This approach helps students see the practical use of euphemisms in various contexts. Another method involves comparing euphemisms with direct expressions, which allows students to understand when and how to use softer phrases instead of more direct, potentially harsh ones. She also stresses the role of cultural comparison, particularly between Chinese and English, in helping learners grasp euphemistic meaning more effectively.

These methods can be useful for this study as they help integrate euphemisms into the educational process in Kazakhstan, considering the students' cultural and language differences. However, their studies are descriptive and do not investigate classroom implementation. This reinforces the need for practical research, which the current study addresses by exploring how students engage with euphemisms through explicit instruction.

In contrast to these theoretical contributions, several researchers have explored how euphemisms can be taught through classroom-based instruction. A common instructional task across multiple studies is the replacement of direct or impolite expressions with more tactful alternatives (Mamatova, 2020; Rapaeva, 2019; Nikitina & Zyryanova, 2020).

Rapaeva (2019) implemented a six-step instructional model with secondary school students. Her system included tasks ranging from identifying euphemisms in literary texts to creating euphemistic phrases for given situations. This progression helped students move from recognition to confident use. Students receiving structured instruction demonstrated a clearer grasp of euphemisms than those without. This supports the idea that step-by-step guidance can improve students' ability to use euphemisms effectively and communicate more tactfully.

Mamatova (2020) developed a four-stage approach for university students. It began with recognizing inappropriate expressions and continued with rewriting dialogues and creating original texts that incorporated euphemisms. Her students engaged in editing speech to make it more socially acceptable, often through rewriting headlines or narrative snippets. The goal was to help learners internalize euphemism use as a communicative strategy, not just memorize fixed phrases. This structured approach promoted both pragmatic flexibility and stylistic awareness. As a result, students demonstrated more confident use of euphemisms and showed improved sensitivity in adjusting language to different communicative situations.

Nikitina and Zyryanova (2020) applied similar ideas in primary education. Their learners practiced replacing impolite words, creating polite speech acts, and analyzing euphemisms in stories. These activities aimed to build basic speech etiquette and early pragmatic sensitivity. Though the learners were younger, the emphasis on substitution and

tone adjustment echoes tasks used at more advanced levels. The shared focus on polite language suggests that euphemism instruction is effective across age groups.

Khalil and Mohammed (2024) worked with fourth-year EFL university students, focusing on how euphemism instruction affects vocabulary use. Their twelve-week course included teacher-led modelling of euphemistic phrases, polite feedback strategies, and vocabulary practice. As a result, students in the experimental group showed stronger vocabulary performance and felt more confident when discussing sensitive topics. This approach is similar to that of Mamatova (2020), who also worked with university students and emphasized the use of euphemisms in classroom communication. However, Khalil and Mohammed (2024) provide little detail on how students developed politeness strategies. There is no analysis of how learners understood euphemisms or whether they applied them beyond controlled tasks. This limits insight into their pragmatic development. These are precisely the areas addressed in the present study, which focuses on students' understanding, perception, and reflection on euphemisms in educational settings.

Salih (2017) proposed incorporating euphemisms into classroom routines, particularly during feedback, error correction, and task assignment. These suggestions reflect an awareness of the pedagogical value of euphemisms. However, the study was limited to survey data and did not include any classroom implementation. As a result, the practical effectiveness of the suggested strategies remains unverified. This limitation highlights the need for classroom-based research, which the current study aims to address by examining how students understand and apply euphemisms through guided instruction.

These studies reveal a shared approach to teaching euphemisms. Tasks such as editing dialogues, rewriting statements, identifying and analyzing euphemisms, and developing euphemistic alternatives appear to be effective tools for fostering awareness of linguistic tact.

For this reason, similar activities will be incorporated into the instructional lesson of the current study. This aligns with the study's focus on how teaching euphemisms can support the development of respectful communication in educational settings.

By synthesizing these approaches, the present study aims to evaluate how structured euphemism instruction can enhance pragmatic competence and support appropriate communication among learners.

Conclusion

Key theoretical and empirical contributions related to euphemism use in education have been examined in this section. It began with an overview of the historical and linguistic foundations of euphemisms, highlighting their links to taboo language and politeness strategies. The pragmatic functions of euphemisms were then explored, with emphasis on their role in maintaining face and supporting respectful communication. The chapter concluded with a critical discussion of pedagogical applications, drawing on classroom-based studies and instructional approaches.

Each section of the review was aligned with the study's research questions. The first question, concerning students' initial understanding of euphemisms, was addressed through definitions and theoretical perspectives provided by Enright (1985), Allan and Burrige (2006), and Wang (2013), Fernández (2005), and Fairclough (2008). These works helped establish a baseline for interpreting students' conceptual knowledge and communicative awareness prior to instruction.

The second question, focused on changes in students' understanding and perception after instruction, was examined through the lens of pragmatic theory and politeness strategies. Studies by Zhu and Hu (2018), Ismailova (2022), Bulusan (2019), and Cao (2020) provided insight into how euphemisms function as tools for softening speech and building respectful classroom interactions.

The third question, regarding the implications of teaching euphemisms for multilingual classrooms, was informed by pedagogical studies such as those by Gulamova (2023), Rapaeva (2019), Mamatova (2020), Khalil and Mohammed (2024), and Wedlock (2020). These contributions illustrated how structured euphemism instruction can foster pragmatic competence, linguistic sensitivity, and intercultural awareness.

Together, these sources form the conceptual foundation for the current study. They have guided the development of research instruments and shaped the design of instructional activities. The key ideas discussed in this chapter form the foundation for the methodological approach outlined in the following section.

Methodology

Introduction

Modern euphemisms have a significant impact on shaping communication in educational contexts. They are essential for fostering nuanced and respectful interaction, which is key to creating a positive learning environment. This research aims to examine students' evolving awareness and views on euphemisms following explicit instructional intervention. To guide the inquiry, the following research questions were formulated: What prior conceptual understanding do students have about euphemisms before instruction? In what ways do students' understanding and perceptions of euphemisms change after participating in the lesson? How can insights from the lesson contribute to developing effective pedagogical approaches for teaching euphemisms?

The methodology section describes the following information: research design, sampling, effective data collection techniques, piloting, data analysis, ethical considerations, and benefits for participants and others (Creswell, 2009). In this work, a qualitative action research method is described and justified, as it is considered suitable for addressing the stated research objectives and questions.

Research Design

A qualitative action research framework is employed in this study. Action research provides a teacher-centred, practical methodology aimed at systematically improving teaching practices (Burns, 2009). This approach is highly suitable for educational contexts where immediate and context-sensitive enhancements are needed. Qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). Action research, as articulated by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), is practical, aiming to foster improvements through systematic inquiry. This design is particularly appropriate because the study seeks to not only

understand students' perceptions of euphemisms but also actively influence and enhance their communicative strategies through pedagogical intervention. A similar methodological approach is used by Wedlock (2020), who conducts an action research study to explore how taboo and sensitive language can be effectively taught in EFL/ESL contexts. His research focuses on raising students' awareness of the pragmatic and social functions of such expressions. It shows how professionally structured instruction can support critical engagement with linguistic norms. Following this example, action research is viewed as an appropriate methodological framework for examining euphemisms in educational contexts.

The structure of the present study follows the cyclical model of action research outlined by Efron and Ravid (2013). They describe the process as “beginning with a research question and ending with the application of the knowledge gained that leads to new questions and a new cycle of research” (p. 8). This study follows six common steps of action research: identifying a problem, reviewing relevant literature, designing a pedagogical intervention, gathering empirical material, followed by its analysis, and using the findings to form recommendations for future teaching practice. “Action research is much more dynamic, fluid, and—at times—messier than is implied by the linear description of the process” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 9). In this study, the process was therefore adapted to the practical realities of the educational setting.

This study also aligns with the classic spiral model of action research conceptualized by Lewin (1946) and later expanded by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). This spiral represents the iterative nature of action research—planning, acting, observing, and reflecting—repeated continuously for ongoing improvement. Although action research is typically conceptualized as an ongoing spiral of cycles (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), the implementation of this study was confined to a single full cycle due to contextual limitations related to time and academic scheduling.

Conducting a full, well-documented cycle allowed the study to achieve its objectives. Throughout this process, the emphasis remained on systematic reflection, practical improvement, and fostering better communication practices among students, consistent with the core principles of action research.

Action research was selected because it supports immediate improvements in educational practice through direct engagement. As a method that combines reflection with practical improvement, action research serves both inquiry and development purposes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This is particularly relevant for language education, where communication practices evolve through participation and reflection. Moreover, action research is particularly suitable for educational contexts because it focuses on the dynamic relationship between theory and practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). As McNiff and Whitehead emphasize, action research empowers educators to act as change agents within their settings.

Sampling

This study employed purposive and convenience sampling. To ensure relevance to the research goals, participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting those who met specific requirements.. Purposive sampling in the study enables the selection of participants based on their individual experiences, competencies, or other characteristics (Patton, 2001). As Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) note, purposive sampling is appropriate when selecting participants who can provide the most relevant information for the study (pp. 6–8). Participants were chosen according to the following criteria:

- Enrollment in the General English course
- Age 18 or older
- Demonstrated proficiency at the B2 level of English

B2-level students have a well-developed command of English, allowing them to engage with complex language phenomena such as euphemisms. Initially, the study required the participation of university freshmen enrolled in General English courses, as they were deemed most suitable for exploring basic pragmatic awareness and communication skills. However, due to logistical constraints and internal scheduling at the university, access was instead provided to students enrolled in the Cambridge English preparation course.

The research was conducted in one group of Cambridge English Course B2+ students. 47 undergraduate students enrolled in a B2-level Cambridge English course at Maqsut Narikbayev University participated in the study. The group included students from different academic backgrounds, aged between 17 and 22 years. The sample is homogeneous regarding language proficiency and age range, but diverse in academic majors, providing both consistency and varied perspectives essential for this study. Due to ethical restrictions, only 37 students were involved in the data collection process. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were collected anonymously.

In addition to purposive sampling, convenience sampling was also applied. Participants are selected using this method due to their ease of access and readiness during the data collection period (Etikan et al., 2016). In this research, participants were chosen from a group that was available during the researcher's teaching practice. The group was arranged through direct coordination with the course instructor, who provided access to the class and was free and present at the scheduled time. Students who were available and willing to take part in both the survey and the intervention lesson were included in the study.

Although sampling may limit generalizability, it is commonly accepted in small-scale educational studies, especially within action research frameworks. As Burns (2009)

explains, action research prioritizes context-specific and practice-based insights rather than broad representation. Stringer (2014) also supports the use of accessible participants in action-oriented classroom studies, where the focus is on improving local teaching practices. Therefore, combining purposive and convenience sampling was both a practical and methodologically appropriate choice for this research setting.

The study was conducted at Maqsut Narikbayev University. Data collection took place in classrooms familiar to students, contributing to a comfortable environment for participation.

Methods and Data Collection

The data collection methods employed in this study are detailed here, with a focus on teaching euphemisms in educational contexts. The research adopts a qualitative approach within the framework of action research, allowing for practical and reflective exploration of students' linguistic awareness in a classroom setting. As Burns (2010) notes, action research is particularly suitable for teacher-led inquiries because it empowers educators to investigate, implement, and evaluate changes within their own teaching practice. This approach fits the objectives of this research by fostering students' pragmatic awareness through explicit instruction and assessing changes in their perception of euphemistic language.

The data collection procedures were guided by the cyclical model of action research originally developed by Kurt Lewin (1946) and later refined by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (1988). This model consists of four key stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Each stage of the research cycle was accompanied by specific instruments and procedures, ensuring the collection of rich and contextually grounded data.

Stage 1 Planning (diagnosis)

The planning phase followed the classic, foundational cycle of action research (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). At this stage, the research problem was identified based on the results of an initial diagnostic survey administered to 37 university students.

In the first stage, participants completed a written survey via Google Forms. The initial survey, which lasted 15-20 minutes, was aimed at assessing students' initial understanding of euphemisms. The structure of the survey included closed-ended questions, which allowed for gathering data on students' awareness, and open-ended questions that provided information on examples of euphemisms and their communicative functions. The participants' responses revealed limited understanding of euphemisms and their functions in academic contexts. These findings highlighted the need for explicit instruction on euphemistic language. A lesson plan was designed to raise students' awareness of euphemistic language and to address their limited understanding of its role in academic and professional contexts.

In response, a 60-minute lesson was developed, introducing euphemisms in educational communication through targeted input, contextual examples, and reflective tasks. Ethical clearance was obtained in advance, and only students of legal age were allowed to participate. The lesson was carefully planned based on the objectives of the study. The structure was designed to include a warm-up activity, theoretical explanation, practical exercises, group work, and a final reflection.

The materials, such as examples of euphemisms and reflection questions, were specifically created for this lesson. Some examples and ideas were adapted from educational resources and communication textbooks, while others were developed by me to better fit the students' needs.

All instructions and tasks were prepared in advance to ensure clarity and consistency during the lesson. Special attention was given to modelling the task before group work to help students better understand the assignment.

Stage 2 Acting

At this stage, an instructional lesson was conducted. This 60-minute lesson focused on euphemisms and included theoretical explanations, practical examples, group discussions, and a text-revision activity where students replaced direct expressions with euphemistic alternatives. The lesson was designed to help students understand euphemisms and apply them in communication. The lesson plan used for the session is provided in Appendix A.

Stage 3 Observing

At this stage, a follow-up survey was conducted to assess the students' understanding and awareness after the intervention. Data was collected online via Google Forms, ensuring easy access for participants and minimizing external influence. The follow-up surveys were created and made accessible via QR code. This approach ensured standardized testing conditions and high accuracy in data collection, while the results were automatically saved in Google Forms, greatly facilitating subsequent analysis. Surveys started with demographics, followed by euphemism-related questions. Multiple-choice questions allowed students to assess their level of awareness and understanding, while open-ended questions provided participants with the opportunity to express their opinions, offer examples, and explain the significance of euphemisms in an educational context.

After the lesson, students were invited to share their reflections via Padlet. They expressed their opinions about the session, discussed euphemisms they found interesting or useful, and commented on the role of polite language in educational settings. The students' responses from the Padlet platform are provided in Appendix B.

Stage 4 Reflecting

In this final phase, a systematic thematic analysis of the collected data, including surveys and Padlet reflections, was conducted. This process involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting patterns. The researcher also completed a structured self-reflection on the effectiveness of the lesson and the depth of student engagement. This phase corresponds with the reflective element of the cycle, focusing on pedagogical learning and future implications.

At the end of the lesson, a written reflection activity via Padlet was organized. Each student answered open-ended questions, helping them process what they had learned. This reflection also provided data on how students understood the concept of euphemisms after the lesson and how they evaluated the role of euphemisms and politeness strategies in educational communication. All students participated and submitted their written reflections for further analysis in the research project.

Some students experienced minor difficulties when rephrasing euphemisms. However, overall, all participants completed the tasks successfully. They showed interest and active participation throughout all stages of the lesson. The prior modeling of the task before group work proved especially helpful, giving students more confidence in analyzing examples.

Piloting

During the pilot testing, 12 responses were obtained from Cambridge English Course students selected through purposive sampling. Approval was obtained from the university administration, facilitating access to the student group for pilot testing.

Participants were informed of the study's purpose and gave consent before completing the Google Forms survey.. By the university ethics committee requirements, students under the age of 18 were excluded, reducing the number of respondents. They

cannot complete the survey on their own because they would need to get permission from their parents or guardians.

The survey was conducted using a QR code displayed on an interactive whiteboard. Pilot testing lasted between 15 and 20 minutes.

Responses indicated that some participants did not notice the definition of euphemisms at the beginning of the survey. This led to adding clear definitions and hints in each section. Open-ended questions were made more specific. One multiple-choice question about the frequency of euphemism use was removed as it provided little value for analysis. Two similar questions were combined into one with more response options. An additional question was added to the general information section to gather more background details.

Pilot testing was used to identify potential issues and enhance the validity of the research. It allows for adjustments before the main data collection begins, ensuring that the final instrument is clear and effective. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 216). The pilot testing improved the structure, clarity, and content of the survey, making it more effective for data collection.

Data Analysis

The previous section outlined the data collection methods. This section explains the approach used to organize and analyze the collected data. The process of interpreting the collected responses began after the educational intervention and the collection of students' answers from the pre-surveys, post-surveys, and Padlet reflections.

The analysis began with the initial survey. In this study, descriptive analysis was applied to the first survey data to identify general trends and repeated ideas in students' understanding of euphemisms. This type of analysis focused on summarizing both closed- and open-ended responses without quantifying them. Although often associated with

quantitative approaches, descriptive analysis is also a recognized stage in qualitative research. As Creswell (2009) explains, qualitative data analysis often begins with “a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting” (p. 195). He further states that researchers may start by describing the cases or context before identifying themes (p. 201). In this study, descriptive analysis served this exact function: it provided a clear, structured overview of students’ baseline knowledge before deeper thematic coding. It did not reduce meaning to numbers but organized the raw data to highlight patterns. Therefore, descriptive analysis was fully consistent with the qualitative nature of this research and helped build a foundation for later interpretation.

For the qualitative part, I collected all open-ended responses from Google Forms, carefully read through them, and made important notes to start identifying key ideas and connections.

Before beginning the full thematic analysis, I explored several available software tools such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo. However, following Maxwell’s (2005) advice about the importance of manual work for beginner researchers, I decided to analyze the data manually to better engage with the material.

During the analysis, I used three main strategies described by Maxwell (2005): memo writing, categorization (coding), and connecting the data into a bigger picture.

I chose a categorization strategy, with coding as the main method.

The function of coding was to sort the data into manageable and conceptually distinct categories. I carefully read through all the answers from the post-intervention survey and the Padlet reflection, highlighting key fragments. Each theme was given a specific code.

As Sarantakos (1998) points out, coding helps organize information and is a crucial step in qualitative research.

After coding, I grouped and organized the data into main themes and subthemes that emerged during the process. I then compared the data to identify similarities and differences in students' understanding of euphemisms.

At the final stage, I conducted a data-checking process by reviewing the codes and comparing them with the original responses to ensure the accuracy of my interpretation. If needed, I adjusted my conclusions based on this review, following Sarantakos's (1998) recommendations.

The analysis process followed a deliberate and systematic strategy, enabling insights into the progression of students' understanding of euphemisms.

For the second thematic analysis, the same procedures described above were undertaken. Reflections collected from Padlet were analysed to find common themes related to students' personal impressions and understanding of euphemisms.

Additionally, the researcher's reflection on the intervention process was analysed separately.

Ethical considerations

Special attention in the upcoming research will focus on ethical considerations while analyzing the usage of euphemisms in educational contexts using surveys with participants. These aspects aim to protect the rights and well-being of participants while ensuring adherence to principles of fairness and respect. Before data collection begins, all participants will be required to give informed consent and their replies will be kept anonymous to ensure that the study is performed ethically. Participants will be notified that they have the option to discontinue their participation at any point without incurring any negative repercussions. Ensuring voluntary consent based on full information is a priority. To guarantee confidentiality, the data collected during the research will be anonymized. The personal information of participants will be protected, and their

responses will be processed in a manner to prevent any possibility of identification.

Throughout the survey process, a respectful and attentive attitude will be maintained toward each participant.

The research will be conducted by ethical standards and principles. This includes obtaining preliminary approval from the relevant ethics committee and strictly adhering to norms and rules for data processing and storage. Implementing these measures will ensure a high ethical standard for the research and protect the interests of all participants, which is a key aspect of the successful and responsible conduct of scientific work.

Research on euphemisms in educational contexts involves minimal risks to participants. Participation in the study allows participants to share their experience and knowledge in the field of linguistics.

Benefits

Including euphemisms in educational programs will help students understand academic and professional texts more easily. It will also improve their ability to communicate effectively in both formal and informal settings. Additionally, learning euphemisms will develop their language flexibility and adaptability, preparing them for professional and international interactions. Furthermore, the study will facilitate the development of recommendations for educators on incorporating euphemisms into the curriculum.

Findings

The key results discussed in this chapter are based on data collected from three tools: a pre-instructional survey, a post-instructional survey, and Padlet-based student reflections. Descriptive statistics are used solely to illustrate students' baseline awareness of euphemisms before the pedagogical intervention. The main findings are organized into three sections. First, a descriptive overview of the students' initial familiarity with euphemistic language is provided to establish their starting point. This is followed by a thematic analysis of the open-ended responses from the post-instructional questionnaire, which captures students' evolving understanding and perceptions after the lesson. Finally, the chapter explores insights from students' reflective comments, focusing on their critical engagement and self-reported application of euphemisms in real-world contexts. Each part of the chapter is grounded in data and supported by direct student quotes where appropriate. In this same chapter, my reflections as a teacher-researcher are also included, offering a self-reflexive account of the teaching experience and the research process, with a particular focus on the implementation of this lesson, which I conducted for the first time as part of an educational intervention.

Descriptive Analysis

This section presents a descriptive analysis of the pre-instructional survey responses, aimed at identifying students' initial awareness and understanding of euphemisms prior to the pedagogical intervention. The initial survey used in this study consisted of 23 questions and was administered before the pedagogical intervention. Its primary purpose was to explore the students' baseline knowledge and perceptions regarding the use of euphemisms in educational contexts. A single group of 37 freshmen university students enrolled in English language courses participated in the survey. All participants met the ethical requirements and were aged 18 or above. The sample was

predominantly female, with 23 participants (62.2%) identifying as female and 14 (37.8%) as male. The majority of respondents were 18 years old ($n = 29$; 78.4%), while 6 students were 19 years old (16.2%), and only 2 participants were aged 20 or older (5.4%).

Regarding native language background, most students reported Kazakh as their first language ($n = 29$; 78.4%), followed by Russian ($n = 7$; 18.9%) and Uzbek ($n = 1$; 2.7%). In terms of self-assessed English proficiency, 36 students (97.3%) indicated an Upper-Intermediate (B2) level, while one participant (2.7%) reported an Intermediate (B1) level.

The first six questions of the survey consisted of general background and demographic information. Starting from Question 7, the items focused specifically on students' awareness and perceptions of euphemistic language in academic settings. This section presents a detailed descriptive analysis of those content-related survey responses completed by the same group of 37 students before the lesson. Descriptive trends are used in this section to reveal students' preliminary awareness and viewpoints regarding euphemisms in educational contexts. The questions were both closed- and open-ended in format and were not used to measure variables quantitatively, but rather to illustrate baseline knowledge before instruction.

Question 7 explored whether participants were familiar with the term "euphemism." Only 30.6% of students reported that they had never heard the term before. An even smaller percentage stated that they knew its meaning (9.4%), while 6.3% had heard of it but were unsure of the definition. A large proportion of students (over 50%) did not respond to the question or left it blank. This pattern suggests that most students either lacked awareness of euphemistic language or were uncertain about how to define or recognize it at the outset of the study

Question 7.1 was a follow-up open-ended item. Most students did not respond, left the space blank, or wrote "I don't know." As this was an optional question, the lack of

answers suggests limited awareness or uncertainty in recalling specific examples of euphemistic language before the lesson.

Question 8 invited students to describe where they had encountered the term “euphemism.” This open-ended question was largely left unanswered.

Question 9 asked students to select the best description of a euphemism from multiple options. Only 26.4% correctly identified it as “a mild or indirect word used in place of a harsh one.” The majority of students either chose incorrect definitions, indicated uncertainty, or did not respond at all, revealing significant gaps in conceptual understanding at the pre-instruction stage.

Question 10 addressed whether students could recognize euphemisms in the context of death. Only 12.7% of students selected “He is no longer with us,” and 9.3% chose “He passed away” as euphemistic expressions. A few students selected literal or less indirect alternatives, such as “He has a serious condition.” However, the majority (62.5%) did not respond to this item at all. These results suggest limited familiarity with common euphemisms related to death and indicate that most students were either unsure or unfamiliar with such language prior to instruction.

Question 11 focused on the use of euphemistic expressions to describe student behavior. A minority of students (37.2%) identified the phrase “He tends to drag his feet” as euphemistic, followed by “He is slow-paced” (not quantified). In contrast, the majority (62.8%) selected the direct expression “He is lazy,” indicating limited sensitivity to softened or indirect evaluative language. These responses suggest that most students had difficulty distinguishing euphemistic phrasing from blunt statements before the instructional intervention.

Question 12 was a closed-ended item that asked whether students had ever noticed a teacher using euphemisms in classroom settings. A small number of participants ($n = 14$;

37.4%) responded “Yes,” while others selected “No” or “Not sure.” These results suggest that euphemisms are not always explicitly recognized by students, likely due to their subtle and indirect nature.

Question 12.1 was an open-ended follow-up addressed to those who answered affirmatively. However, the question was largely left unanswered. Most students either skipped it or provided unclear responses such as “I don’t know,” indicating limited ability to recall or describe specific instances of euphemistic language use in the classroom.

Question 13 inquired about the types of classroom situations where students had observed teachers using euphemisms. Nevertheless, most participants left this question unanswered. As a result, no clear patterns could be established, suggesting limited awareness or uncertainty in identifying specific contexts where euphemistic language might be used.

Question 14 focused on how euphemisms influence classroom communication. The most commonly selected functions included softening bad news, encouraging student participation, avoiding awkward topics, helping students feel more included, and limiting open discussion of sensitive issues. However, only about half of the students responded to this question, while many either remained neutral or left it unanswered. The data point to a lack of clarity or assurance among students in assessing the communicative value of euphemisms at the pre-instruction stage.

Question 15 asked students to rate their agreement with the statement: Using euphemisms in educational settings is generally a good idea. A majority of participants (62.5%) agreed (rating 4), 18.9% remained neutral (rating 3), and 12.5% strongly agreed (rating 5). A small portion (6.1%) disagreed (rating 2), and no one strongly disagreed (rating 1). These results reflect a generally positive attitude among students toward the pedagogical use of euphemisms.

Question 15.1 invited students to express their opinions on how effective euphemisms are, using an open-ended format. The majority of participants did not respond, indicating either uncertainty or difficulty articulating their reasoning.

Question 16 asked students to identify university-related or future professional contexts where euphemisms could be useful. Responses included group projects, presentations, and interactions with professors or classmates. However, several students either left this question blank or gave vague responses such as “I don’t know” or “Can’t remember.”

Question 17 explored whether students believed that euphemisms could affect the understanding of important information. Many respondents affirmed this belief, citing reasons such as improved clarity, respectful tone, and the ability to soften sensitive content. Others noted that euphemisms could enhance memorability or create a more professional communication style. However, some students expressed doubts, suggesting that the use of euphemisms might obscure key information or depend heavily on individual perception. A few respondents were uncertain or chose not to provide a definite answer. These responses indicate a diversity of perspectives on the communicative impact of euphemistic language in academic contexts.

Question 18 explored whether students themselves used euphemisms in communication with teachers or peers at university. Only about half of the participants responded affirmatively, indicating some effort to be more polite or indirect, particularly in situations involving unfamiliar people or when giving feedback. Examples included softened expressions in group work or tactful phrasing. Several students gave vague answers such as “I cannot remember the case,” while others explicitly stated they did not use euphemisms.

Question 19 explored whether students had encountered euphemistic expressions in course books, handouts, or other educational materials. Responses were mixed. These results indicate a generally low level of attention to euphemisms in instructional materials, suggesting that their presence is either subtle or not explicitly recognized by students.

Question 20 was an open-ended item asking why teachers might use polite language instead of harsh words. Some students mentioned reasons like avoiding hurt feelings, preventing conflict, or showing respect. However, many gave vague or unclear answers, indicating some difficulty in explaining the purpose of euphemisms.

Overall, the descriptive analysis revealed that most students had limited prior knowledge of euphemisms and struggled to recognize or define them accurately. While some demonstrated intuitive understanding in specific contexts, many responses were vague or incomplete, highlighting a need for explicit instruction. These findings confirm the relevance of the pedagogical intervention aimed at developing students' pragmatic awareness and communicative sensitivity. Following the descriptive overview of students' initial awareness, the analysis now turns to the thematic interpretation of the post-instructional survey responses, offering deeper insight into how students' understanding developed after the lesson.

Demographic data helped to better understand how different students responded to the topic of euphemisms. Gender-related patterns were observed in the reflections.

Female participants more often used polite and softened language in their answers. They focused on respect and emotional tone in communication. Male participants, in contrast, tended to give shorter but more definition-based and analytical responses.

These differences provided additional context for interpreting the students' understanding of euphemisms after the lesson.

Themes Identified in the Final Survey

The analysis of students' final survey answers is detailed in the paragraphs below. These focused on students' thoughts after the pedagogical intervention on euphemisms.

A total of 37 student responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Five main themes were identified from the final survey responses, each providing detailed answers. Each theme includes a full discussion with examples from student responses and thorough interpretation. Direct quotes from students serve as vivid illustrations of their new understanding and perspectives. The students' responses related to our topic are described below.

Politeness and Respect in Communication

Educational communication is significantly shaped by politeness strategies, which help sustain respectful dialogue between students and instructors. They contribute to a positive learning environment, reduce the likelihood of conflict, and ensure that all members of the educational community interact with mutual respect.

A prominent theme identified during the coding process was the use of politeness strategies, particularly euphemistic language, in teacher-student interaction. According to 32 out of 37 participants, the use of softened expressions helps reduce the emotional strain of negative feedback. Moreover, such language supports classroom discipline and allows for sensitive topics to be addressed without creating a confrontational atmosphere. From the students' perspective, these strategies promote trust and contribute to a more constructive learning process. Additionally, 20 participants reported that instructors used softened language when addressing inattentiveness among the whole class, opting for indirect phrasing rather than direct reprimands. Another 25 students noted that teachers often relied on polite reminders to maintain order and discipline during lessons.

While many students had previously interpreted such language passively, after classroom discussion, they began to consciously recognize how euphemisms are used in both oral and written feedback. This shift indicates a transition from passive listening to active reflection. Students realized that euphemisms shape both how communication is perceived emotionally and how teachers and students interact in the classroom. For example, Participant 1 noted: “Yes, I’ve become more aware of euphemisms. Recently, during a class discussion, the professor used 'a more challenging path' instead of saying 'failure' when referring to a student’s struggle with an assignment.” Participant 2 provided the following example: “For instance, when professors provide constructive criticism, they might say ‘You might need to revisit this section,’ instead of ‘This part is completely wrong.’”

Thus, the participants' responses indicate that after the lesson, they became more aware of how euphemisms are used in educational and professional contexts to soften expressions and foster a more polite, respectful atmosphere. Students began to notice how teachers and others apply gentle phrasing instead of direct criticism or unpleasant truths. This reflects a shift from passive reception to active understanding of linguistic strategies, their functions, and potential effects.

Reflection on Personal Growth and Motivational Impact

In everyday student life, euphemisms are often used to maintain politeness and prevent conflicts. Eight out of 37 participants provided examples of how they use euphemistic expressions to soften criticism, express disagreement, and promote constructive communication within the university environment.

Many participants noted that euphemisms help to soften remarks during teamwork. For example, Participant 28 shared how a team leader said, “We need to speed up a little to meet the deadlines – maybe we can think about how to help?” instead of directly pointing

out someone's delay. Similar examples of softening group criticism were mentioned by other participants as well.

After learning about euphemisms, participants said they became more conscious of how they express their thoughts. Participant 31 shared that they now say, "Some parts of the lecture were a little difficult to follow," instead of "I didn't understand anything." Other students mentioned similar changes in their speech strategies, recognizing the value of softened phrasing.

Many students also shared how they talk about being late, choosing euphemistic explanations such as "Sorry for the delay, there were unforeseen circumstances," instead of admitting, "I overslept." This example was shared by Participant 33, with similar expressions mentioned by other participants.

Participants also noted that a polite and tactful style of communication, especially from teachers, contributes to a more comfortable classroom atmosphere and supports academic motivation.

Several students explicitly linked euphemisms to the creation of an emotionally supportive learning environment. One participant reflected, "I think yes, because when teachers treat students with a piece of understanding, their behaviour, students will be motivated to study," while another noted, "Because it can decrease the motivation level of students and interest in the subject." These reflections suggest that softened language is not merely polite but serves as a tool to sustain student engagement and prevent discouragement. Despite the incomplete phrasing, the response associates euphemisms with the ability to avoid conflict and enhance the motivational impact of communication.

Overall, these responses demonstrate that participants are aware of the importance of polite and softened communication in educational contexts. Euphemistic language is viewed not only as a means of preventing interpersonal tension but also as a tool for

boosting motivation and improving teacher–student interaction. This perspective reinforces the relevance of politeness strategies in pedagogical practice, particularly in multilingual and multicultural classroom settings.

Need for Directness and Clarity

Some participants positively evaluated the role of euphemisms: One participant noted that “Euphemisms help solve a problem while maintaining respect between communication participants.” Another added that “they help smooth over situations and avoid offending students, which helps maintain motivation for learning.”

At the same time, other participants emphasized the importance of directness and clarity: One participant remarked that “If a problem is described too softly, it’s not immediately clear how serious it is.” Another explained, “If the teacher always used euphemisms, I might not fully understand what they meant.”

Thus, the participants' responses show that, although they recognize the value of euphemisms in creating respectful and motivating communication, a careful balance must be struck between politeness and the necessity for straightforward expression—especially in situations that require constructive criticism, clear instructions, or serious discussion, where excessive softness might lead to confusion or misinterpretation.

Use of Euphemisms in Professional and Academic Settings

In professional and academic spheres, the use of euphemisms supports respectful dialogue and promotes diplomatic exchanges. They contribute to creating a professional atmosphere during teamwork, presentations, business correspondence, and discussions of sensitive topics. Participants' responses show that many students recognize the importance of euphemistic expressions for effective communication in their future professional activities.

Based on their statements, two key directions have been identified: the use of euphemisms in group work and professional discussions, and their importance for diplomatically addressing delicate topics.

The direction of using euphemisms in group work and professional discussions includes the following participants' responses:

When the teacher gave me a grade, I did not completely agree with it and wrote: 'I do not agree with your grade.' But now, thinking about it, I understand that next time I could write it differently, for example: 'I would like to understand how the grade was determined so that I can improve my results in the future.' This way, it will be more respectful and constructive to communicate with the teacher.

(Participant 26)

When I participated in a scientific project at school related to the development of interactive materials, our project supervisor said, 'We have areas for improvement' instead of directly saying that we failed. Such an expression helped us understand that the project needed revision, but at the same time, we did not feel discouraged. It motivated us to continue working and improve the result. (Participant 27)

In the context of discussing delicate topics, students shared several interesting and detailed responses, highlighting the importance of using euphemisms in everyday communication:

In our group, there was an assignment, and two participants did not cope with the tasks, which slowed down the work. Instead of criticizing, other team members suggested: 'Let's redistribute the tasks, maybe it will be more convenient.' One of the participants added: 'I can help with your part of the work if there were any difficulties.' These delicate remarks allowed us to avoid conflict and supported team spirit. (Participant 29)

When we studied the topic of famine in history class, the teacher used the phrase 'difficult years of economic hardship' instead of directly mentioning 'mass famine.' This allowed us to talk about tragic events more neutrally and respectfully, avoiding emotional tension in the classroom. (Participant 30)

These examples show how the use of euphemisms helps to avoid conflicts and maintain professionalism in communication, especially in sensitive situations.

The obtained research results show that students have begun to realize the importance of using euphemisms in various situations. They understand that such expressions help maintain a respectful and diplomatic tone in communication, which is especially important in delicate and professional contexts. This contributes to creating a favorable and constructive atmosphere both in educational and in future professional environments.

Students' Understanding of Euphemisms

During the discussion of euphemisms, participants demonstrated an evolving understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. Initially, some students had only a vague idea of what euphemisms are, but as the topic developed, their awareness and ability to define and apply the concept noticeably improved.

The majority of students (20 out of 37) defined euphemisms as a way to replace rude or unpleasant words with softer, more polite expressions. They viewed this substitution as a tool for respectful and tactful communication, helping to avoid offense and maintain a friendly tone.

For example, one participant described euphemisms as “a nice way to say something that might sound rude,” while another called them “the best way to make your words sound softer.”

Many students shared a similar idea, describing euphemisms as linguistic tools that soften or neutralize harsh expressions.

One participant put it simply: “Replacement of rude words with more polite versions.”

Some students went further, emphasizing the emotional and psychological value of euphemisms. They recognized that euphemisms are often used not only for politeness but also to avoid discomfort or protect the listener's emotional state.

For instance, one noted that euphemisms “help avoid offense and soften bad news,” while another said they “do not directly impact the psyche.”

Several participants (6 out of 37) gave more theoretically informed or detailed definitions, mentioning their usage in sensitive contexts such as death, age, or job loss.

Finally, some participants highlighted the practical function of euphemisms in smoothing communication and addressing negative topics constructively. Euphemisms were viewed as a kind of “emotional filter,” helping speakers to frame unpleasant information more positively.

Overall, students demonstrated a significantly improved understanding of euphemisms, from basic definitions to recognizing their deeper communicative and emotional roles. They now see euphemisms not just as vocabulary tools, but as key elements of respectful and considerate interaction.

Thematic Analysis of Student Reflections after Instruction

Based on the qualitative analysis of participants’ reflective responses collected immediately after the lesson, three main themes were identified. These themes reflect their initial understanding of euphemisms and their role in communication. Each theme is explained below, with illustrative examples from participants’ responses that show their perceptions and interpretations of euphemism use in various contexts.

Politeness and Respect in Communication

Many participants noted that euphemisms are important in expressing politeness, tact, and emotional sensitivity. According to them, using softened expressions helps to avoid rudeness, show empathy, and create a more comfortable communication atmosphere. Participants said that if you want to sound polite and kind, it's better to use euphemisms, especially in areas like work, healthcare, and education. Some participants demonstrated an understanding that language should be adapted depending on the situation and the interlocutor. Euphemisms were considered appropriate when speaking with strangers or older individuals, while directness was preferred in communication with close people to avoid misunderstandings. An emerging awareness of using euphemisms purposefully and contextually was also noted.

Several participants commented: "It is better to use euphemisms when you talk to a stranger or elder people, and direct is when you don't want the person you are talking to misunderstand you." And another said: "It is better to use euphemisms when you are talking in a workplace or school, but when you talk to close friends or colleagues, it is better to use direct communication."

Overall, students started to understand euphemisms not just as polite words, but as a useful way to make communication softer and more respectful. They realized that it's important to choose words depending on who they are talking to and the situation.

Use of Euphemisms in Professional and Academic Settings

Some participants highlighted that euphemisms are particularly relevant in formal contexts such as the workplace, educational institutions, and official correspondence. Euphemisms help maintain a respectful, professional tone, especially when interacting with unfamiliar people or conveying sensitive information.

Examples of responses include: “We use euphemisms to sound polite and more professional. I guess that they make schools’ communication better,” and “Using it during work conversations and in the professional sphere will be necessary.”

Necessity of Directness and Clarity

Despite acknowledging the benefits of euphemisms, participants also emphasised the importance of clear and direct communication in certain contexts. This includes situations that require seriousness, urgency, or accuracy, such as emergency cases, conflict discussions, or delivering bad news. In such cases, directness was seen as more effective.

Examples include: “Sometimes is better to tell the things directly, so individuals can recognise the seriousness of situations.” and “Be direct when clarity is essential.”

Some participants pointed out potential drawbacks of using euphemisms. These included the risk of misunderstanding, message distortion, or even passive-aggressive communication. A particular concern was that euphemisms might downplay the seriousness of a situation, for example, in medical or alarming contexts. In cases of particular gravity, directness in communication becomes imperative.

One participant noted: “Euphemisms help communication feel kinder but can also cause confusion.” Another added: “Using euphemisms helps to express your ideas without direct notation, and it can help in difficult or awkward situations. However, euphemisms also can be used for passive aggression.”

Even at this early stage of reflection, participants demonstrated a relatively deep understanding of euphemisms. They not only recognised their positive role in creating polite and emotionally sensitive communication but also critically reflected on their potential limitations. The responses showed that participants were aware of the importance of adjusting their language depending on the context and the interlocutor, and many

expressed readiness to apply this knowledge in real-life academic and professional situations.

Reflection

The lesson on the topic of euphemisms in the educational sphere was generally effective. The goal of the session was not only to introduce students to the concept of euphemism but also to encourage them to reflect on the role of such expressions in educational communication. Despite time constraints (there was only one lesson), the main objectives of the class were successfully achieved.

One of the strengths of the lesson was the high level of student engagement. They actively participated in the discussion, asked questions when something was unclear, and took part in meaningful conversations. The discussion became particularly lively after the slide presentation with examples of euphemisms: students eagerly shared their interpretations, offered explanations, and suggested alternative formulations.

During pair and group work, students showed interest in the task aimed at identifying euphemisms and replacing them with direct expressions. However, some difficulties arose at this stage. Most groups successfully identified euphemisms and suggested direct equivalents, but the task related to analyzing the impact of euphemisms on the perception of the message proved more challenging. Many students either left this column blank or filled it out incompletely and with uncertainty. This suggests that the skill of critically analyzing such language requires further development and possibly additional examples or guidance.

Time management during the session was adequate, and all planned stages of the lesson were completed. However, it would have been beneficial to dedicate a bit more time to explaining the completed tasks and providing feedback, especially for the more complex

elements of the assignment. This could help consolidate students' understanding and clarify any remaining uncertainties.

At the end of the lesson, a written reflection was conducted using Padlet, where each student expressed their opinion on the topic. Based on observations, it became clear that even a single session significantly increased students' awareness of euphemisms. Many of them wrote that they had used similar expressions before but did not realize they were called euphemisms, and now they could apply them more consciously in appropriate situations. In particular, during the discussion, students noted that one can be more direct with close friends because such honesty is less likely to be taken offensively. At the same time, they expressed the opinion that when it comes to health or serious illnesses, it is better to speak directly, so as not to hide important information that may affect a person's well-being or even their life.

There were also comments that teachers should use euphemisms in their professional speech to avoid traumatizing or offending students. Students pointed out that in educational and academic settings, it is important to speak respectfully and politely, as this demonstrates professionalism. At the same time, they emphasized that polite and respectful communication should be mutual, both from the teacher and from the students.

Among the limitations that influenced the implementation of the lesson, the first is that the class was conducted only once, within the scope of a single academic hour. This amount of time was not sufficient for an in-depth exploration of the topic. Secondly, the lesson was implemented in only one university, with a single group of first-year students enrolled in a Cambridge English program, where official permission had been granted for conducting the session as part of the research. To ensure a deeper understanding of the material and to develop students' analytical skills, it would be advisable to conduct a series

of lessons. However, according to the academic calendar, the topics are already fixed, and expanding the course would require separate approval.

In terms of areas for improvement, I would like to:

- Provide more euphemism examples on the board for class-wide analysis.
- Conduct not just one, but several sessions on this topic to reinforce and deepen understanding.
- Apply more varied activities, including role plays, case discussions, mini-debates, and critical analysis of authentic statements.
- In moments when students show confusion, give more clarification, additional examples, and more detailed feedback to support their understanding of the material.

Overall, the lesson can be considered successful in terms of its goals and the given conditions. Students showed interest in the topic, actively participated in discussions, and their written reflections demonstrate that they made important discoveries about the role of language in educational communication. Conducting such lessons promotes the development of linguistic awareness, critical thinking, and communicative politeness in students and fosters an understanding of the nuances of professional interaction.

Differences

During the reflection phase immediately following the lesson, several key themes were identified.

Politeness and Respect in Communication – euphemisms were viewed as a way to express politeness, respect, and tact;

Use of Euphemisms in Professional and Academic Settings – students recognized the appropriateness of euphemisms in formal and professional contexts;

Necessity of Directness and Clarity – participants noted that in some situations, directness is necessary, especially when accuracy or seriousness is required.

After the post-survey, which was conducted some time after the lesson, two additional themes emerged:

Reflection on Personal Growth and Motivational Impact – students began to realize that euphemisms not only support polite communication but also have a positive effect on motivation, self-esteem, and comfort in the learning environment.

Students' Understanding of Euphemisms – participants demonstrated a deeper and more theoretically grounded understanding of euphemisms, showing the ability to define, exemplify, and explain their communicative functions.

The emergence of these new themes indicates a development and consolidation of knowledge, reflecting a shift from surface-level perception to conscious and critical understanding of euphemisms. This suggests that the lesson not only sparked emotional and intellectual engagement but also contributed to the development of students' pragmatic awareness and their ability to apply euphemistic language in real academic and professional situations.

Conclusion

The analysis of the reflection and post-test responses shows clear progress in how students understood euphemisms and politeness strategies. During the reflection phase, which took place right after the lesson, students focused on three main ideas: the role of euphemisms in polite and respectful communication, their use in formal and professional settings, and the need for directness in some situations. These early reflections were based on first impressions and showed that students had started thinking about how language can be used more carefully and respectfully.

Later, the post-test responses revealed deeper and more structured thinking. Two new themes appeared. First, students began to reflect on how polite language can support motivation and create a more comfortable learning environment. Second, they showed a clearer understanding of what euphemisms are, how they work, and when to use them. Many students were able to explain euphemisms in their own words and give relevant examples. They also showed more awareness of the emotional and social effects that language can have.

This change in themes shows that students moved from general ideas to more specific and thoughtful reflections. It also shows that they began to understand euphemisms not just as polite words, but as tools for better communication in different situations. While their first reactions were more emotional, the later answers were more analytical and confident.

Overall, the study shows that the lesson helped students become more aware of how and why euphemisms are used. They learned to think about their language choices, consider the feelings of others, and adjust their speech depending on the situation. This is an important step toward developing respectful and effective communication in both education and future professional life.

Discussion

This chapter examines how the implementation of euphemism-focused teaching contributed to promoting respectful communication in an academic environment. One of the key goals of the study was to evaluate how euphemism instruction influences students' grasp and use of respectful and contextually appropriate expressions.

Thus, the data collection process was structured into three phases: (1) a pre-instructional survey to assess baseline knowledge, (2) a post-instructional open-ended questionnaire, and (3) written reflections submitted via Padlet. These reflections were also integrated into the teacher's own reflective practice, forming a part of the action research methodology. The thematic analysis of students' post-instruction responses and reflections revealed five main themes: Politeness and Respect in Communication, Reflection on Personal Growth and Motivational Impact, Need for Directness and Clarity, Use of Euphemisms in Professional and Academic Settings, and Students' Understanding of Euphemisms. These themes serve as the basis for the following discussion and are aligned with the three research questions.

The data were analysed using two complementary strategies. The pre-instructional survey responses were examined through descriptive analysis, providing an overview of students' initial awareness. The open-ended responses and reflections were subjected to thematic analysis. The emergent themes were directly mapped to the three main research questions:

What are students' initial understandings of euphemisms?

How do students' understanding and perceptions of euphemisms evolve after the lesson?

How can the lesson inform future teaching practices for euphemisms in multilingual classrooms?

As shown in the Findings chapter, prior to the lesson, students generally had a limited grasp of euphemisms, often associating them only with politeness or formal language. After the lesson, their responses became more precise, contextually grounded, and pragmatically aware, indicating meaningful learning gains. As for the third research question, responses revealed that students found the lesson content applicable to various communicative domains, affirming its educational importance.

This chapter now interprets those findings through the lens of relevant scholarly literature and theoretical frameworks. It argues that even a single, targeted lesson embedded within a reflective action research cycle can effectively support students' pragmatic competence and intercultural sensitivity. The insights shared by participants further reinforce the conclusion that the instructional approach successfully addressed the research questions and has pedagogical relevance beyond the scope of this study.

Firstly, the results confirmed that students' initial understanding of euphemisms was limited to superficial notions of politeness or indirectness, without consideration of their pragmatic or contextual functions. This finding supports earlier observations by Salih (2017), Mamatova (2020), and Wang (2013), who noted that euphemisms are rarely taught explicitly and often remain outside the scope of systematic instruction in language education.

Secondly, after the lesson, students demonstrated a deeper and more context-aware understanding of euphemisms, recognizing their role in maintaining a respectful tone, managing social distance, and adjusting speech according to cultural or institutional expectations. This shift aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, especially their distinction of politeness strategy, which euphemisms often help to realize. Student reflections such as "We use euphemisms to sound polite and professional" or

“Sometimes it's better to use soft words with strangers” exemplify this heightened awareness.

Thirdly, the students’ reflections provided substantial insight into the third research question by connecting their understanding of euphemisms to future applications in teaching, workplace scenarios, and intercultural communication. For instance, one student shared, “I understood how language can be used indirectly. This will help in professional life.” Such responses indicate that the lesson supported the development of students’ ability to make context-sensitive linguistic choices in diverse communication settings. These findings also resonate with studies by Mononen-Aaltonen (1998) and Wang (2024), who underline the value of pragmatic instruction in multilingual classrooms for fostering communicative competence and intercultural awareness.

The results of the study demonstrate that even a single, well-structured lesson, implemented within a reflective action research cycle, can significantly enhance students’ understanding of euphemisms and their role in respectful, context-sensitive communication. The evidence suggests that the intervention was effective in meeting the research objectives and supports the pedagogical value of incorporating euphemism instruction into multilingual educational settings.

To provide a more structured interpretation of the data, the following section addresses each of the three research questions in turn, linking the findings to relevant literature and offering a critical discussion of their implications for educational practice.

Initial Understanding of Euphemisms

The first research question explored how students initially understood euphemisms before instruction. Analysis of the pre-instructional survey responses revealed that most students associated euphemisms with general politeness without recognizing their pragmatic functions or the contextual sensitivity they serve. Many participants reported

that they had never encountered the term before, while others indicated vague familiarity but were unsure of its precise meaning. Only a few students demonstrated a confident understanding of the concept. The data reveal that students generally entered the study with a low level of awareness regarding the use of euphemisms.

This limited understanding was further evident in the open-ended responses. For example, when asked to describe a situation in which a teacher had used a euphemism, several students answered “I don’t know” or gave very general descriptions, such as “maybe when they didn’t say something directly.” A few responses mentioned polite corrections or softened comments from instructors, but without using terminology associated with euphemistic functions. These vague or hesitant answers indicate that even when students had encountered euphemistic language, they were unable to clearly identify or articulate it.

These observations confirm that euphemisms, while socially and communicatively significant, are rarely taught in ways that help learners recognize or apply them intentionally. The limited awareness demonstrated by students in this study, ranging from vague definitions to the inability to identify euphemistic expressions in classroom contexts, reflects findings from previous research. In particular, earlier studies have shown that euphemisms are either insufficiently addressed in curricula or poorly modeled by teachers, which results in underdeveloped pragmatic competence among learners (Salih, 2017; Mamatova, 2020; Abugharsa et al., 2023). The present findings thus reinforce the need for explicit instruction on euphemisms as part of pragmatic and communicative training in educational contexts.

In response to these findings, which highlighted students’ limited prior awareness and the lack of systematic instruction, a targeted lesson on euphemisms was planned and

implemented to explore how such explicit teaching could influence their understanding, thus addressing the second research question.

Shifts in Awareness and Attitudes after the Lesson

Changes in students' comprehension and attitudes toward euphemisms after the instructional activity were central to the second research question. This part of the discussion draws particularly on the themes *Politeness and Respect in Communication*, *Students' Understanding of Euphemisms*, and *Reflection on Personal Growth and Motivational Impact*, which emerged from the thematic analysis. The analysis of post-lesson open-ended questionnaires and Padlet reflections indicated a clear and substantial development in students' conceptual grasp of euphemisms. Initially associated primarily with politeness or indirectness, euphemisms were later recognized by many participants as purposeful linguistic tools used to manage sensitive topics, maintain respectful tone, and adapt communication to specific social or institutional contexts.

This enhanced understanding was evidenced in students' reflections, where they articulated the strategic use of euphemisms in real-life communication. One student commented: "Now I understand that when the teacher said 'Does not meet expectations,' he meant 'poor performance.' He didn't want to tell the student directly." This response shows a developing awareness of euphemistic strategies used in educational settings to mitigate face-threatening acts. Another student wrote: "Teachers always use euphemisms when they explain any topic, give feedback, propose advice. Your academic success has changed." Here, the student not only recognizes euphemistic expressions in institutional discourse but also interprets their communicative purpose with greater nuance.

In line with these examples, multiple students provided contextually grounded insights about the usefulness of euphemisms. One reflection stated: "When you want to be more polite and gentle with people, it will be more appropriate if you use euphemisms in

spheres like work, medicine and education.” Another participant wrote: “Euphemisms should be used in schools and universities to maintain respect for interlocutors. It’s a good way to give feedback politely so as not to offend a person.” These responses underscore a shift from superficial definitions to a greater awareness of when and why euphemisms are employed in formal and semi-formal communication.

Importantly, this evolving understanding aligns with findings by Bloch-Rozmej (2023) and Wang (2024), who argue that explicit instruction in euphemisms enhances learners’ pragmatic competence and linguistic sensitivity. Wang emphasizes the role of euphemisms in intercultural communication and professional discourse, noting that without guided instruction, students may overlook their value in managing tone and emotional impact.

Additionally, students demonstrated the ability to recall and interpret euphemistic expressions they encountered outside the classroom. Several participants cited the phrase “economically challenged” as a more respectful alternative to “poor”, particularly in educational or business contexts. This recognition parallels the findings of Alimzhanova (2022), who compared English and Kazakh euphemisms and noted that expressions like “economically disadvantaged” function to soften social stigma. The fact that students independently recalled such examples after instruction suggests an increased ability to transfer classroom learning to real-world discourse.

These student reflections also validate prior research highlighting the limited awareness and use of euphemisms among learners before explicit instruction. This observation corresponds with findings from Salih (2017), who identified a generally low level of euphemism awareness among university students, many of whom were unable to provide appropriate substitutes for sensitive terms. Similarly, Abugharsa et al. (2023) noted that even advanced students often defaulted to direct language due to insufficient

classroom exposure and lack of confidence in using euphemisms. Furthermore, the pedagogical benefits emphasized by Katermina (2018) and Gulamova (2023) were indirectly echoed in students' reflections. The ability to use euphemisms thoughtfully was perceived by many as a valuable communicative skill, particularly in educational and professional contexts.

This development also echoes the arguments of Zhu and Hu (2018), who emphasize that euphemisms serve as vital strategies for softening speech, preserving interpersonal harmony, and avoiding face-threatening acts in academic communication. Several student reflections confirm this idea. For example, one participant wrote: "Euphemisms should be used in schools and universities to maintain respect for interlocutors." Another stated: "It helps to soften rude phrases or bad news." These responses illustrate an increased awareness of the interpersonal function of euphemisms and support Zhu and Hu's conclusion that such strategies are especially relevant in teacher-student discourse.

Some students in their reflections noted that in certain situations, it is more appropriate to use direct speech rather than euphemisms. One participant wrote: "Euphemisms should be used in informal situations, when you need to show empathy and not hurt the other person. But direct expressions are needed when it's important to be clear and honest." Another added: "We should use euphemisms in sensitive situations and be direct when clarity is essential." These student reflections confirm findings from previous research, which emphasize that while euphemisms play an important role in polite and tactful communication, in some contexts it is better to prioritize direct language—especially when clarity, precision, and transparency are required (Hojati, 2012; Halmari, 2011; Gernsbacher et al., 2016).

Taken together, these responses suggest that after the lesson, students gained a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of euphemisms. They began to

recognize their role in fostering respectful and tactful communication, while also showing an ability to reflect on when directness might be more suitable. These observations indicate a noticeable development in students' perceptions, offering a well-supported response to the second research question.

Pedagogical Implications and Future Applications

The third research question explored how the instructional session could inform future teaching practices for euphemisms in multilingual classrooms. The data gathered from student reflections and post-instruction responses revealed several important outcomes. This part of the discussion draws on the themes Reflection on Personal Growth and Motivational Impact, Use of Euphemisms in Professional and Academic Settings, and Students' Understanding of Euphemisms, which collectively highlight how students internalized and transferred the lesson content to future academic and professional situations.

First, the lesson significantly enhanced students' awareness of euphemisms and their functions in communication.

Second, it prompted students to reflect on the broader relevance of euphemistic language.

Specifically, they began to consider how such strategies could be applied in academic writing, professional interactions, and intercultural communication.

This suggests a growing sensitivity to context-appropriate language use and pragmatic competence.

This observation was further supported by the researcher's reflections, documented during the concluding stage of the action research process. Through the reflective process, I observed that students demonstrated increased sensitivity to tone, purpose, and context in communication. Many of them began to articulate their thoughts more thoughtfully and

chose language more carefully in class discussions and written work after the lesson. This shift confirmed the value of integrating euphemism instruction into classroom practice, not as isolated vocabulary, but as a pragmatic skill embedded in real-world communication.

Moreover, these findings align with the study by Bulusan (2019), who demonstrated that learners adjust their language depending on the formality of the situation. Both Bulusan's research and the present study revealed that students prefer euphemistic or softened expressions in formal or academic contexts, while using more direct or even taboo terms in informal settings. This adaptability was echoed in several student reflections. For instance, one participant shared: "If I talk to a teacher, I try to use polite expressions, but with my friends I can say it more directly."

Another student explained: "I sometimes use euphemisms when I speak to teachers or other students. For example, instead of saying 'I didn't understand anything from the lecture,' I might say 'some parts of the lecture were a bit difficult to follow.' It sounds more polite and respectful."

These comments demonstrate a growing awareness of how language choices can influence social dynamics and show that students have begun to intentionally apply euphemistic strategies to maintain politeness, especially in educational contexts. This confirms that the instructional session helped students not only to internalize the concept of euphemisms but also to reflect on their appropriate use in future professional, intercultural, and academic communication.

The relevance of these observations was further confirmed during my reflective practice as the researcher. Reviewing students' reflections and classroom behavior after the lesson, I noted a clear shift toward more thoughtful and context-sensitive communication. Students were more attentive to tone when responding to peers and used more neutral or softened expressions when discussing potentially uncomfortable topics. These insights

validate the pedagogical value of euphemism instruction and directly address the third research question by showing its applicability in multilingual classrooms focused on respectful and effective interaction.

In conclusion, the study effectively addressed all three research questions. The initial findings revealed that students' understanding of euphemisms was largely superficial, often limited to general ideas of politeness without acknowledging their deeper pragmatic or contextual significance. This confirmed the necessity for explicit instruction, as previously noted in the literature. Following the pedagogical intervention, students demonstrated increased awareness, more nuanced perceptions, and improved application of euphemisms, particularly in academic and professional contexts. Their reflections indicated enhanced sensitivity to tone, appropriateness, and indirectness - essential elements of pragmatic competence.

The third research question was also fully addressed. The students' reflective responses suggested that even a single, purposefully designed lesson on euphemisms can significantly inform future teaching practices. These findings reinforce the argument that euphemisms merit explicit inclusion in language instruction aimed at developing respectful, culturally responsive communication, especially in multilingual educational environments.

Overall, the research met its objectives and contributed meaningful insights into the instructional value of euphemisms. When situated within an action research framework, even short interventions can yield observable progress in learners' pragmatic development and intercultural communicative competence.

Limitations

While the findings of this study were largely positive, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the intervention was limited to a single lesson due to curriculum

constraints. The academic English course had a predetermined syllabus, and there was no opportunity to add supplementary lessons. Although even this one lesson had a noticeable effect on students' awareness and perceptions, the limited duration restricted the possibility of evaluating long-term outcomes. A more sustained and measurable improvement in pragmatic competence would likely require a cycle of lessons implemented over time, with opportunities for repeated practice, feedback, and contextualised application of knowledge.

Second, the study was conducted at a single university with one group of students, which limits the generalizability of the results. Although the data offer valuable insights into how students may respond to pragmatic instruction on euphemisms in multilingual classrooms, it remains unclear whether similar results would be observed in other educational settings or among students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For more generalizable findings, future research should involve a broader sample of participants across multiple institutions, and possibly different levels of language proficiency.

A third limitation concerns the nature of the data collection, which relied primarily on students' self-reports through surveys and written reflections. While these sources provide access to learners' subjective experiences and perceptions, they may not fully capture actual changes in language behaviour. Participants may overestimate or underestimate their understanding and use of euphemisms. Therefore, students' limited ability to objectively assess their own pragmatic development represents an additional methodological limitation. Future research could strengthen the validity of findings by incorporating independent assessments, such as pre- and post-analysis of students' spoken or written discourse, or teacher observations in authentic communication settings.

Recommendations

Considering the outcomes and limitations identified, this study offers several insights that may support both future scholarly work and practical approaches in language education.

Integration of Euphemism Instruction into General English courses is recommended to explicitly incorporate euphemism instruction as part of developing students' pragmatic competence. Future practice is encouraged to move beyond a one-time lesson and to include multi-session modules that explore euphemisms alongside related topics such as politeness strategies, indirectness, and social sensitivity. Repeated exposure and practice are likely to produce more sustainable learning outcomes. Further research may also consider conducting interviews with instructors and classroom discourse analysis to explore how teachers model euphemism use and how students respond to such modelling in real-time interactions.

As this study focused on short-term outcomes, future research could examine long-term retention and application of euphemism knowledge. Additionally, it would be valuable for future studies to include participants from diverse institutions, disciplines, and linguistic backgrounds. Comparing results across multilingual learners at different proficiency levels may help enhance the generalizability of findings.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how university students understand and perceive euphemisms in educational contexts. It also assessed the effectiveness of explicit instruction in euphemistic language. A qualitative approach using an action research design was chosen. This allowed the study to address the issue of limited pragmatic awareness in a multilingual academic environment, where euphemisms are often overlooked as a tool for classroom communication.

Three research questions were investigated during a single cycle of action research. The first question focused on students' initial understanding of euphemisms. Before the lesson, most students had only a basic idea. They described euphemisms without recognizing their deeper pragmatic functions or usage in context.

The second question examined how students' awareness changed after the lesson. Post-lesson surveys and written reflections showed a clear improvement. Students began to notice euphemisms in academic and professional texts. More importantly, they started using them intentionally — to soften criticism, avoid conflict, and maintain respectful tone in communication.

The third question explored the value of this lesson for future teaching practice. Students reported that euphemisms were helpful in group work, public speaking, and sensitive conversations. They started to view euphemisms as useful tools for creating more thoughtful and respectful communication.

The findings have practical value for teachers and curriculum developers. The study showed that even one focused lesson can raise students' pragmatic awareness. Euphemisms help create a respectful and emotionally safe learning environment. Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. These include integrating

euphemism instruction into teacher training, designing contextual learning materials, and encouraging reflective tasks that build politeness strategies.

However, the study has some limitations. Only one action research cycle was conducted due to time and academic constraints. The participant group came from a single university, which limits how broadly the results can be applied. Data was also based on self-reported responses, which might affect reliability.

Future research could include multiple teaching cycles or long-term observation. It would also be useful to compare students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Another direction could be the study of how teachers themselves use euphemisms in feedback and classroom management.

In conclusion, the study achieved its goals. Students developed a deeper understanding of euphemisms. They began to apply them consciously in both academic and everyday communication. The findings offer new insights for educational practice and confirm that euphemisms are valuable tools for respectful, tactful, and effective interaction in multilingual learning settings.

References

- Abugharsa, A., Friwan, T., & Elgubbi, M. (2023, November 28). Libyan EFL students' understanding and use of euphemism in their performance. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*.
- Ahmetov, Ä. (2015). *Týrki týlderindegi tabu men evfemizmder (Salýstırmaly etnolingvıstıcalyq paýym)* [Taboo and Euphemisms in Turkic Languages (A Comparative Ethnolinguistic Study)]. Astana: Gýlym.
- Akyltaev, A., Aikenov, D., & Eslyan, R. (2023). *Compiling a dictionary of modern English euphemisms* (Bachelor's thesis). M. S. Narikbayev KAZGUU University.
- Alimzhanova, F. B. (2022). Linguocultural analysis of euphemism in the Kazakh and English languages. *Philological Sciences*, 33, 164-181.
- Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden words: Taboo and the censoring of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bloch-Rozmej, A. (2023). Euphemisms and teacher–student interactions. *Linguistics Beyond and Within (LingBaW)*, 9(9), 6-22.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2019). *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Roadmap From Beginning to End* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Boltaboyeva, U. M. (2025). Euphemisms as linguistic phenomena. *International Journal of Innovative Approaches in Linguistics*, 3(1), 302–307.
- Brookhart, S. M. (2008). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. ASCD. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/howtogiveeffecti0000broo>
- Brousse, C. M. (2020). *The effects of figurative language on perceptions of war: A case of euphemisms and dysphemisms* (Master's thesis). University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Bulusan, F. (2019). College ESL learners' politeness in using linguistic taboos and euphemisms: Looking through the socio-pragmatic lens. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(3), 148–157. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n3p148>
- Burns, A. (2009). Action research in second language teacher education. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 289–297). Cambridge University Press.
- Cao, Y. (2020). Analysis of pragmatic functions of English euphemism from the perspective of pragmatic principles. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(9), 1094–1100.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research designs. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Dutková, E. S. (2023). *Perspectives on discussing taboo topics in ELT* (Bachelor's thesis). Masaryk University, Faculty of Education.
- Efron, S. E., & Ravid, R. (2013). *Action research in education: A practical guide*. The Guilford Press.
- Enright, D. J. (1985). *Fair of speech: The uses of euphemism*. Oxford University Press.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. (n.d.). *Action research in Kazakhstan*. <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/networks/eri/casestudies/kazakhstan/actionresearch/>

- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Fernández, E. C. (2005). Euphemistic strategies in politeness and face concerns. *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, 27(2), 33–49.
- Frigillano, S. D. (2020). Influence of euphemistic texts on students' corrupt communication usage, empathy and prejudice. *The Normal Lights*, 14(1), 1–16. Iloilo Science and Technology University.
- Gernsbacher, M. A., Raimond, A. R., Balinghasay, M. T., & Boston, J. S. (2016). "Special needs" is an ineffective euphemism. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, 1(29). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-016-0025-4>
- Gómez, M. C. (2009). Towards a new approach to the linguistic definition of euphemism. *Language sciences*, 31(6), 725-739.
- Gryzina, O. V. (2021). *Eufemizmy kak sredstvo nejtralizatsii obidnogo obshcheniya v uchebno-pedagogicheskom diskurse* [Euphemisms as a means of neutralizing offensive communication in educational and pedagogical discourse]. *Filologicheskii aspekt*, (4), 189–196.
- Gulamova, D. I. (2023). Methods of forming the culture of using euphemisms in 5–6th grade native language classes. *International Journal of Literature and Languages*, 3(11), 61–67.
- Halmari, H. (2011). Political correctness, euphemism, and language change: The case of 'people first'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(3), 828–840.
doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2010.09
- Haryati, S. (2020). The study of taboo and euphemism on the English department students in Universitas Pamulang. *Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 4(1), 92-111.

- Hojati, A. (2012). A study of euphemisms in the context of English-speaking media. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4(4), 552–562.
<https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i4.2933>
- Holder, R. (1996). *A Dictionary of Euphemisms*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hughes, G. (2006). *An encyclopedia of swearing: The social history of oaths, profanity, foul language, and ethnic slurs in the English-speaking world*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Ismailova, H. I. (2022). Semantic and structural differentiation of euphemisms. *Journal of Pedagogical Inventions and Practices*, 9, 161–166.
- Jamet, D., Burrige, K., Allan, K., & Crespo-Fernandez, E. (2012). Euphemism as a word-formation process. *Lexis. Journal in English Lexicology*, 7.
- Kashkinbayeva, Z. Z., Maudarbekova, B. K., & Makhanbetov, A. I. (2014). Brief review of the synonymy and euphemisms in Kazakh. *Paradigmata poznani*, (2), 213-220.
- Katermina, V. (2018, May). *Evfemizmy kak sredstva manipuljacji v pedagogicheskom diskurse* [Euphemisms as a means of manipulation in pedagogical discourse]. In *Society. Integration. Education. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference* (Vol. 1, pp. 209–217). <https://doi.org/10.17770/sie2018vol1.3129>
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The Action Research Planner*. Deakin University Press.
- Kenzhebayeva, A. A. (2015). Euphemisms in Kazakh and Chinese languages: Comparative analysis. *KazNU Bulletin. Oriental series*, 3(73), 141-145
- Keyes, R. (2010). *Euphemania: Our love affair with euphemisms*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Khalil, Y. M., & Mohammed, I. J. (2024). The effect of euphemism as teaching expressions on EFL university students' performance in producing vocabulary. *South Eastern European Journal of Public Health*. Advance online publication.

- Khudaybergenova, N. R. (2022). The theory of English euphemisms and their peculiar features in language teaching methodology. *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference on Society, Integration, and Education, 1*, 209–217.
<https://doi.org/10.17770/sie2018vol1.3129>
- Koblandina, K., Yessenova, K., Koblanova, A., Kassenov, Y., & Nurzhanova, A. (2025). Navigating the world of euphemisms: Comparative analysis of periphrasis in modern media. *European Journal of Language Policy, 17*(1), 120-134.
<https://doi.org/10.3828/ejlp.2025.7>
- Kovaleva, T. A. (2008). Frazеologicheskie evfemizmy v sovremennom angliyskom yazyke (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Kolomenskij gosudarstvennyj pedagogicheskij institut, Kolomna, Rossiya.
- Laude-Cirtautas, I. (1976). *K voprosu o tabu i evfemizmax v kazakhskom, kirgizskom i uzbekskom yazykakh* [On the issue of taboo and euphemisms in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek languages]. *Sovetskaya tyurkologiya, (4)*, 72-86 [In Russian].
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues, 2*(4), 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1946.tb02295.x>
- Lutz, W. (1987). Doublespeak at large. *English Today, 3*(12), 21–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078400003072>
- M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University. (2020). *Academic Policy. Astana, Kazakhstan: M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University.*
- Mamatova, F. B. (2020). The role of euphemisms in teaching. *EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD), 5*(7), 138–145.
<https://doi.org/10.36713/epra2016>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2011). *All you need to know about action research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Euphemism. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
- Mocanu, M. (2017). Taboo and euphemism in the religious language. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 7(1), 1-9.
<https://www.learntechlib.org/p/176437/>
- Mononen-Aaltonen, M. (1998). A learning environment: A euphemism for instruction or a potential for dialogue? In S. Tella (Ed.), *Aspects of media education: Strategic imperatives in the information age* (pp. 163–218). University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education.
- Nikitina, E. Y., & Zyryanova, E. A. (2011). *Teoriya i metodika formirovaniya navykov rechevogo etiketa u mladshikh shkol'nikov* [Theory and methods of forming speech etiquette skills in junior students].
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative research and evaluation and methods* (3rd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Pryadilnikova, N. V. (2006). Evfemizatsiya rechi v sotsiokul'turnom aspekte [Speech euphemisation in a sociocultural aspect]. *Vestnik of Samara State Aerospace University*, (3), 143–149.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1939). *Taboo*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.kz/books?id=HV5kAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA3>
- Rahayuningsih, D., Saleh, M., & Fitriati, S. W. (2020). The realization of politeness strategies in EFL teacher-students classroom interaction. *English Education Journal*, 10(3), 120–133.

- Rapaeva, Yu. V. (2019). Obuchenie shkol'nikov ispol'zovaniyu evfemizmov v rechi [Teaching schoolchildren to use euphemisms in speech]. *Modern High Technologies*, (8), 168–171.
- Salih, H. A. (2017). *The application of euphemism in teaching English in some secondary schools in Misurata, Libya* (Master's thesis). The Libyan Academy for Graduate Studies - Misurata Branch.
- Sarantakos, S. (1998). *Social research* (2nd ed.). Macmillan Education Australia.
- Southerland, R., & Katamba, F. (1997). *Euphemisms in contemporary linguistics*. New York: Longman.
- Stringer, E. T. (2014). *Action Research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Tadjibaeva, A. A. (2016). National–cultural specificity of euphemisms. *Man In India*, 96(7), 2155–2163.
- Toxanbayeva, R. K., & Kenzhehanova, K. K. (2020). The importance of social euphemisms and their application to British and Kazakh press. *Vestnik KazNU Seriya filologicheskaya*, 178(2), 166-173.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2009.05.001>
- UNESCO. (2021). *Kazakhstan: Inclusion in education*. Global Education Monitoring Report. Retrieved from <https://education-profiles.org/central-and-southern-asia/kazakhstan/~inclusion>
- University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education. (n.d.). *Action research in Kazakhstan*. Retrieved April 22, 2025, from <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/networks/eri/casestudies/kazakhstan/actionresearch/>
- Wang, M. (2013). Corpus analysis of English euphemisms in college English. *English Language Teaching*, 6(8), 156.

- Wang, Y. (2024). Analysis of euphemism teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language under the environment of modern educational technology. *International Journal of Cognitive Informatics and Natural Intelligence*, 18(1), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.4018/IJCINI.360787>
- Warren, B. (1992). What euphemisms tell us about the interpretation of words? *Studia Linguistica*, 46(2), 128-172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9582.1992.tb00833.x>
- Wedlock, J. (2020). Teaching about taboo language in EFL/ESL classes: A starting point. *ORTESOL Journal*, 37, 33–47.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370230059>
- Yekhsanova, Z. A., Ramazanova, A. E., & Mukazhanova, G. Z. (2020). Euphemisms in the English and Kazakh languages. *In Word science: problems and innovations*, 162-165.
- Yıldız, U. F. (2021). Use of euphemisms in youth language. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(Special Issue 2), 1117–1128.
- Zhu, P., & Hu, Y. (2018). Euphemisms in interpersonal communication: A pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspective. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 6(2), 34–41.

Appendix A

Lesson Title: "The Power of Words: Understanding Euphemisms in Education"

Lesson Objectives:

- To provide students with foundational knowledge of euphemisms and their pragmatic significance in interaction.
- To help students identify euphemisms commonly used in educational settings.
- To encourage critical thinking about how euphemisms influence clarity, tone, and effectiveness in communication.

Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard for examples and discussion.
- Handouts with scenarios or sentences containing euphemisms (one per group).
- Padlet (QR code) for reflection responses.

Timing & Stage (Interaction)	Stage Aim	Procedure & Materials
7 mins - Warm-up (Open Class)	To introduce the topic of politeness and lead into the concept of euphemisms.	<p>Task 1:Teacher asks: "What does it mean to be polite?" (2 mins) - Students give quick answers.</p> <p>Task 2: The teacher shows a slide :</p> <p>We're downsizing the team.</p> <p>She's between jobs right now.</p> <p>The special needs child needs extra support.</p> <p>He is academically challenged.</p> <p>Task 3:Students, in pairs, discuss what these phrases mean and why people use them instead of direct language. (5 mins)</p> <p>Introduce the term "euphemism": a polite way of saying something potentially unpleasant.</p>
15 mins - Explanation & Examples (Open Class)	To clearly explain what euphemisms are and provide relevant examples.	<p>Task 1:Teacher explains why we use euphemisms: to be polite, avoid offense, or soften bad news. (3 mins)</p> <p>Establish understanding by asking Concept checking questions:</p> <p><i>Politeness:</i></p> <p><i>"Why might someone use a euphemism when talking to their boss about being late for work?" (Looking for answers that relate to maintaining a polite and professional demeanor.)</i></p> <p><i>Avoiding Offense:</i></p> <p><i>"Imagine a friend has gained weight. Would you say 'You've gotten fat' or 'You look like you've put on a little weight'? Why?" (Expected answer should show understanding of how euphemisms can prevent hurt feelings.)</i></p> <p><i>"Can you think of a situation where being too direct could offend someone, even if you're telling the truth?"</i></p>

		<p>Softening Bad News:</p> <p><i>"If a company is laying off employees, why might they use the term 'downsizing' instead of 'firing people'?" (Looking for recognition that "downsizing" is less harsh.)</i></p> <p><i>"Why might a doctor use a euphemism when telling a patient about a serious illness?" (Expected answer: to soften the blow and avoid causing unnecessary distress initially.)</i></p> <p>General Understanding:</p> <p><i>"So, are euphemisms always the best choice? Why or why not?" (Prompts critical thinking about the potential downsides.)</i></p> <p><i>"Give me an example not from the lesson, of when someone might use euphemism"(10 mins)</i></p> <p>Task 3: Give examples of euphemisms at school, college, or university. (2 mins)</p>
<p>25 mins - Group Activity (Small Groups)</p>	<p>To practice identifying and analyzing euphemisms in context.</p>	<p>Task 1: Divide students into groups of 3-4. (3 mins)</p> <p>Task 2: Give each group a handout with scenarios containing euphemisms (see example scenarios below). (7 min)</p> <p>Task 3: Groups identify the euphemisms, rewrite the sentences in direct language, and discuss how the euphemism changes the meaning/feeling. They record their answers on the handout. (15 mins)</p>
<p>13 mins - Class Discussion & Reflection (Open Class, Individual)</p>	<p>To encourage critical thinking about the use and impact of euphemisms.</p>	<p>link to the Padlet</p> <p>Task 1: Teacher leads a class discussion using these questions: (7mins)</p> <p>Have you become more aware of euphemisms in your daily interactions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do euphemisms always make communication more polite, or can they sometimes cause misunderstandings? - What did you learn from this lesson? <p>Task 2: Students write a quick answer to this question: "Do euphemisms make communication in schools better or worse?" (6 mins)</p>

Group Work: Identifying and Analyzing Euphemisms

Your Task:

Carefully read each sentence/scenario.

Identify and highlight the euphemisms used in each sentence/scenario. Write them in the "Euphemisms" column.

Rewrite the given sentence using more direct and clear language in the "Direct Language" column.

Discuss within your group how euphemisms can affect the reader's understanding or emotions. Write your rewritten sentences and observations in the "Euphemism's Impact" column.

Scenario/Sentence	Euphemism(s)	Direct Language	Impact of Euphemism
1. Report Card Comment: [Student's Name] is a developing learner in mathematics.	<i>Developing learner</i>	Tom is struggling in mathematics.	Softens the blow for parents, but may not clearly communicate the severity of the problem. Can sound like the child is progressing, when they may be behind.
2. Teacher to Student: I noticed you were having a side conversation during the lesson.			

Appendix B

Screenshots of Student Responses from the Padlet Platform

