Euphemistic Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Learners: Death and Lying in Focus

Dr. Amin Karimnia* (Corresponding Author)
Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics,
Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran
E-mail: aminkarimnia@yahoo.com

Mohammad Reza Khodashenas
PhD Candidate of TEFL,
Torbat-e-Heydarieh-Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran
E-mail: mrkhodashenas@yahoo.com

Abstract

Euphemism is a communicative strategy used to frame a polite or less offensive language and to save people's public face in communication. This study investigated the euphemistic strategies used by Persian speakers in situations associated with death and lying. Warren's model of euphemism was drawn on as the analytic model guiding the study. To conduct the study, 60 male and female university students were randomly selected. The data were gathered through copies of an open-ended questionnaire and then analyzed. It was found that "figurative expression", "implication", "overstatement", "understatement", and "particularization" were the most frequently used euphemistic strategies among the participants in the contexts of death and lying. The study also revealed that there was no relationship between gender and the choice of euphemistic strategies. The findings implied that euphemistic strategies might reflect cultural and religious values.

Keywords: Euphemistic Strategies, Politeness Strategies, Taboos, Death, Lying, and Culture

Introduction

As a system of signs and symbols, language is constantly changed, developed, and extended through time. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language functions as a sophisticated means of communication in human communities. Language and society are intricately interrelated and have a reciprocal relationship. As communities grow, languages too start to develop. Some language varieties are forbidden and some words/expressions are marked vulgar, taboo, unwashed, or at least low-class (Tal, 2003). Using language, people can freely choose various words and statements to express their feelings or exchange their ideas. As Wafi (1983) states, the choice of words is very important in maintaining a conversation. To start and maintain a conversation, as Wafi advises, language users should apply a mellowed tone of language which is polite, respectable, or even impressive.

In different communities with different cultural and religious backgrounds, people tend to use varieties of language, depending on the situations in which they interact (e.g. office, home, university) and on the degree of formality they perceive (e.g. parents, friends, boss) (Allan & Burridge, 2006). People are more likely to use polite and courteous words in their social encounters (Linfoot-Ham, 2005). Even in the case of mass media, Slotkin (1994) has observed that censorship and avoidance of using obscene and frivolous terms play a crucial role in broadcasting and transferring unspeakable topics. Burchfield (1985) claims that "a language without euphemisms would be a defective instrument of communication" (p. 23). Similarly, Leech (1974) views euphemisms as the "linguistic equivalent of disinfectant" (p. 53).

According to Allan and Burridge (1991), euphemistic utterances occur in both spoken and written languages, but they are usually used in oral communication. Euphemistic strategies, as Linfoot-Ham (2005) states, are linguistic tools that people incorporate into their conversations instinctively. He explains that euphemisms are socially needed because they are implemented to discuss tabooed topics, and emotionally they reduce pressure and keep up a certain level of politeness. Rawson (1981) considers euphemisms to be communicative strategies which are used by speakers of a language to maintain face and avoid being outspoken. Considering the importance of euphemisms, Crystal (1992) declares that people use euphemisms to: (a) keep public face; (b) avoid threatening the social face of their interlocutors; (c) re-frame offensive topics; (d) describe unpleasant events or experiences; (e) avoid direct mention of distasteful subjects; (f) avoid revealing a secret; and (g) sometimes amuse interlocutors.

Viewing euphemism as a universal phenomenon, this study aims to investigate euphemistic strategies used by Persian speakers. In doing so, the study focuses on two contexts (conversions about death and lying). Warren's (1992) model of euphemisms, which focuses on semantic innovations, guides the analysis of the data gathered from the contexts. The study also tries to investigate the hypothetical

differences between males and females in terms of using euphemistic utterances in Persian speaking contexts.

Review of Literature

Euphemism is derived from Greek. Etymologically, the prefix *eu-* means *well or good*, the root *phemi* means *speaking*, and the suffix *ism* means *result or action.* Thus, the word *euphemism* means *good speech* or *speaking well of something* (McArthur, 1992). In the Hutchinson encyclopedia (1990), euphemism is defined as *speaking well of something*. In their historical review (Williams, 1975; Neaman & Silver, 1983; Epstein, 1985) contend that euphemism expressions are rooted in religious issues. For example, the *Eumenides* (the good humored lady) was used for the *Furies* and the *Avenging* Gods, in the hope that they might be flattered into being less furious.

Many definitions have been presented by researchers (Kany, 1960; Diebold, 1961; Williams, 1975; Willis & Klammer, 1981; Fromkin & Rodman, 1993; Abrantes, 2005; Fernández, 2006; Gomez, 2009) asserts that euphemism is a communicative tool by which offensive or disagreeable issues are substituted with an indirect or softer terms. Williams (1975), Similarly, defines euphemism as a type of linguistic amelioration which seeks to find the socially acceptable terms for concepts which may seem unpleasant. Whatever definition of a euphemism we consider, it is agreed that a euphemism is a mannerly and genteel way of phrasing which is used to garnish and debilitate the unpleasantness of a statement.

"Face" and "public image" are concepts which were suggested and described by Brown and Levinson (1987). They claim that the concept of "face" plays a crucial role in creating euphemisms. According to Wardhaugh (2006), people employ euphemism to save their audiences' face or their own public image. Ham (2005) explains that the main function of using euphemistic expressions is to save the listeners' face from a possible violation against each other, which resulted from stating a tabooed topic to which one of them may be sensitive. On the other hand, Bowers and Pleydell-Pearce (2011) clarify that through the use of euphemisms, language users not only protect their own face but they can also protect others' face.

Regarding the psychological effects of euphemistic expressions on the interlocutors, Tal (2003) distinguishes two types of euphemisms. Amplifying euphemisms which make people feel greater and more important than they really are; in contrast, minifying euphemisms consolidate the strong feeling of hatred and dislike.

According to Wardhaugh (1984), "taboo is one way in which a society expresses its disapproval of certain kinds of behavior believed to be harmful to its members, either for supernatural reasons or because such behavior is held to violate a moral code" (p. 45). According to Fershtman et al. (2011), a taboo is a kind of "thought police" which governs both human behavior and human thoughts. They go

further in their definition and demonstrate that cultural values and religious beliefs of a society are indicators of tabooed topics. Although there are a lot of tabooed topics, Abrantes (2005) classifies them into three major categories: fear-based tabooed topics (e.g. death and disease), politeness-based tabooed topics (e.g. lying, insults) and shame-based tabooed topics (e.g. sex and excretion).

Van Oudenhoven et al. (2008) conduct a research on euphemisms in 11 different societies (Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Great Britain, USA, Norway, Greece, and The Netherlands). All the 3000 participants were asked to write down terms of abuse which they use in certain contexts. The findings reveal that cultural differences lead to the use of various euphemisms which may not be common in other societies. Similarly, in a sociolinguistic study of linguistic taboos in Persian, Aliakbari and Raeeisi (2015) clarify that euphemisms are culture- and religion-dependent terms. Moreover, Guo (2010) in a contrastive study of Chinese euphemisms and English euphemisms points out that using euphemistic expressions is particularly a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. Similarly, Gomaa and Shi (2012) conduct a contrastive study of death euphemisms in Egyptian, Arabic, and Chinese. They confirm the role of cultural differences in using euphemisms. Furthermore, they reveal that death euphemisms are mainly and structurally employed in Chinese, Arabic, and Egyptian as a figure of speech and a linguistic device.

In a study of communicative functions of euphemisms in Persian, Bakhtiar (2012) explains that in Persian euphemisms are divided into three categories according to their communicative functions. Firstly, euphemistic utterances are used to avoid offending both the speaker and listener's public-image. Secondly, they are stylistic markers which are used in appropriate contexts. Thirdly, they are employed by people in power to impose their thoughts on them. Badakhshan and Mousavi (2014) investigate the linguistic and cognitive mechanisms of producing euphemistic expressions and suggest the following main devices for the construction of euphemisms in Persian: loan words, fuzzy words, deictic expressions, metonymy, semantic widening, reversal, circumlocution, understatement, overstatement, omission, reduplication, implication, and metaphor.

Warren (1992) asserts that a euphemism is in the eye of the beholder. She also presupposes that an utterance is a euphemism, when the listener feels that the speaker uses polite and tactful words or expressions to convey a sensitive issue. She assumes three prerequisites for her definition. First, the topic of conversation should be a sensitive one or refer to something unpleasant (e.g. death, health, crime, lying, politics, sex). Second, the utterance stated should be indirect or less rough than other alternatives. Third, the listener finds that the speaker forced to use that statement because of embarrassment or offensiveness of the issue. According to Warren (1992), euphemisms may be constructed in four ways. Firstly, it is possible to use

word formation devices to construct euphemistic utterances. Compounding (e.g. *comfort station*), acronyms (e.g. *AIDS*, a disease for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*), blends (e.g. *brunch*), derivations (e.g. *sanguinary*), onomatopoeia (e.g. *quak quak* for ducks) are types of such devices. Secondly, borrowing is another way of using euphemisms. Words such as *lingerie* from French, *sativa* (marijuana) from Latin and *Calaboose* from (jail) from Spanish are common loaned words in English. Thirdly, phonemic modification is another way of making offensive utterances euphemized. Phonemic replacement such as *gad, gosh,* and *golly* for "God", *Fug* for "fuck", back slang words such as *epar* instead of "rape", and rhyming slang phonemic similarities such as *darn* instead of "damn" are common strategies used for phonemic modification. The last way for forming euphemisms is to create a new feeling for the existing words or combination of words. For example, *sanitary engineer* is a euphemized term used for "garbage man". The first three ways of forming euphemisms are derived from formal innovation, while the last way was derived from semantic innovation. The most common euphemized utterances are derived from semantic innovation. Figure 1 below, illustrates the exhaustive classification of euphemisms, based on Warren (1992):
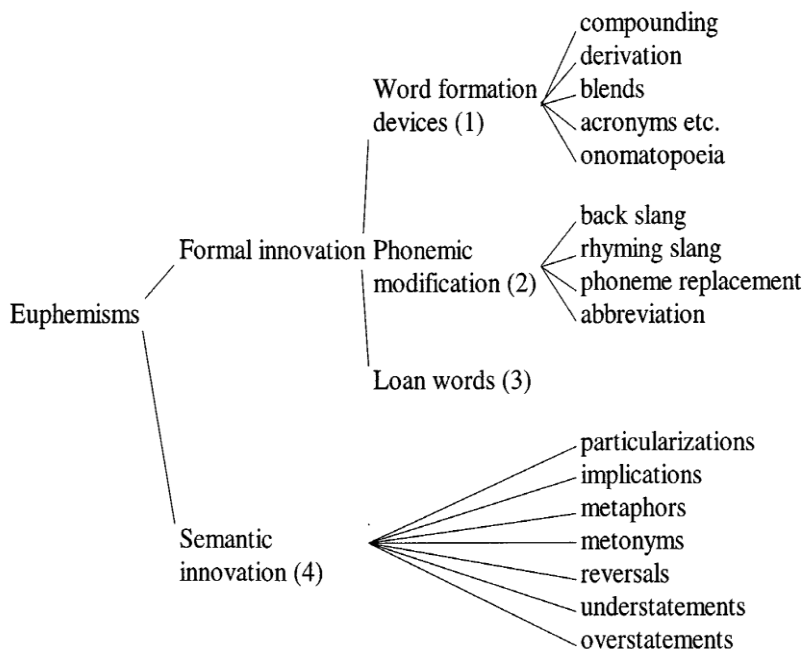
Figure 1. Classification of Euphemisms (Warren, 1992, p.134)

Other devices such as omission, circumlocution, fuzzy words, part to whole, and reduplication are suggested by Allan and Burridge (1991), which are less common. As figure 1 above illustrates, euphemisms derived from semantic innovation are: particularization, implications, metaphors, metonyms, reversals, understatements, and overstatements. Each of them is discussed below:

- ***Particularization:*** is the most common used device for creating euphemisms. According to Warren (1992), particularization refers to the selection of a particular term for an offensive expression. Particularization does not only discuss the meanings of the new terms become particularized, but also explains how they get their idiomatic meanings. In other words, in particularization the listener has to use his/her general knowledge of context or situation to get the missing meaning and information. For example, the expression *cut out to be a gentleman* has the particularized meaning of "destined to be a gentleman".

- ***Implications:*** in comparison with particularization, implications can have secondary senses, while particularization cannot. Warren (1992) defines implications as the result of the causal relationship between the contextual and conventional referents. This relationship is not necessarily antecedent-consequent one. It can also be reversed. Thus, Warren (1992) claims that implications are ambiguous and depending on the context and situation they are used, the listeners can interpret them differently. For example, the phrase *do one's bit:* if/then "one does one's duty" (established term), then/if "one dies in service" (new euphemistic term).

- ***Figurative expressions:*** since the distinction between metaphors and metonymies is often controversial, this study discussed them under the heading of figurative expressions. As Warren (1992) and Allan and Burridge (1991) state, metaphors are flexible devices which rely on the imagination of humans. Newmark (1988) distinguishes six types of metaphors: (a) dead metaphors; referring to the main parts of body, global issues of time, and major human activities, such as *space, leg, food*, (b) cliché metaphors; using as an alternative for clear thought without relating to the facts of the matters, such as the use of *break though* in academic context, (c) stock metaphors; referring to the simple techniques of covering a mental and physical situation in an informal context, such as *the ball is in their court*, (d) adapted metaphors, are usually used as replacement for stock metaphors, such as *the ball is a little in their court*, (e) recent metaphors which are new and widespread, and (f) original metaphors which are used or created by the author. On the other hand, Allan and Burridge (1991) define metonymy in terms of substituting words with other words. One-for-one substitution and whole-to-part and part-to-whole substitutions are various forms of metonymy. For instance *bathroom* is used for WC. According to Kirkmann (1992), metonymies can be used as euphemisms in six ways: (a) relating to general instead of a part of it, (b) relating to a part instead of the whole, (c) relating to an organization instead of an individual,

(d) relating to a property instead of its bearer, (e) relating to a thing instead of its consumer, and (f) relating to a place of event instead of the event itself.

- *Reversals:* as Warren (1992) states reversals (irony) refer to the use of the opposite meaning of something impolite. They are context dependent, have an ironic tone and put emphasis on the opposite term. For example, *huge* means "unusually small".

- *Understatements:* understatements (litotes) usually occur when the undesirable features are downgraded. For example, *drug habit* is used instead of "drug addiction".

- *Overstatements:* overstatements (hyperboles) occur when the desirable features are upgraded. For example, *flight to glory* is used instead of "death".

For the purpose of this study, one fear-based tabooed topic (death) and one politeness-based tabooed topic (lying) were investigated in an empirical context. Warren's (1992) classification of euphemisms guides the analysis of the data gathered. The semantic innovation branch of this classification is of most interest in this study. This study also tries to investigate the difference between males and females in employing euphemisms in tabooed contexts.

Method

Design

This study drew on Warren's (1992) model of euphemisms to analyze a sample of Persian utterances pertaining to the concepts of death and lying. The study relied on a mixed method design. In other words, it integrated qualitative and quantitative research designs and paradigmatic specifications (see Dörnyei, 2007).

Participants

The participants were 60 Persian-speaking, undergraduate students of English language teaching. They were 30 male and 30 female students who were randomly selected from Mashhad Islamic Azad University. They were divided into two equally sized groups (thirty individuals in each group). The participants were aged 22-30 years.

Instrumentation

To gather the data for analysis, an open-ended questionnaire was designed. It consisted of two parts. In the first part, the students were asked to provide related demographic information (gender, age, level of education). In the second section,

they were asked to write their responses to four conversational situations (formal and informal) which revolved around two tabooed topics (death and lying). The selected topics represented two common types of themes which, according to Abrantes (2005), are associated with social and cultural taboos: fear-related and politeness-related topics. To examine the face validity of the questionnaire, two experts in language teaching and testing from Mashhad Islamic Azad University were asked to review the items and give feedback regarding their appropriateness.

Data Analysis Procedure

After the participants were selected and divided into two equally sized groups of males and females, the questionnaires were distributed among them. They were asked to write as many responses as they could for each situation within an hour. Focusing on Warren's model of euphemisms (semantic innovations), gender (male vs. female), and degree of formality (formal vs. informal), two language experts from Mashhad Islamic Azad University classified the participants' responses. Among all of the utterances collected, the researchers reduced the data down to 40 topics to sort out only those which were more common in the Persian speaking society. Finally, frequency and percentage statistics were computed to find the most frequent strategies among males and females in both formal and informal situations.

Findings and Results

The study relied on Warren's (1992) model of euphemisms. According to the text-processing parcel of the model, euphemistic strategies which could change the meanings of words and utterances are called *semantic innovations*. According to Allen and Burridge (1991) and Warren (1992), euphemistic utterances derived from semantic innovations can be categorized into six types: particularization, figurative expressions (metaphor and metonymy), overstatement, understatement, implication, and reversal.

The findings of the present study were reported in two sections. The first section presents the frequencies and types of euphemistic strategies used by male and female Persian speakers in formal and informal situations about a fear-related topic (death). The second section presents the types and frequencies of the euphemistic strategies used by the same population about a politeness-related topic (lying).

Death

According to Searle (1998), death is a natural process and an inevitable phenomenon in human life. People who observe the death of others, especially beloved ones, tend to feel dread, affection, and loneliness. Because of this, Abrantes (2005) considers death to be a fear-specific topic which is unpleasant to most people. Thus, members

of all societies try to use euphemistic strategies to conceal feared concepts such as death and to avoid directly expressing ideas about death (Chu, 2009). Table 1 lists various utterances with their English equivalents, which were produced by the Persian speakers to address this fear-related tabooed topic (death) in formal and informal situations.

Table 1. Some Euphemistic Utterances Provided by Persian Speakers to Address the Death

Persian Expression	English Equivalent
Doktoraa javabesh kardan	Doctors have rejected him
Omresho daad be shomaa	He gave his life time to you
Aadam khubi bud	He was a good man
Khodaa rahmatesh konad	God bless him
Un khodaa biaamorz hichvaght bad kasi ro nakhaast	That God-blessed never wished anybody ill
Ruhash shaad	May his soul rest in peace
Baazgasht hame be suye ust	To Him we shall return
Jaayash dar behesht ast	He will be in paradise
Izraaeil jaanash raa gereft	The death angle took his soul
Be rahmat Izadi peivast	He departed / passed away
Un be khaak baazgasht	He returned to the dust

Table 2 lists some euphemized utterances expressed by Persian speakers who try to avoid strong words such as *mord* (died). It also shows that most of the euphemistic utterances in both formal and informal situations fall under four categories: figurative expressions (23, 28.75%), implications (23, 28.75%), overstatements (19, 23.75%), and particularization (12, 15%). As shown in Table 2, most of the euphemistic expressions belonged to the figurative expression and implication strategies. The formal situation choices displayed 13 figurative expressions (metaphors and metonymies) covering 32.5% of the cases. The informal situation, too, included 10 utterances (25%) (e.g. *un be khaneh jadidash rafte ast* [he has moved out of an old house into a newer house] and *un be khaab abadi rafte ast* [he fell into a forever slumber]). Implicit utterances were as frequent as the figurative

expressions. The formal situation showed 10 implicit responses covering 25% of the cases, whereas the informal situation included 13 responses which accounted for 32.5% of the utterances (e.g. *raft az pishe ma* [he kicked the bucket] and *un raa dar taabut gozaashtan* [he went home in a box]).

Particularization, which involves explicit expressions, was the next most frequently used strategy. The formal situation displayed 5 responses of this strategy (12.5%), whereas the informal situation showed 7 responses (17.5%) (e.g. *un be dyaar faani raft* [he went to his eternal home] and *un be nedaaye hagh labbeik goft* [he answered the last call]). Overstatement, a strategy used to express an event exaggeratedly, was the last euphemistic strategy used by the Persian speakers. All expressions which referred to God were accounted as instances of this strategy. The formal, death-related utterances accounted for 11 overstated expressions (27.5%), although the informal situation displayed 8 overstated expressions (20%) (e.g. *un be suye khodaa rafte ast* [he flew up to God] and *un nazd parvardegaarash baazgasht* [he returned to his Creator]). Understatement and reversal strategies of euphemisms related to death were so inconsiderable to be mentioned.

Table 2. Frequencies of Death-Related Euphemistic Strategies

Strategy	Situation				Total	
	Formal		Informal			
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	N	%
Understatement	1	2.5%	2	5%	3	3.75
Overstatement	11	27.5%	8	20%	19	23.75
Reversal	-	-	-	-	-	-
Figurative Expression	13	32.5%	10	25%	23	28.75
Particularization	5	12.5%	7	17.5%	12	15
Implication	10	25%	13	32.5%	23	28.75
Total	40	100%	40	100%	80	100

Lying

Lying, although a universally acknowledged notion, may be defined in different ways (see Pierce, 1955; Krishna, 1961; Mannison, 1969; Lindley, 1971; Kupfer, 1982; Primoratz, 1984; Grice, 1989; Grotius, 2005; Faulkner, 2007; Stokke, 2013). According to *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (2017), telling a lie means telling an intentional false statement for the purpose of deceiving somebody. The most acceptable definition of lying is proposed by Isenberg (1973), who believes lying involves "making a statement believed to be false, with the intention of getting another to accept it as true" (p. 284). According to Abrantes (2005), lying reflects one of the most familiar tabooed topics (in the category of politeness-related topics).

Table 3 lists utterances with their English equivalents which were produced by the Persian speakers to address this politeness-related tabooed topic (lying) in formal and informal situations.

Table 3. Some Euphemistic Utterances by Persian Speakers to Address Lying

Persian Expression	English Equivalent
Durugh maslahati	A white lie
Hamash kalak ast	It is all a fiddle
Durughash baraam ro shude	I have his number
Dige taa nabinam baavar nemikonam	I believe it when I see it
Ghaabel ghabul nist	Unreliable
Haghighat raa ketmaan mikone	He colors the truth

Table 4 below shows that the most frequently used euphemistic utterances among the Persian speakers who tried to avoid the offensive word *durughgu* (liar) in both formal and informal situations fell under three main categories: figurative expression (38, 47.5%), implication (23, 28.75%), and understatement (9, 11.25%). As shown in Table 4, the majority of the euphemistic utterances belonged to the figurative expression strategy. In the formal situation, the participants relied on 18 figurative expressions (45%), while 20 utterances were found in the informal situation (50%) (e.g. *u haghighat raa penhan mikonad* [he bends the truth] and *damaaghet dare*

bozorg mishe [your nose is getting bigger]). Implication was the second most frequently used strategy. The formal implied expressions showed 12 responses (30%), whereas the informal ones accounted for 11 responses (27.5%) (e.g. *jaayash jahanam ast* [he will go to Hell] and *doshmane khodaa* [he sins against God]).

Understatement, a strategy used to undermine the importance of utterances, was the next frequently used politeness strategy. In the formal context, the participants expressed 4 responses (10%), whereas 5 utterances were observed in the informal context representing 12.5% (e.g. *dorost nist?!* [is it not true?!], *baavaresh baraaye man sakht ast* [it is hard to believe], *baavar nakardani!* [incredible!], *baraam ghabel hazm nist* [it is difficult to digest], and *dalil kaafi baraaye harfash nadaarad* [he can't support his idea with evidence]). A few responses, such as *pedar salavaati* (you, son of a gun), *durugh shaakhdar* (embellish a subject), and *man shak daaram* (I remain skeptical), were observed which represented other strategies used (e.g. reversal, overstatement, and particularization).

Table 4. Frequencies of Euphemistic Strategies Related to Lying

Strategy	Situation				Total	
	Formal		Informal			
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	N	%
Understatement	4	10%	5	12.5%	9	11.25
Overstatement	2	5%	-	-	2	2.5
Reversal	3	7.5%	4	10%	7	8.75
Figurative Expression	18	45%	20	50%	38	47.5
Particularization	1	2.5%	-	-	1	1.25
Implication	12	30%	11	27.5%	23	28.75
Total	40	100%	40	100%	80	100

Gender and Euphemistic Strategy

Table 5 summarizes the distribution of the most commonly used euphemistic strategies among the Persian participants in terms of their gender. According to Table 5, in the context of death, male participants produced 14 (out of 23) figurative expressions (60.86%), whereas the female ones showed 9 representative responses

(39.14%). Given the use of the implication strategy, female participants produced 15 (out of 23) implied statements, (65.21%), while the males framed 8 implied statements (34.79%).

As far as overstatement was concerned, females wrote 10 instances (52.64%), while males suggested 9 responses (47.36%). Regarding the context of lying, Table 5 below shows that both males and females shared a relatively equal number of figurative expressions (19.50%). In the case of implications used, the females mentioned 12 (out of 23) responses (52.18%), and the males wrote 11 responses (47.82%). Considering the use of understatement strategy, the male participants exceeded the females and by mentioning 77.77% of representative responses. The females, however, just mentioned 2 relevant responses (22.23%).

Table 5. Distribution of Strategies Used by the Persian Participants in terms of Gender

Topic	Most frequently used strategies					
	Gender	N	%	N	%	N	%
Death	**Male**	Figurative expression 14	60.86	Implication 8	34.79	Overstatement 9	47.36
	Female		65.21	Figurative Expression 9	39.14	Overstatement 10	52.64
		Implication 15					
Lying	**Male**	Figurative expression 19	50	Implication 11	47.82	Understatement 7	77.77
	Female		50				
		Figurative Expression 19		Implication 12	52.18	Understatement 2	22.23

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and explore the euphemistic strategies used by Persian speakers in two tabooed contexts (death and lying). Furthermore, the study investigated the relationship between gender and the use of euphemisms. To accomplish this, the study drew on Warren's (1992) model of euphemism. After the data were gathered through open-ended questionnaires and then analyzed, it was found that for the death-related theme, the participants applied four euphemistic strategies (e.g. figurative expression, implication, overstatement, and particularization) (see Table 2 above).

Condolence phrases are usually used to refer to the event of a person's death. These phrases usually serve to trivialize the fear provoked by death. Because Iran is an Islamic country with an Islamic culture, condolence expressions usually reflect

religious notions. Thus, Persian speakers with religious faith express specific euphemized phrases when they talk about the fear of death. The findings related to this topic are in line with those of Greene (2000), Frajzyngier and Jirsa (2006), and Rabab'ah and Al-Qarani (2012), who observed that overstatement (e.g. *flight up to God*) and figurative expressions (e.g. *he passed over to the great beyond*) were the most frequently used euphemistic strategies in a death-related context.

The findings also revealed that in the context of lying, Persian speakers used three euphemistic strategies more than the others to alleviate the intensity of the idea of lying (figurative expression, implication, and understatement) (see Table 4 above). The findings related to this topic were compatible to the observations of Rabab'ah and A-Qarani (2012) who showed that understatement (e.g., I cannot believe it) and figurative expressions (e.g., it is not true) are the most common strategies in this context.

Considering the impact of gender on the use of euphemistic strategies, the findings revealed that female and male participants both tended to use almost similar strategies; although the death-related utterances showed some differences (see Table 5). It was found that in the context of death, males used figurative expressions (e.g. *he breathed his last*) more than the others, while implication was more popular among females. The results were in line with those of Greene (2000) and Rabab'ah & A-Qarani (2012) as they observed that both males and females found it *offensive* to use "died/dead" and "liar", in their formal and informal situations. The study, however, revealed results which were in clash with those of other studies. For instance, Cameron (1995) and Holmes (1998) reported that females and males used strategies of euphemism and politeness different from the ones observed in the present study.

Conclusion

This study investigated the pragmatic dimensions of using euphemistic utterances and strategies in two common contexts (death and lying), by relying on a model of euphemism. Through the administration of this study and comparing the findings (similarities and differences) with the other studies (Greene, 2000; Frajzyngier & Jirsa, 2006; Rabab'ah & A-Qarani, 2012), it was found that not only euphemism is a linguistic phenomenon but also it is a cultural concept. Due to the cultural differences, different people with different languages show different attitudes to the same tabooed topic. The findings of the present study revealed that Persian speakers, unlike the Arab speakers in Rabab'ah & A-Qarani's (2012) study or the Russian ones in Greene's (2000) study employ various euphemistic strategies due to the cultural, social, and religious differences. Therefore, as Fernandez (2006) states, euphemism is a natural phenomenon which exists in all the natural languages. Persian Speakers use euphemized phrases in different situations to satisfy their communicative needs. According to Allan and Burridge (2006), people use euphemisms for two purposes. First, they utilize euphemistic expressions to prevent the expansion of taboos in their culture. Second, they employ various strategies of

euphemisms to trivialize the violent level of some tabooed topics. Finally, euphemisms do exist in Persian culture but, depending on the social norms, values, and religious beliefs, they differ from those of other cultures.

Further studies can draw on the methodology used in this study but include a larger variety of data to securely generalize the findings. Moreover, since Iran is a multi-ethic country, expanding the number of participants from various backgrounds could also help discover euphemized phrases which are regional. Further studies can also focus on different tabooed topics such as disease, insult, excretion, sex, religion, or politics.

References

Abrantes, A. M. (2005). Euphemism and co-operation in discourse. In E. Grillo (Ed.), *Power Without Domination, Dialogism and the Empowering Property of Communication* (pp. 85–103). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Aliakbari, M., & Raeesi, H. (2015). A Sociolinguistic study of the linguistic taboos in the Iranian society. *International Journal of Educational Investigations, 2(3),* 91-104.

Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (1991). *Euphemism and dysphemism: Language used as a shield and weapon.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden words: taboo and the censoring of language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Badakhshan, E., & Mousavi, S. (2014). A linguistic analysis of euphemism in Persian. *Language Related Research, 5(1).*1-26.

Bakhtiar, M. (2012). Communicative functions of euphemisms in Persian. *The Journal in International Social Research, 5(20),* 7-12.

Bowers, J. S., & Pleydell-Pearce, C.W. (2011). Swearing, euphemisms, and linguistic relativity. PLoS ONE 6 (7), e22341, http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/ journal.pone.0022341.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burchfield, R. (1985). An outline history of euphemisms in English. In D. J. Enright (Ed.), *Fair of Speech: The Uses of Euphemisms.* (pp. 13-31). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cameron, D. (1995). *Verbal Hygiene.* London: Routledge.

Chu, M. P. (2009). Chinese cultural taboos that affect their language and behavior choices. *Asian culture and history, 1*(2)*,* 122-139.

Crystal, D. (1992). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Diebold, A. R. (1961). American-Spanish euphemisms by Charles E. Kany. *Book Review 37*(2)*,* 289-292.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Epstein, J. (1985). Sex and euphemism. In D. J. Enright (Ed.), *Fair of speech: The use of euphemism* (pp. 57–71). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Faulkner, P. (2007). What is wrong with Lying? *Philosophy and Phenomenological research, 75,* 524–547.

Fernández, E. C. (2006). The language of death: Euphemism and conceptual metaphorization in Victorian obituaries. *Sky Journal of Linguistics, 19*, 101-131.

Fershtman, C., Gneezy, U., & Hoffman, M. (2011). Taboos and identity: considering the unthinkable. American Economic Journal: Microeconomics 139–164, Retrieved on November 20, 2011 from: http://rady.ucsd.edu/faculty/directory/gneezy/docs/taboo.pdf.

Frajzyngier, Z., & Jirsa, B. (2006). The principle of indirect means in language use and language structure. *Journal of Pragmatics 38*, 513–542.

Fromkin, V., & Rodam, R. (1993). *An introduction to language.* Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Gomaa, Y. A., & Shi, Y. (2012). Soft boiled speech: A contrastive analysis of death euphemisms in Egyptian Arabic and Chinese. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science Research, 12(8).*22-39.

Gómez, M. (2009). Towards a new approach to the linguistic definition of euphemism. *Language Sciences 31(6),* 725–739.

Greene, C. T. (2000). *The use of euphemisms and taboo terms by young speakers of Russian and English.* Unpublished M.A. Thesis. University of Alberta.

Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words.* London: Harvard University Press.

Grotius, H. (2005). *The rights of war and peace, anonymous (trans*.), R. Tuck (ed.), Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Guo, Q. (2010). Cultural differences in Chinese and English euphemisms. *Cross-Cultural Communication 6(4),* 135–141.

Ham, K. (2005). The linguistics of euphemism: A diachronic study of euphemism formation. *Journal of Language and Linguistics 4* (227–263), Retrieved on August 23, 2007 from: http://www.shakespeare.uk.net/journal/4_2/linfoot_ham.htm.

Holmes, J. (1998). Women's talk: The question of sociolinguistics universals. In J. Coasts (Ed.), *Language and Gender: A Reader*. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Isenberg, A. (1973). *Deontology and the ethics of lying, in aesthetics and theory of criticism: selected essays of Arnold Isenberg.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kany, C. E. (1960). *American-Spanish euphemisms.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kirkmann, A. (1992). Muutama sana metonymiasta, in L. Harvilahti, et al. *metafora: ikkuna kieleen, mieleen ja kuultturiin, Tampere, Tampereen, Pikakopio, 79-90.*

Krishna, D. (1961). Lying and the complete Robot. *The British Journal of the Philosophy of Science, 12,* 146–149.

Kupfer, J. (1982). The moral presumption against lying, *Review of Metaphysics, 36,* 103–126.

Leech, G. (1974). *Semantics*. Penguin

Lindley, T. F. (1971). Lying and falsity. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 49*, 152–157.

Linfoot-Ham, K. (2005). The linguistics of euphemism: A diachronic study of euphemism formation. *Journal of Language and Linguistics 4(2),* 227-263.

Mannison, D. S. (1969). Lying and lies. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy,* 47, 132–144.

McArthur, T. (1992). *The Oxford companion of the English language.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Neaman, J., & Silver, C. (1983). *Kind words: A thesaurus of euphemisms. Facts on File*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. New York: Prentice hall.

Pierce, C. S., (1955). Logic as semiotic: The Theory of signs, in J. Buchler (Ed.), *philosophical writings of Peirce*. (pp. 98–119). New York: Dover Publications.

Primoratz, I. (1984). Lying and the methods of ethics. *International Studies in Philosophy, 16,* 35–57.

Rabab'ah, G., & Al-Qarni, A. M. (2012). Euphemism in Saudi Arabic and British English. *Journal of Pragmatics, 44(6),* 730-743.

Rawson, H. (1981). *A dictionary of euphemisms and other double talk: being a compilation of linguistic fig leaves and verbal flourishes for artful users of the English Language.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Searle C. (1998). *Constructing death: The sociology of dying and bereavement.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Slotkin, A. R. (1994). Two new obscenities: The acceptability of taboo words in the media. *American Speech, 69(2),* 220-224.

Stokke, A. (2013). Lying and asserting. *Journal of Philosophy, 110*, 33–60.

Tal, A. (2003). Euphemisms in the Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch. *Aramaic Studies 1*, 109–129.

The Hutchinson Encyclopedia (1990). Hodder Arnold.

Van Oudenhoven, J. P., de Raad, B., Francoise, A. L., Boski, P., Brunborg, G., Carmona, C., Barelds, D., Hill, C. T., Mlačić, B., Motti, F., Rammstedt, B., & Woods, S. (2008). Terms of abuse as expression and reinforcement of cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations 32*, 174–185.

Wafi, A. A. (1983). *Language and society.* Riyadh: Okaz Bookstores Companies.

Wardhaugh, R. (1984). *An introduction to sociolinguistics.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An introduction to sociolinguistics.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Warren, B. (1992). What euphemisms tell us about the interpretation of words? *Studia Lingustica* 46, 128–182.

Williams, J. M. (1975). *Origins of the English language: A social and linguistic history*. New York: Free Press.

Willis, H., & Klammer, E. (1981). *A brief handbook of English*. New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Authors Biography

Dr. Amin Karimnia is an associate professor in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English, Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran. His research interests are in the area of Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, and Translation Studies.

Mohammad Reza Khodashenas is a PhD candidate of TEFL in the Department of English, Torbat-e-heidarye Branch, Islamic Azad University, and an English instructor. His research interests include Discourse Analysis and Second Language Acquisition.