

THE USE OF EUPHEMISMS IN THE REPORT CARD COMMENT IN CANGGU COMMUNITY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The use of euphemism in the process of human interaction is very common a linguistic phenomenon. The correct use of euphemisms is to avoid the embarrassment of interpersonal communication or unpleasant, so as to achieve a successful interaction purposes. In today's society, euphemisms have been widely used in various fields. This study concerns on the use of euphemisms in writing report card comments by teachers of Canggu Community School. The use of euphemisms in reporting students' achievement relates to the teachers' politeness strategies to save the students' and parents' face or to minimize the students FTAs. Based on the data from the report card comments and interview with the teachers about the students, it is found that teachers in Canggu Community School mostly employ euphemisms in their comments on three areas of achievement: academic, work presentation and behavior. They also employ Grice's cooperative principles. Only few comments do not employ euphemism but rather informing as informative as possible in a polite way.

Key words: *euphemism, report card, comment*

1. Background

People when speaking or writing things tend to consider other's feelings. They use politeness in such a way as to minimize

the potential threat in the interaction. Politeness appears to be a crucial role and an important factor in human interaction. To be polite, people have to veil concepts that are delicate or offensive. Politeness is a term for a combination of interpersonal considerations and linguistics choices affecting the form and function of linguistic interactions. In different cultures and different contexts, politeness refers to quite different things.

This study focuses on the teachers' politeness in writing report comment for the students at the end of the term at Canggu Community School. It has been observed that teachers use indirectness or euphemisms in their written comment to cover up or soften the unpleasant connotations and denotations of a particular behavior or utterance which is polite in one culture might be impolite in another culture. Interpreting of these indirect expressions are specific in every culture and language.

Canggu Community School has its own policy concerning the report card's content and format. The school applies UK curriculum. The students come from many different countries such as: Indonesia, Australia, America, England, Japan, France and Spain. The main language in school is English. Teachers use euphemism to criticize the students both to serve educational purposes and also to maintain self-esteem of the students, thus narrowing the distance between teachers and students and maintaining a harmonious atmosphere of the classroom. The

present study addresses euphemism as a way of being polite and studies it under the face work and politeness strategies. It also relates to Grice's work Cooperative principles.

2. Theoretical Review

2.1 Face-Work Theory

The main theory used in this study is the face-work theory. Goffman (1959, pp. 208-212) defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during particular contact. Face is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes”.

The main idea underlying face-work theory is that people living in society do their best to save their face and not to lose it. People communicate with each other; all participants are in charge of maintaining not only their own face, but also other people's face.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) develop a fundamental theory of politeness, thus all participants are supposed to maintain two types of face during interaction: positive face and negative face. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) positive face is paying attention to others' face needs. Peccei (1999,p.64, cited in Mahyuni, 2008) stated that positive face refers to the human's need to be confirmed and liked by other people in the society. It also refers to a person's need to feel that his social group share common

aims. Brown and Levinson (1978, p.13), negative face is ensuring that the other is not imposed on. Brown and Attardo (2005, p.8) also state; “Negative face is the desire to be left alone, not to be imposed upon, and to be able to act as we please”. In their opinion, apologies and deference are aspects of negative face.

All the threat to both positive and negative face of both speaker and hearer are called Face-Threatening Acts. Brown and Levinson as cited in Mahyuni (2008) state that in the spirit of maintaining face, people are supposed to minimize Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) such as criticism, disagreements and embarrassing during their interaction. The degree of these FTAs is not similar. Some of them can be serious FTAs and some can be mild. Factors such as intimacy or power can be determined the seriousness of the FTAs.

2.2 Politeness

Politeness is developed by Brown and Levinson. In fact, they extend Goffman’s face theory. As discussed by Mills (2003, p.6), politeness is the speaker’s intention to reduce the face threats of the FTAs toward another. Basically, minimizing the hearer’s negative face and maximizing their positive face are the main considerations of politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p.1) as cited in Mahyuni hold that politeness has a socially basic role. It can control potential

conflicts among the communicators. Politeness of an utterance is evaluated by norms and values which are culture-bound and vary from culture to culture.

Upadhyay (2001) implies that politeness cannot be understood just from a linguistics point of view, but should be viewed as a form of behavior involving various language forms selected in accordance with the norms and expectations of a particular society. He adds that an appropriate selection of words influences both social and psychological meanings. It is strongly recommended that people be polite in their communication with those whom they do not know very well so that the people feel accepted and valued as member of a social group.

Brown and Levinson distinguish two kinds of politeness: positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness serves to keep positive face of others. Peccei (1999, p.64) as cited in Mahyuni (2008) states that “when we use positive politeness, we use speech strategies that emphasize our solidarity with the hearer, such as slang expression, nicknames and also request which are less indirect. Positive politeness wishes to preserve people’s self – image as confirmed and liked member of the society. Some examples of positive politeness are offering, avoiding disagreement, paying attention to the hearer’s need.

Brown and Levinson state as cited in Mahyuni (2008) that negative politeness is to keep people’s negative face. In the case of

using negative politeness, those speech strategies will be used that stress the speaker's deference to the hearer. According to Peccei as cited in Mahyuni that the use of the following strategies will lead to preserve the negative face of other people such as: avoidance of nicknames, slang and informal pronunciation, using more indirect and impersonal request, referring to the hearer in the third person instead of second person and more frequent use of mitigating devices, e.g. please, possibly, I'm sorry but...

2.3 Grice's cooperative Principle

Grice assumes that people are intrinsically cooperative and aim to be as informative as possible in communication. To support this intention, Grice proposes four maxims:

1. Maxim of quantity:

Make your contribution as informative as is required; do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true, do not say what you believe to be false or do not say that for which you lack of evidence.

3. Maxim of relevance: Try to make your contribution relate to the context and content.

4. Maxim of manner: Be perspicuous, avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief, and be orderly.

Grice (1975) further argues that when any of these four maxims are flouted, they may result in linguistic aberrations. It is assumed that people are normally going to provide an appropriate amount of information, tell the truth, be relevant and try to be as clear as they can. Speakers rarely mention these principles, except when they may be in danger of not fully adhering to them.

3. Research Method

The present study was a descriptive study involving four subjects. Two are native speakers of English and the others are local teachers. Data were collected using interview method and document analyses. Brown and Levinson's Face theory and politeness as well as Grice's work on the cooperative principles were used to analyze the data.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Finding

From the report card comment of the students who face problem in their study, it can be seen that teachers applied euphemism to describe the students' achievement. There are three areas of concern; academic, work presentation and behavior. The table will be given to show the distribution of the euphemism to show the distribution of the euphemism from the three areas.

Table 4.1 The Euphemism Used in Literacy Report Comments of Students in Year 6

Students' name	Interview result	Academic	Work presentation	Behavior
Al	Al cannot spell most of the words correctly and does not know how to use punctuation in his writing. He is struggling to write using joined handwriting. He is also not good in reading.	Al's written work shows improvement but still needs to check for simple spelling errors and punctuation omission. Al shows a sound understanding of the texts he reads. Continue to practice reading aloud.	When reminded, he can write using joined handwriting and is developing consistent joins.	Nothing concern on behavior.
Br	His work presentation is not good. His work is usually messy; he has never checked his work. His hand writing is also not neat.	Nothing concern on academic.	Br is also developing his handwriting style well but needs to be consistent in sizing. He produced some lovely written work but needs to ensure that he checks over it for careless punctuation and tense	Nothing concern on behavior.

			errors.	
Fl	She is not that good in creating her writing, lack of ideas. She makes a lot of mistake in tense. When she was asked to read she is too quite, so her friends will comment ‘I cannot hear her’.	She needs to edit her work for incorrect tense usage as well tries to improve her sentences starts to create a more interesting piece of writing.	Fl has a clear voice when reading aloud but she should practice increasing her volume.	Nothing concern on behavior.
Ja	Ja is a careless boy who does not like to check for his work.	Ja has creative ideas but the quality of his work needs to be improved through checking his draft for simple punctuation and tense errors.	Nothing concern here.	Nothing concern here.
Ma	He has a lot of mistake in his writing, simple spelling, and punctuations. As a year 6 student, he has not yet shown fluency in	Simple spelling and punctuation errors often detract from the quality of the story content. He should take opportunities to read more	Nothing concern here.	Nothing concern here.

	reading.	often aloud at home to improve his fluency.		
Thi	She is not good in writing especially in organizing her sentences. Her handwriting and reading are not good.	... sometimes sentences just run into one another. This handwriting and reading aloud are both improving but still need more practice to achieve results appropriate for year 6.	Nothing concern here.	Nothing concern here.

In teaching process, factors, such as self-esteem, will influence the students' learning process. It is very often for the teachers to meet such a situation in which some students face academic difficulty, problems in accomplishing their tasks, and problems in controlling behavior.

From the findings, teachers focus their comments on three different areas. Those areas are in the academic achievement, task presentation, and their behavior control. The teacher's comment about Al is that she does not directly inform that Al still has problem in punctuation and in his joined handwriting. It is easily seen that in giving information to the students and parents the teacher is employing the politeness strategy by using euphemism

to avoid making the situation embarrassing. However, the teacher tried to be as informative as possible to give information about Al's achievement.

The teacher's comment for Br is about his work presentation which is mostly not presented neatly. To save the student's and parents' face the teacher uses indirect sentences to inform about the student's achievement by saying 'needs to be consistent in sizing'. The use of word 'but' indicates that the student needs to improve on that area. Applying euphemisms when informing errors that have been made by students as clearly be seen in comment for Al. those sentences naturally sound more comfortable than the harsh one ' He does not know how to use punctuation in his writing'. The indirect polite and mild way can not only point out the mistakes, but also not hurt the students' self-esteem. In table 1, it is seen that the teacher gives advice by applying euphemism. The purpose is to give motivation to the students.

Table4. 2 The Euphemism used in Bahasa Indonesia Report Comments of Some Students in Year 6

Students ' name	Interview result	Academic	Work presentation	Behavior
Al	Al has little effort in learning Bahasa Indonesia.	Al has shown that he can work well when motivated.but he needs to work a little bit faster to complete the	Nothing concern in here.

	Al works so slow in completing his work.		work in the given timeframe.	
Br	Br's works are mostly presented messy.	Nothing concern here.	He also needs to present his work more neatly.	Nothing concern in here.
Fl	Fl likes to chat with her friend during the lesson. Fl lacks of vocabulary in Bahasa Indonesia.	She needs more extensive words to express her ideas freely.	Nothing concern in here.	Fl has shown enthusiasm in role plays but can lack concentration in class discussion.
Ja	Ja is mostly not listening during discussion. He likes to distract the class instead of share his ideas. Sometimes he is out of control during the lesson.	Nothing is concerned in here.	Nothing is concerned in here.	Ja is learning to listen carefully and share ideas. However, he must learn to control himself and maintain his concentration until the task is finished.
Ma	Ma shows that he is lazy in completing his bahasa Indonesia	If he continues to work hard though, he will soon see	Ma tends to work too quickly, which results in many careless	Nothing concerns in here.

	works.	improvements.	errors.	
Thi	Thi likes to chat during the lesson.	Nothing concerns in here.	Nothing concerns in here.	...but she must avoid the tendency to chat and needs to recognize the value of concentrated attention.

Table 4.2 is the comment from an Indonesian teacher about students' achievement in Bahasa Indonesia. In applying euphemisms on the students' academic achievement, the teacher does not describe directly but uses indirect sentences that make the students and parents feel comfortable to read the comment. Regarding FI's behavior who likes to chat with her friends during the lesson, the teacher in this point violates the maxim of quantity and maxim of quality in which the teacher tends not to as informative as possible and does not tell the truth about FI talks a lot during the lesson, instead the teacher gives comment '...but lack concentration in class discussion.' From the result of the interview, the teacher's reason is that she does not want to hurt FI's feeling in which FI is a sensitive child.

Comment 4 is regarding to Ja's behavior, the teacher uses the politeness strategy to inform about Ja is mostly not listening during discussion and likes to distract the class. The teacher informs that 'Ja is learning to listen carefully and share ideas.' In this point, the teacher flouts the maxim of quantity in which she does not give enough information about Ja's behavior and the teacher does not use politeness strategy because she just wanted to inform the truth of Ja's behavior. The same things can be seen in comment 6 about Thi. The teacher avoids to use direct sentences to inform that Thi must avoid to chat during the lesson.

Table 4.3 The Euphemism Used in Literacy Report Comments of Some Students in Year 4

Students ' name	Interview result	Academic	Work presentation
An	An is not an English native speaker. She still lacks of vocabulary and makes many mistakes in spelling.	She indeed still needs to work on her vocabulary and spellings....	Nothing concerns here
Az	Az still makes many mistakes in spelling.	Although he still needs to work on his spellings.	Nothing concerns here
Ch	Ch is not good in comprehending texts. He does sometimes not listen well during	Ch at times seems to find difficulty in comprehending what he reads.	Nothing concerns here.

	the lesson. He often comes late to school.		
Ki	Ki has not made a good progress in literacy. His spelling and handwriting is not so good.	Ki has made considerable progress in literacy. He continues to work hard on his spellings and handwriting and will benefit from more practice.	Nothing concerns here.
Le	Le does not have a good understanding of the rules of grammar and punctuation. He is not interested in books.	...and is developing a better understanding of the rules of grammar and punctuation. At time, Leland can be a reluctant reader and therefore has been encouraged to look for books which interest him.	Nothing concerns here.
Zi	Zi works slow in finishing his work.	Nothing concerns here.	Zico needs prompting to begin work though, and thus is often unable to finish his work on time.

Table 4.3 is about the comment from year 4 teacher. She is from England. To inform the students' achievement in speaking

and vocabulary, the teacher does not describe directly that the students have a problem in vocabulary and spelling but she informs that they still need to work on their vocabulary spellings. The teacher tries to be as informative as possible about the students' achievement but not in direct way comment 1 and 2.

In comment 3, the teacher does not inform about Ch's ability in reading achievement directly, rather she informs that Ch seems to find difficulty in comprehending what he reads. Regarding Ch's behavior that he sometimes does not listen well and often comes late to school, the teacher informs that ' He also continue to work on his listening and attending skills.

To inform Ki's progress in literacy, the teacher does not inform directly that Ki has not yet achieved a good level in spelling and handwriting. She rather gives advice for Ki to have more practice. In this point, the teacher does not give an exact achievement but just tells using the word 'considerable'. In here, the maxim of quality is flouted.

In comment 5, the teacher does not tell that Le has a problem in grammar and the use of punctuation. She tells that Le is developing a better understanding of grammar and punctuation. The teacher also informs politely about Le does not like to read. She informs that Le needs encouragement to look for books which interest him.

The teacher informs about Zi's work presentation, in fact Zi works so slow and always to be told to begin his work. In this point, the teacher informs in a more polite way as describe in comment 6.

Table 4.4 The Euphemism Used in Bahasa Indonesia Report Comments of Some Students in Year 4

Students' name	Interview result	Academic	Work presentation	Behavior
An	An is not confident during the lesson. An most of the time is asked to speak by the teacher.	An requires an encouragement in speaking.	Nothing concerns here.	She is responsible but quite unconfident with her work.
Az	Az often distracts his friend during the lesson. He also works too slow.		Az requires an extra effort in finishing his task.	He can work independently on the task but is easily distracted and can distract others.

Ch	Ch has not shown a good attitude. He likes to distract the class during the lesson.	Nothing concerns here.	Nothing concerns here.	...but he must try to develop a more positive attitude toward work rather than attempting to distract other member of the class.
Le	Le mostly presents his work messy. He tends to have a chat with the friends during the lesson.	Nothing concerns here.	Nothing concerns here.	But he needs to present his written work neatly and listens more carefully during class discussion.
Zi	Zi likes to chat with his friend and does not pay attention in the lesson.	Nothing concerns here.	Nothing concerns here.	But must avoid the tendency to chat and needs to recognize the value of concentrated attention.

Table 4.4 is comments from Indonesian teacher of some students in year 4 in Bahasa Indonesia achievement. In comment 1, An is a new student at the school. The teacher informs in her report that An requires an encouragement in speaking. In fact, she is not confident to speak during the lesson.

In comment 2, the teacher informs about Az indirectly as described in the table. In fact, Az often distract his friend during the lesson and is slow in finishing his work. Regarding Az' behavior that he likes to distract the class, the teacher does not explain implicitly, she informs directly but in a more polite way. In this point, the Indonesian teacher tends to be as informative as possible and informs the actual situation of Az. According to Grice's maxim, she follows the maxim of quantity and maxim of quality. The same thing as comment 2 can be seen as well in comment 3 about Ch and comment 5 about Zi.

4.2 Discussion

Based on the data analysis from the teachers' comment of 23 students, it is found that 17 comments use euphemism to inform about the students' academic achievement, work presentation and their behavior. 14 comments refer to the academic achievement. All four teachers use indirect strategies and euphemisms in describing the students' achievement. Eight comments concern on the students work presentation. 10 comments concern on the

students' classroom behavior. Most euphemisms are applied in reporting the students' academic achievement and work presentation.

The teachers also employ the Grice's maxims- maxim of quality and quantity, by giving information as informative as possible and tell the actual condition of the students. It is found that only one comment flouts the maxim of quality (in table 3 comment 4). There is one comment which violates the maxim of quality and quantity as seen in table 2 comment 3. Six comments do not employ euphemism but the teachers try to present the comment in more polite way. These comments concern on the students' behavior from two Indonesian teachers. Based on the result of the interview with the two teachers they stated that they want to give clear information to the parents, they prefer to say directly about the students' behavior but in polite sentences. There is a reason why the comments from Indonesian teachers concern more on the students' behavior, as a fact that some students behave worse to Indonesia teachers compare to expatriate teachers.

Therefore, how to make comments on students' performance plays a significant role in the whole teaching process. These sentences in the report card comment are not harsh ones and protect the students' self image and parents. These also seemly pleasant and mild sentences contain extra meaning. Students are clear about their in adequate performer but not to be hurt.

5. Conclusion

The use of specific comments encourages positive comment between teachers, parents and students. Written in a positive and informative manner, comments can address a variety of issues while still maintaining the dignity of the child. This is especially important if a child has difficulty with a particular subject area or in controlling his/her behavior over a period of time.

Euphemisms play positive functions. When the teachers write comment about students' performance they use euphemisms to show their politeness, to avoid being offensive and to meet the psychological and beneficial needs of students. It also beautifies the teachers' language, which are comfortable for the students and parents to read to.

Euphemism is a good favorable interpretation of bad words, which can remove the threat to the vulnerable faces of the students; therefore the self image will be defended when reading the comment.

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