The Application of Euphemism in English Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Euphemism, which is a cultural phenomenon and an important rhetorical device, is widely used in the English teaching. This paper tries to explore the usage of euphemism in English teaching by applying some pragmatism theories in order to improve the effect of English teaching.¹

KEYWORDS

Euphemism, English teaching, Pragmatism theory.

DEFINITION OF EUPHEMISM

Euphemism is a cultural phenomenon and an important rhetorical device. It is extremely common in English. When the author or speaker feels that the straightforward speech may cause the reader or the listener to have a certain level of disgust, the above-mentioned psychological barriers are overcome through the adjustment of verbs out of taboo or politeness. This special expression is called euphemism. Euphemisms can also be informally referred to as comfortable words or cosmetic words.

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THE PRAGMATICS THEORY OF EUPHEMISM IN ENGLISH TEACHING

Pragmatics Basis

According to the face-saving theory (FST) of the human interaction theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), teachers’ criticisms, contempt, ridicule, complaints, accusations, reproaches, insults, challenges, and refutations belong to evaluative words that threat listeners’ or students’ positive face requirement. Therefore, under the guidance of pragmatic theory, teachers should adopt language expressions that can achieve the discourse purpose and preserve students' face at the same time.

Searle’s Theory of Indirect Speech Act

The theory of indirect speech acts of American philosopher and linguist Searle believes that there are five types of indirect speech acts: Explaining, Promising, Instructing, Expressing, and Declaring (He Zhaoxiong, 2000:118-119). Among the five types of indirect speech acts, the most indirect ones are the instructing.

In English classes, teachers can give instructions to students from three perspectives. First, from the perspective of the speaker (teacher), to state aspirations, such as, “I Would like you to speak more loudly.” Second, from the perspective of listeners (students): (1) to state their abilities, such as “You can speak more loudly.” (2) to inquire their abilities, for example, “Can you speak more loudly?” Third, start from the angel of the action itself: (1)to state the reason, e.g., “The voice is not loud enough, so ...” (2) ask for reasons, e.g., “Would it not be better if the voice is louder?” Obviously, the second type of questioning starting from the perspective of listeners (students) is more euphemistic. Because the form of questioning always leaves the student room for choice, he/she can more than euphemistically reject the teacher’s request by denying his ability, desire, etc. Teachers who are good at giving instruction to students artistically in class can not only allow students to appreciate the indirect features of English euphemisms, but also improve students’ self-confidence, thereby improving the effectiveness of English classes.

Theory of Politeness Principle

Geoffrey Leech, an English linguist, put forward six polite guidelines for people's language communication activities. In a nutshell, under the same conditions, the expression of impoliteness is reduced to the minimum, that is, “reducing impolite expression as much as possible” and “maximizing polite expression as much as possible”. Some words that are impolite to the listener or the third party are either ignored or expressed indirectly or artistically.
Shu Dingfang’s Self-Protection Principle

People not only comply with the principle of politeness in verbal communication, and the use of euphemisms does not only benefit listeners. Domestic scholar Shu Dingfang proposed the principle of self-protection of the use of euphemisms and believed that people consider their own identity and social status more in the process of communication. The principle of self-protection and the principle of politeness restrict each other, complement each other, and work together in verbal communication. When the principles of politeness conflict with the principle of self-protection, the principles of politeness obey the principle of self-protection.

USE OF EUPHEMISM IN ENGLISH TEACHING

English class is also a kind of social communication process in nature. As an English teacher, it is necessary to effectively use speech and euphemism according to students’ differences in age, psychological characteristics and English level to handle the teacher-student relationships and better serve the English class, at the same time, further develop students’ cross-cultural communication skills.

Greetings

Before class, the teacher can interact with the students through some cordial greetings to begin the class, which will make the students feel at home and lay a good foundation for the bilateral activities in the class. For example, before the class begins on Monday, the question “Did you have a wonderful time last weekend?” will prompt the students’ attention, actively participate in answering this question, and lay a good foundation for the teachers to start the new class.

Evaluation Terms

Teacher evaluation terminology refers to the language used by teachers to evaluate students' classroom behavior. It can be divided into affirmative evaluation and negative evaluation. Both of these are indispensable in the teaching process and complement each other. First of all, the affirmative evaluation is based on praise. This satisfies the psychological needs of students to a large extent and can greatly enhance students' enthusiasm for learning. Such as: “Very Good!/Good Job!/Excellent!/Well-done!” Second, when conducting negative evaluations, teachers should pay attention to the proper use of euphemisms, first step backwards, or limit and dilute praise so that criticism and negation can be more easily accepted by students. It can not only point out students’ mistakes in time, but also protect students' self-esteem. For example, when criticizing students, the personal pronoun “we” can be used instead of “you” to avoid causing students to accept it. For
students who did not complete their homework on time, they said “We should spend more time in learning English.” When students cannot respond to questions raised by teachers in class, teachers can also use the personal pronoun “us” to save students’ faces. For example: “It’s difficult for us to solve this problem and I think Tom has the same.” In the same way, when correcting student mistakes, teachers also need to pay attention to the euphemism of language, which is generally the method of first suppressing and suppressing. Such as: You give us a new view but wouldn’t it be better if ... / What you’ve said sounds reasonable, but the teacher’s comments both take into account the student’s face and make the student feel that the teacher fully understands himself.

**Criticism**

Appropriate use of euphemistic critical language in the English class is more acceptable to students than harsh, direct criticism, and can also avoid harming students’ self-esteem, helping to build a harmonious teaching atmosphere. When criticizing students for misconduct in class, use “Don't think...”, “I'm afraid...”, “You'd better...”, “Is it all right if...” etc. Use euphemistic ways to express denial and criticism. For example, facing students who are late for class, the teacher can say “Don’t you think it would be better to come earlier?” During the class, when the students are not concentrating on the class and making noises, use “I'm afraid this is not a rock festival.” It will be easier for the students to accept the teacher’s approval, which is a proper expression of English euphemism.

**Classroom Instruction**

The classroom instruction referred to those instructions used by the teacher when he wants students to do something according to their own wishes. The classroom instruction is crucial for students to improve their learning. It should reflect teachers’ courtesy and respect for the students. The word “please” is the most common word used by teachers when they give instructions. It runs through the entire teaching process and allows students to feel the respect of the teacher from time to time. During the teaching, teachers can use soft euphemistic questioning way to ask students questions, which will play a very good relief or encouraging effect, thereby eliminating students’ nervousness and allowing students to actively participate in classroom activities.... Such as: “Do you agree with...?” “I'm sure you can give us a good answer.” “I believe you can give us a good point, etc...” When asking students to answer questions, the teacher can use encouraging and polite words or expressions, such as “please”, "afraid" or "could, would" and other modal words to weaken the tone of the order and allow the communication to proceed smoothly. Other sentences like “I'm afraid you will have to do this again.” “Could you repeat my sentence, please?” “Would you please say it again?” are also a good way to order euphemistically. Regardless of whether the student's performance in answering questions is good or not, teachers should avoid using the words or
expressions to knock down students' enthusiasm for actively participating in activities. We should use phrases such as “Well, you give us a good points. I couldn’t have given a better answer myself.” While correcting students' mistakes, we should also pay attention to the euphemisms to encourage students, such as “You have tried your best and I'm sure you could do a better job next time.”

CONCLUSIONS

All in all, during the English language classroom, teachers who use euphemisms appropriately for students with different levels and characteristics in their teaching can not only preserve students' face, protect their self-respect, increase their self-confidence, enhance their interests in learning, boost their enthusiasm for learning, but also allow students to pay attention to the polite language in English, understand the language habits of different cultures and nationalities, and lay a good foundation for listening, speaking, reading and writing, so as to create harmonious teaching atmosphere and achieve the purpose of successful classroom teaching.

REFERENCES