

Euphemistic strategies in Algerian Arabic and American English

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the use of euphemistic strategies by Algerians and Americans when dealing with three unpleasant topics: death, lying, and disease. It also examines the effect of degree of formality on the use of euphemistic strategies. To achieve this objective, a discourse completion task (DCT) was distributed to 21 Algerians and 21 Americans. The data were analysed using SPSS. The data analysis revealed that there are some differences and similarities between the two groups. The euphemistic strategies used by the Americans when they deal with death topics are *synonyms* and *part for the whole*. The Algerians use *part for the whole*, *overstatement*, and *synonyms* when they deal with death. Regarding the topic of lying, the Americans employ strategies of *understatement* and *deletion*, whereas the Algerians use *understatement* and *metaphor*. As for the topic of disease, the Americans use *vagueness*, and the Algerians use *vagueness*, *metaphor*, and *deletion*. These findings reveal that both groups resort to euphemism when dealing with these three unpleasant topics. However, their use of euphemistic strategies is culture-bound.

Key words: euphemism; American English; Algerian Arabic.

1. Introduction

Language is a means through which people communicate to socialise and fulfill their daily needs. However, the use of language has always been constrained by cultural, social, and religious values and principles. Language is also powerful because it not only establishes social ties but may also destroy relationships. When people become aware of the impact that language can have on their relationships with others, they tend to be very selective and choose the words carefully; they take into consideration the status of the interlocutor, their age, gender, and the context in which a communication happens. The act of being selective of the words one is using to avoid hurting people is called euphemism. Euphemism is a very important device that allows people to speak freely about sensitive or unpleasant topics without

feeling embarrassed, being accused of rudeness and impoliteness, or violating social and cultural constraints.

Euphemism is a universal phenomenon that is highly related to politeness. Speech communities around the world euphemise differently due to cultural, religious, and social values and norms. People tend to carefully choose their words to save their or others' faces and to avoid hurting other people. Indeed, euphemism is a politeness device. Euphemism is derived from the Greek word *euphemia*: The prefix *eu-* means "good, well"; the stem *pheme* means "speak"; the suffix *-ism* means "action or result"; and the word means "speaking well of...", "good speech", and "words of good omen" (McArthur, 1992: 387). Taboo is defined by Bussmann (2006: 1173) as "a term that is avoided for religious, political, or sexual reasons and is usually replaced by a euphemism." People euphemise to avoid taboo words like death, disease, sex-related topics, family relations, wealth, and possessions. For example, instead of directly saying that somebody has died, Arabs would prefer to say *احبه الله واخذه بجواره* "God loved him, so he took him." Here, the speaker avoids directly reporting the death of the person and uses a religious phrase to describe the situation. The listener will infer and automatically understand that somebody has died. It is obvious that the speaker resorted to religion to mitigate the severity of the news.

Rawson (1981) divides euphemisms into two types: negative and positive. A negative euphemism refers to being careless or ignorant about the impact and outcome of using taboo words. When these unpleasant expressions are used, the hearer will be offended. On the other hand, a positive euphemism refers to the speaker being careful about and attentive to his/her words and avoiding the use of an expression that could hurt other people. Classification of linguistic expressions as a taboo is based on the values and the principles of a particular society. For instance, Muslims know by heart that their religion encourages them to euphemise to avoid causing any kind of emotional harm or to be rude. The Holy Quran (in Surat Aal Imran, Verse 159) tells Muslims that people would abandon a person who is rude.

Euphemisms are a form of indirect politeness used when dealing with unpleasant topics such as death, lying and disease. This contrastive study aims to investigate how euphemistic strategies are used by Americans and Algerians and to find similarities and differences in the use of these strategies in different degrees of formality. The study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the euphemistic strategies used in Algerian Arabic and American English in death, lying, and disease topics?
2. What are the similarities and/or differences in the use of euphemistic strategies in Algerian Arabic and American English?

3. To what extent does the degree of formality affect the use of euphemistic strategies?

2. Literature review

Research in the area of Arabic linguistics has mainly focused on the realisation of speech acts (e.g., Alghazo et al., 2021), the use of discourse markers (e.g., Jarrah et al., 2019), grammaticalization of certain verbs (Al-Shawashreh et al., 2021), and the use of persuasion in the area of media discourse (Rabab'ah et al., 2020). Euphemisms have also received some attention in Arabic linguistics (e.g., Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012). Most studies examined euphemistic strategies in English, and some deal with euphemisms in Arabic. However, the use of euphemistic strategies in Algerian Arabic has not been explored, particularly in comparison with English. This section reviews existing studies on the use of euphemistic strategies in various languages and contrastive studies between English and Arabic.

2.1. Monolingual studies

In a classic text on euphemism, Neaman and Silver (1995) explored the factors that affect the use of euphemism and found—upon analysing a collection of related literature—that linguistic and cultural factors play a role in the use of euphemisms. In particular, they analysed topics of love, death, and body parts to set the criteria that are used to identify euphemistic expressions. They found that frequency of usage, the interlocutor, and the circumstances are essential criteria upon which euphemisms are assigned. Specifically, the authors found that people generally substitute unpleasant and negative words with more acceptable and positive ones; for example, the word 'vomit' has been substituted by 'whoops' to avoid rudeness and impoliteness.

Euphemisms, as noted above, are closely related to politeness and the concept of *face*. Therefore, they have been studied with reference to the Politeness Theory. Crespo-Fernandez (2005), for example, conducted a study that seeks to highlight the extent to which a euphemism is related to the notion of *face*. He adopted Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness and considered impoliteness a social taboo. The study concluded that people resort to euphemisms to save their or others' faces and that euphemisms, politeness, and face are interrelated discursive phenomena as euphemisms are employed as a strategy to save face and promote politeness.

Enab (2019) focused on euphemisms in Egyptian Arabic by investigating the strategies used by Egyptian Arabic speakers to euphemise in topics such as physical illness, socially inferior career, cancer, bodily functions, women-

sensitive issues, and death. The participants were 275 Egyptians who were asked to select euphemistic expressions in absence and existence of face-threatening acts (FTAs). For data analysis, Enab adopted Allan and Burridge's (1991) classificatory framework. The results showed that the Egyptian informants are extensive users of euphemisms when speaking about sensitive issues in the existence of FTAs. Also, it has been found that Egyptians tend to utilize euphemistic strategies such as *understatement*, *general-for-specific*, *hyperbole*, *borrowing*, *circumlocution*, and *technical jargon*.

In medical discourse, Tailor and Ogden (2009) studied the euphemistic expressions used by doctors to avoid the word 'obese'. The searchers used a cross-sectional survey to collect data. The participants were 19 doctors and 449 patients. The analysis revealed that doctors avoid using the word 'obese' to avoid hurting people. They resort to euphemisms by using expressions such as 'your weight may be damaging your health.' In particular, the study found that doctors and patients perceive the word 'obese' as unpleasant and indicative of a serious problem. Moreover, the study showed that using 'obese' was accompanied by anxiety on the part of patients while this feeling was avoided when a euphemism was used.

2.2. Contrastive studies

Existing studies have also focused on how euphemisms are manifested in various languages. For example, Al-Husseini (2007) conducted a contrastive study to examine similarities and differences between Arabic and English in the use of euphemistic strategies. The study found that the two languages and their respective cultures differ in the conceptualisation and use of euphemisms. More importantly, the study emphasised the link between euphemisms and politeness in that substituting negative words with more positive ones happens frequently and purposefully. The study also showed that the two languages use euphemisms differently due to cultural reasons. Arabic conceptualises euphemism as an innuendo, wave, symbol, and hint whereas English tends to use euphemisms to switch unpleasant words to pleasant ones.

Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) explored the use of euphemistic strategies in Saudi Arabic and British English to find similarities and/or differences between the two languages. They recruited 300 participants (150 Saudis and 150 British), with each group being divided into 75 males and 75 females. The authors examined euphemisms in relation to three topics: death, lying, and bodily functions. The analysis shows that Saudis use *part-for-whole*, *overstatement*, *understatement*, *deletion*, *metaphor*, *general-for-specific*, and *learned words and jargon* whereas the British use *understatement*, *deletion*, *learned words and jargon*, *metaphors*, and *general-for-specific*. These similarities and differ-

ences between the two languages were attributed to cultural and religious beliefs and values.

Another contrastive study between English and Arabic was conducted by Almufawez et al. (2018) who analysed the use of euphemistic strategies in Saudi Arabic and American English using an online questionnaire to collect data. The analysis showed that Saudi Arabic speakers use *religious phrases* when delivering bad news. In addition, the study found that Saudis were sometimes unable to euphemise compared to Americans in certain situations and that they were more prepared to lie in order not to cause harm to others. However, Americans would prefer to be more straightforward and deliver bad news more clearly and directly. The study attributed these differences to cultural and religious reasons. The data suggests that the cultural and religious beliefs of each party determine the use of euphemism. As for similarities, the study found that speakers of the two languages may use euphemism with/without polite expressions and that the speakers who do not use euphemisms resort to dysphemism with polite expressions.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method methodology employing both qualitative and quantitative measures to best answer the research questions. A Discourse completion task (DCT) was used to collect data. The main purpose of DCTs is to dive into the participants' pragmatic knowledge. It uncovers the ways by which people handle different communicative scenarios and the tactics they use to get through the different linguistic obstacles they face in everyday lives. One of these tactics is the use of euphemisms, which enables language users to reduce the intensity of speech. Different scenarios were introduced to the participants with each being presented in both formal and informal situations. The degree of formality was expressed by adding the element of the distance between the interlocutors. For instance, within the same topic, there are two scenarios: one with a friend and another with a boss. The use of DCTs has been found to be an effective tool in this kind of research, and it was described by many scholars in the field as one of the most influential tools. The DCT was adopted from Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) and modified by the authors to fit this study.

3.1. Participants

Two groups of participants were recruited. The first group consisted of 21 Algerians (10 males and 11 females), and the second group consisted of 21 Americans (8 males and 12 females). The majority of Algerian participants were Ph.D. students at the University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan, and the others were recruited using Facebook. All the Ph.D. students filled the ques-

tionnaire in the library at the University of Jordan and took around 15 to 25 minutes to answer it. They responded in Algerian Arabic. The American participants were also students; they study Arabic as a foreign language in the School of Prince Hussein Bin Abdullah II for International Studies at the University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan. The authors asked for the assistance of one of the lecturers to distribute the DCTs inside the classrooms to the Americans to answer them during the break, after taking permission from the director. The teacher told the authors that it took the participants 10 to 15 minutes to answer the DCT. The American participants answered in American English. The gender variable was not considered in this study.

3.2. Data collection procedure

A DCT was the main instrument for collecting data, as noted above. Two forms of the DCT were designed: one in English and another in Arabic. The situations were the same in both forms. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section was designed to obtain data about the participants' demographic information such as gender, age, and nationality. The second one consisted of six conversational situations covering the three topics: death, lying, and disease, with each topic being introduced in two different situations: formal and informal. The reason behind choosing these topics is because they are the most frequent ones as suggested by Abrantes (2005). To examine the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to three professors of linguistics at the University of Jordan. The questionnaire was modified based on their suggestions (see Appendix). The two tables below show the distribution of the topics according to the type.

Table 1: The distribution of topics.

| Type | Fear-based | Politeness-based |
|-------|----------------------|------------------|
| Topic | ✓ Death ✓ Disease | ✓ Lying |

Table 2: The distribution according to the degree of formality, setting, and the relationship between speakers.

| Formality | Situation/Question | Status or distance between the respondent and the proposed speakers |
|-----------|--------------------|---|
| Informal | Death | Friend |
| Formal | Death | Boss |
| Informal | Lying | Friend |
| Formal | Lying | Colleague |
| Informal | Disease | Strangers |
| Formal | Disease | Boss |

3.3. Data analysis

After finalizing the process of data collection, SPSS was used to analyse the data. The analysis is presented in the following section with tables that summarize the results. The analysis is followed by a discussion of the findings. Each topic was analysed separately by extracting the euphemistic strategies from the participants' responses and classifying them following the framework used in this study. The strategies changed according to the topic and context, i.e., the interlocutors. The framework used for the analysis is based on previous studies (e.g., Allan & Burrige, 1991, 2006; Warren, 1992, Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012). The framework adopted in the present study includes 25 strategies, as follows:

Table 3: Strategies of euphemism.

| Strategies of Euphemism | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Compounding | 14. Metaphor |
| 2. Flippancies | 15. Reversals |
| 3. Derivation | 16. Understatement (Litotes) |
| 4. Acronyms | 17. Overstatement (Hyperbole or Elevating) |
| 5. Onomatopoeia | 18. Circumlocution |
| 6. Back Slang | 19. Clipping |
| 7. Rhyming Slang | 20. Part-for-whole (Synecdoche) |
| 8. Phonemic Replacement (Remodelling) | 21. General-for-specific (Metonymy) |
| 9. Abbreviations | 22. Colloquial Common Terms |
| 10. Deletion | 23. Blending |
| 11. Loan Words | 24. Nurseryism |
| 12. Particularization | 25. Synonym |
| 13. Implications | |

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis and interprets them in the light of both findings of previous research and theoretical groundings of pragmatics. As noted above, the main aim of the study is to find the euphemistic strategies used in Algerian Arabic and American English in the three topics of death, lying, and disease and to compare between the two languages in the use of these strategies, with reference to the degree of formality of the situations. Below is a presentation of the findings related to each topic.

4.1. Death

Death is an unpleasant situation for almost all people across the world. It is usually accompanied by feelings of fear and apprehension. Such feelings on the part of people who experience the death of a close person make the delivery of death news a difficult act. Therefore, people resort to euphemisms to soften the unpleasant news about death and make the effect of this news less severe. In this study, it was found that the two groups use euphemistic strategies to deliver news about the death of a person. However, the two groups differ in the types and frequency of use of different strategies, particularly in relation to the degree of formality of the interlocutors. The majority of the American participants have shown a tendency to euphemise in the given unpleasant topics, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The use of euphemism in the topic of death by the American group.

| Situations | total | Euphemise | | Did not euphemise | | Freq | No response | Total | Chi ² | Sig. |
|------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------------------|--------|------|-------------|-------|------------------|--------|
| | | freq | % | freq | % | | | | | |
| Formal | 21 | 16 | 76.19% | 4 | 19.05% | 1 | 4.76% | 100% | 18.00 | 0.00* |
| Informal | 21 | 16 | 76.19% | 5 | 23.81% | 0 | 0% | 100% | 5.762 | 0.016* |

*: significant at the level of (0.05)

Table 4 shows that there are statistically significant differences between those who used euphemisms and those who did not use euphemisms in formal and informal death situations. The Chi² values are 18.00, and 5.762 respectively, and these values show significant differences at the level of (0.05) where the variance was in favor of those who euphemised. Table 4 also indicates that the majority of the American participants euphemised in both formal (76.19%) and informal (76.19%) situations of death. In the formal context, 19.05% of the Americans did not euphemise which means that they deliver the news directly and clearly. In the informal situations, 23.81% of the participants did not euphemise as well. Only one participant did not provide a response.

As for strategies of euphemism used by the American participants, the analysis in Table 5 below shows that there were statistically significant differences in the use of euphemistic strategies by the Americans in the topic of

death, with the *synonym* strategy as the most frequent (79.49%), followed by *part-for-the-whole* (*condolences*) (17.95%) and *deletion* (2.56%), respectively. The χ^2 value is 38.769 which is significant at the level of (0.05), and the variance was in favor of the *synonym* strategy. As for the degree of formality, the analysis reveals that there were no statistically significant differences between formal and informal situations in the relation to these strategies and the total. The χ^2 values are 0.032, 0.143, 0.026, respectively, and these values are not significant at the level of (0.05).

Table 5: The use of strategies of euphemism in the topic of death by the American group.

| Strategies | | | Formal | | Informal | | Chi ² | Sig. |
|--|------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|------------------|-------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | | |
| Synonym | 31 | 79.49% | 16 | 51.61% | 15 | 48.39% | 0.032 | 0.857 |
| Part for the whole (Condolences) | 7 | 17.95% | 3 | 42.86% | 4 | 57.14% | 0.143 | 0.705 |
| Deletion | 1 | 2.56% | - | - | 1 | 100% | - | - |
| Total | 39 | 100.0% | 19 | 48.7% | 20 | 51.3% | 0.026 | 0.873 |
| Chi ² = 38.769, Sig. (0.000*) | | | | | | | | |

*: Significant at the level of (0.05).

Below are examples on each strategy. As we have already said, *synonym* is the most frequent strategy, as illustrated in the following examples.

- (1) *Friend's name, I need you to sit down, we have to talk. I have to tell you something that isn't going to be easy to take. Your mother **has passed away**. I am here for you, and I am so sorry for your loss. (Informal)*
- (2) *We need to talk. Let's sit down. Your mom **has passed away**. (Informal)*
- (3) *Boss, we need to talk in private. Your mom **passed away**. (Formal)*
- (4) *Your mom **has passed away** I am sorry for your loss. (Formal)*

The second strategy is *part-for-the-whole*. The examples below were taken from the data to show the use of this strategy.

- (5) *I am so sorry, but your mother passed away. **I am so sorry for your loss if you need anything I am here for you.** (Informal)*
- (6) *I am so sorry, but your mother has passed away. **My condolences** are with you. I am sorry for your loss. (Formal)*

Only one American participant used *deletion* (2.56%), and it was used in an informal situation, as shown in the example below:

- (7) *I need to talk to you. I want you to know that I am here for you and will help you with whatever next steps you need to take. I just got a phone call about your mom*

The majority of the American informants were not direct when dealing with death in most of their responses; they preferred to introduce the topic first in both formal and informal situations by showing support, sympathy, and being sorry for what happened before telling the painful news about the death of the person to the hearer, as demonstrated in the following examples:

- (8) *I need to talk to you. I want you to know that I am here for you and will help you with whatever next steps you need to take. I just got a phone call about your mom....*
- (9) *Do you have a moment? Take a rest I am deeply sorry, but I was just told your mother has passed away. I am so sorry.*

In formal situations, one American participant (4.76%) did not provide a response. He thinks that it is not his job, i.e., it is a family matter, as demonstrated below:

- (10) *I would put my boss in contact with whoever told me. It's not my responsibility to be involved in my boss's matter.*

The word 'loss' has been employed by the majority of the American participants which can elude to the way Americans perceive death. The Americans are generally very attached to life; they consider death as a loss and a problem, not a natural event of life; as a result, the Americans tend to avoid talking about it. In an interview with a CNN journalist, Kate Sweeney, the author of **American Afterlife**, talked about this subject; in particular, she said: "The Americans ... are very obsessed with youth and triumphing over every challenge they face that they become scared of getting older and death, it is seen as life's ultimate defeat."

Turning now to the Algerian participants, the study shows that they tend to deal differently with the topic of death. Table 6 below indicates that the Algerian participants also euphemise when they want to report the news of death; however, they employ different strategies. The table shows that 90.48 % of the Algerians euphemised in the formal situation whereas 9.52% did not euphemise. In the informal situation, 95.24% euphemised, but only 4.76% did not euphemise.

Table 6: Use of euphemism by the Algerian group.

| | | Euphemise | | Did not euphemise | | | | |
|------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------------------|-------|-------|------------------|-------|
| Situations | total | freq | % | freq | % | Total | Chi ² | Sig. |
| Formal | 21 | 19 | 90.48% | 2 | 9.52% | 100% | 13.762 | 0.00* |
| Informal | 21 | 20 | 95.24 | 1 | 4.76% | 100% | 17.190 | 0.00* |

*: significant at level of (0.05)

Table 6 shows that there were statistically significant differences between those who euphemise and those who did not euphemise in the formal and informal death situations. The Chi² values are 13.762, 17.190, respectively, and these values show significant differences at the level of (0.05), where the variance was in favor of those who euphemised.

As for the strategies of euphemism used by the Algerian participants in the topic of death, Table 7 below shows that there were statistically significant differences in the use of euphemistic strategies by the Algerian participants in the topic of death. In particular, the *part-for-the-whole* strategy was the most frequent, with (51.67%), followed by *overstatement* (26.66%) and *synonym* (21.67%), respectively. The Chi² value was 9.300 which is significant at the level of (0.05), and the variance was in favor of the *part-for-the-whole* strategy. The results also show that there were no statistically significant differences between formal and informal situations and the total. The Chi² values were 0.806, 1.000, 0.692, and 0.267, respectively, and these values are not significant at the level of (0.05).

Table 7: Use of strategies of euphemism by the American group.

| Strategies | | | Formal | | Informal | | Chi ² | Sig. |
|---|------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|------------------|-------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | | |
| Part for the whole | 31 | 51.67% | 18 | 58.06% | 13 | 41.94% | 0.806 | 0.369 |
| Overstatement | 16 | 26.66% | 6 | 37.5% | 10 | 62.5% | 1.000 | 0.317 |
| Synonym | 13 | 21.67% | 8 | 61.54% | 5 | 38.46% | 0.692 | 0.405 |
| Total | 60 | 100% | 32 | 53.33% | 28 | 46.67% | 0.267 | 0.606 |
| Chi ² = 9.300, Sig. (0.010*) | | | | | | | | |

*: Significant at level of (0.05).

The most frequent strategy used by the Algerian participants was *part-for-the-whole*, with 51.67% of occurrences. It was used in the formal situations

(58.06%) more than in the informal ones (41.94%). This finding can be attributed to the fact that, as Muslims, Algerians tend to resort to religious phrases when delivering any news about death. Condolences are classified under the *part-for-the-whole* strategy. Many of the Algerian participants reported this information by expressing their condolences to the hearer in formal or informal situations, as illustrated in the examples below.¹ The first example is in informal situations, and the second is in formal situations.

- (11) *الدنيا مراح دووم لحتى واحد و الموتى علينا حق عظم الله اجرته في الوالدة ربي بصيرك بصيرك*
/js'abrak rabbi ?alwaldah fi ?adzrak ?allah ?ad'ama haq ?liina
walmøut waahad lhata duum maraah ?iddunja/
'The world does not last for anyone, and death is a right. May God be with you.'
- (12) *عظم الله اجرتم في الوالدة صدي صدي الدنيا دوام الحال من المخل*
/?almuhaal min ?alhaal dwaam ?addunja hija haaði ?alwaldah fi
?adzrakum ?allah ?ad'ama/
'My condolences this is the world where nothing lasts.'

Overstatement ranked second, with 26.66%. This strategy is used when the speaker begins to exaggerate to evoke the feelings of the hearer. In this study, the Algerian participants were found to use this strategy in the informal setting (62.5%) more than in the formal one (37.5%). Here, death is overstated and exaggerated as illustrated in the following examples:

- (13) *الله غالب الوالدة لقابص ربح*
/rabbi lqaat ?ilwaaldah yaalib ?allah/
'Sorry, your mother met her creator.'
- (14) *نقولك خير بجمع ما تتقلىقش. همامك حبها ربي وداها*
/waddaaha rabbi habha mamaak titqalaqif ma bs'ah x abar ngullak/
'I will tell you something but calm down okay. God loved your mother, and he took her.'
- (15) *الوالد الدايم ربي الله بصيرك*
/js'abbrak ?allah rabbi ?iddajim ?ilwaalid/
'Your father, only God lasts.'

Synonymy ranked third, with 21.67%. For example, the participants used the word *توفى* (passed away) instead of the word *مات* (died). Most of the Al-

¹ Note that the second line in the examples does not contain the word-by-word glosses of the words in the original, but just the transliteration. It does not follow the right-to-left direction of writing in the original Arabic text but the phonological realization. In other words, the first word of the sentence in the Arabic script on the right edge corresponds to the first transliterated from on the left edge, etc.

gerian participants resorted to this strategy more in the formal setting (61.54%) compared to the informal one (38.46%). Below are some examples.

- (16) شوفي راج نقولت حاجة في دنيا هي رانا غير ضياقت وواهي دار امتحان وابتلاء و كامل راج نفوتو عليها
وراج نذوقو من مر هاذ الدنيا والله معلا بالي كهي تخادي نقولك بصع هاملت ابي توفات.
/twafaat ?aj maamaak bs?aħ ngullak yaadii ki baali mafala wallah
?addinja haad mur min nduuquu wraah ?liiha nfuutuu raah
wkaamil wibtilaa? ?imtihaan daar wrahi d'jaaf yajr raana haaði
ddunja fi haadzah nguullak raah suufi/
'Look I will tell you something, in this world, we are only guests,
and it is the house of exams and intolerance, and all of us may taste
this bitter this is the world I swear that I don't know how I would
say this to you, but your mother has passed away.'
- (17) خويا هذه سنة الحياة و البقاء لله املت حايم ربي توفات ربي بصوتك خويا العزيز
li?ziiz χ uujah js?abrak rabbi twafaat rabbi daajim ?ummak lillah
/walbaqaa? ?alhajah sunnat haaði χ uujah/
'Brother, this is one of the life norms and only God lasts your mother
passed away God be with you dear brother.'
- (18) سلام عليك سيدي، هالابيش كفاش راج نقولك بصع جانا خير بلبي الوالدة تاملت توفات
twafaat taafak ?ilwaalidah billi χ abar dzaana bas?aħ ngullak raah
/kiifaaf ?alabaliif ma sajidi ?alajk salaam/
'Alsalam Alaykum sir, I don't know how I would say this, but we
heard the news that your mother passed away.'

In closing, it can be noticed that all the strategies employed by the Algerian participants reflect their religious beliefs. Death in Islam is the end of worldly life but the beginning of another. As a result, once they pass to their new life (life after death), all they need is prayers, Doaa and Sadaka. This is most likely the reason why all the Algerian participants resorted to religious phrases and condolences when reporting the sad news in both formal and informal settings. It is important to mention that Islam is the religion of the majority in Algeria and that believing in the afterlife is one of the sixth articles of faith in the Islamic religion. The Algerian participants' beliefs justify the extensive use of religious phrases and Verses.

4.2. Lying

Lying is a negative trait of a human being. However, many people lie for different reasons. In such situations, they may resort to euphemism to justify the use of lying in a particular situation. It should be recollected that this study compares between Americans and Algerians in the use of euphemism

in the topic of lying. This sub-section begins by reporting the results related to the use of euphemistic strategies by the American group.

Table 8: The use of euphemisms in the topic of lying by the American group.

| | | Euphemise | | Did not euphemise | | | | |
|------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------------------|-------|-------|------------------|-------|
| Situations | total | freq | % | freq | % | Total | Chi ² | Sig. |
| Formal | 21 | 21 | 100% | - | - | 100 | - | - |
| Informal | 21 | 10 | 47.61% | 11 | 52.38 | 100 | 0.048 | 0.827 |

Table 8 shows that there were no statistically significant differences between those who used euphemism and those who did not use euphemism in the informal situation. The Chi² value is 0.048, and it is not significant at the level of (0.05). In the formal situations, all participants (100%) euphemised. This could be explained with reference to politeness which prevents them from exposing the liars, especially in public. On the other hand, in informal situations, 47.61% euphemised, and 52.38% did not. This shows that the participants who did not euphemise seem to be straight and direct; they seem to prefer facing the liars when they are their friends. Consequently, euphemism in the topic of lying depends on the degree of formality between the interlocutors: the lower the degree of formality, the more euphemism is used, and the higher the degree of formality, the least euphemism is used (see the examples below). The first two are used in formal situations, and the other two are used in informal situations.

- (19) *Are you sure that's how it happened? I spoke to Cathy who said it happened very differently.*
- (20) *What you are saying is inaccurate.*
- (21) *I know that isn't true you know.*
- (22) *Are you sure it is true? I heard something different.*

As for strategies of euphemism, the results in Table 9 show that there are statistically significant differences in the use of euphemistic strategies by the American participants in the topic of lying. The *understatement* strategy ranked first, with 93.55%, followed by the *deletion* strategy, with 6.45%. The Chi² value is 23.516 which is significant at the level of (0.05), and the variance is in favor of the *understatement* strategy.

Table 9. The use of strategies of euphemism in the topic of lying by the American group.

| Strategies | | | Formal | | Informal | | Chi ² | Sig. |
|---|-------------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|------------------|--------|
| | Frequencies | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | | |
| Understatement | 29 | 93.55% | 19 | 65.52% | 10 | 34.48% | 2.793 | 0.095 |
| Deletion | 2 | 6.45% | 2 | 100% | 0 | 0% | - | - |
| Total | 31 | 100% | 21 | 67.7 | 10 | 32.3 | 3.903 | 0.048* |
| Chi ² = 23.516, Sig. (0.00*) | | | | | | | | |

*: Significant at level of (0.05).

As for the *understatement* and *deletion* strategies, there were no statistically significant differences between the formal and informal situation. The Chi² value is 2.793 for *understatement* and there is no use of *deletion* in the informal situations. The Chi² value is 3.903 for the comparison between the total values among the formal and informal situations which is significant at the level of (0.05), and the variance is in favor of the formal situations. As also shown in the table, *understatement* came first, with 93.55%. This strategy was used in formal (65.52%) more than in informal situations (34.48%). The participants employed phrases such as 'it is not true', 'for real', 'I heard another side of the story', or asked questions such as 'are you sure?'. *Understatement* enables the speaker to inform indirectly the liar about his/her doubts about what is being said, and that they are aware of him/her being dishonest but still in a polite way, as shown in the following examples. The first three are in formal situations, and the second three are in informal ones.

- (23) *I am sorry I think that I misunderstood what you say? I don't think that this is right because ...*
- (24) *I have heard a few clarifying points. Could you please clarify your point?*
- (25) *I am confused as to what you are saying maybe there was an error. Here is the fact.*
- (26) *Are you sure that this is true? I have heard something else.*
- (27) *I have heard another side of the story to what you told me earlier. I would appreciate it if you could tell me the truth.*
- (28) *Are you sure? I don't think that's right.*

Deletion is the least used strategy, with 6.45%; it was used only in formal situations, as illustrated in the example:

(29) *I think there is a misunderstanding as far as I know the truth is*

Turning to the Algerian informants, the use of euphemistic expressions in the shamed-based taboo topic of lying is illustrated in the table below.

Table 10: The use of euphemisms in the topic of lying by the Algerian group.

| Situations | Euphemise | | | Did not euphemise | | Total | Chi ² | Sig. |
|------------|-----------|------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------|------------------|--------|
| | total | freq | % | freq | % | | | |
| Formal | 21 | 15 | 71.42% | 6 | 28.58% | 100% | 3.857 | 0.050* |
| Informal | 21 | 14 | 66.66% | 7 | 33.34% | 100% | 2.333 | 0.127 |

Table 10 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between those who used euphemisms and those who did not use euphemisms in the topic of lying in formal situations. The Chi² value is 3.857 which is significant at the level of 0.05, and the variance is in favor of those who euphemised. In addition, the results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between those who euphemised and those who did not euphemise in the informal situation. The Chi² value is 2.333 which is not significant at the level of 0.05. Table 10 also shows that 66.66% of the Algerian participants euphemised in the informal situations while 71.42% of them avoid facing the liars in the formal ones due possibly to politeness and the degree of formality. The setting imposes on the participants to euphemise especially in front of the attendees such as their bosses. Even if their colleague is lying, they do not dare to face him/her due to the distance between them and the fear of being impolite especially in the presence of the boss. It is also noticed that 33.34% of the Algerian participants did not euphemise in informal situations as they prefer to face their friends and to tell them that they are lying to them directly. Table 10 also reveals that 28.58% of the Algerian sample did not euphemise in the formal settings. Unlike the Americans, where none of them dare to expose their colleagues at a work meeting in front of their bosses.

As for strategies of euphemism, the analysis presented in Table 11 below shows that there are statistically significant differences in the use of euphemistic strategies by Algerian participants in the topic of lying. The *understatement* strategy ranked first, with 82.76%, followed by the *metaphor* strategy, with 17.24%. The Chi² value is 12.448 which is significant at the level of 0.05, and the variance is in favor of the *understatement* strategy. In these two strategies, there are no statistically significant differences in the formal situations, with the Chi² value being 1.500 which is not significant at the level of 0.05. The Chi² value for the comparison between the total values among the formal and informal situations is 0.034 which is not significant at the level of 0.05.

Table 11: The use of strategies of euphemism in the topic of lying by the Algerian group.

| Strategies | | | Formal | | Informal | | Chi ² | Sig. |
|---|------|--------|--------|-------|----------|-------|------------------|-------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | | |
| Understatement | 24 | 82.76% | 15 | 62.5% | 9 | 37.5% | 1.500 | 0.221 |
| Metaphor | 5 | 17.24% | / | / | 5 | 100% | - | - |
| Total | 29 | 100% | 15 | 51.7 | 14 | 48.3 | 0.034 | 0.853 |
| Chi ² = 12.448, Sig. (0.00*) | | | | | | | | |

*: Significant at level of (0.05).

The analysis of the data suggests that the most frequent strategy used by the Algerians is *understatement*, with 82.76%. Here, the participants attempt to minimise the effect of lying by making it less important. They resort to *understatement* in formal (62.5%) more than in informal (37.5%) situations, as shown in the following examples. The first two are formal, and the third is informal.

- (30) *والك متأكد من كلامك هذا. خاطر كل مرة نسمعو هدوة مبدلة فبصمنا في هذي الحكاية قدهقد الله بريم
وهلديك*
/waaldiik jarham ?allah qadqad lhkaajah haði fi fihhimna mbaddlih hadrah nissam?u marrah kul ?aat'ir haada kalaamak min mit?akkid raak/
'Are you sure of what you are saying because every time we hear something different explain to us this story please, may God forgive your parents.'
- (31) *سملي على المقاطعة. بعد الكلام لي والة تقول فيه يدخل الفلانة مع اختراعتي*
/?ihtiraami ma? ?iffak jad?il fiih tguul raak li ?ilklaam bis'aħ ?ilmuqaada?ah ?ala smaħli/
'Forgive me for interrupting but what you are saying is doubtful with all my respect.'
- (32) *انتي من نيكنة تموسيني نصدق حاجة كيفا هادي*
/haadi kiima haad?ah ns'addig thuusiini niitik min ?inti/
'Seriously !!! you want me to believe that.'
'Seriously!!! I did not hear that don't be afraid just tell me the truth.'

On the other hand, 17.24% of the Algerian participants preferred to use *metaphor* when dealing with the liars. More importantly, this strategy was used only in the informal situation. It seems that the formal setting imposes on the participants to behave in a certain manner. Therefore, respecting the attendees is crucial even if you know that somebody is lying. The participants used words and expressions which are local; people from other Arabic countries would not be able to understand them; however, the Algerian community can decode their meaning. The following are two examples from informal situations.

- (33) هنا ميس راحي تقلي من الصواب.
/ʔisʔbbaaħ min tuqlli raaki habbas hnah/
'Stop here. You are lying.'
- (34) برصي ما تقردني علينا راه كلسي دابن مكان لاه تخرطي عليا
/ʕalajjah tħurtʔi laah makaan baajin kulfi raah ʕliina tqarrdi mabar-
ki/
'Stop lying on us. We know the truth.'

4.3. Disease

The topic of disease is classified within fear-based topics. In general, people fear diseases, especially the chronic ones like cancer, diabetes, and AIDS. Allan and Burridge (2006: 220) state that "it is only relatively recently that authorities have overcome their reticence to use the word cancer in the names of hospitals, clinics and special units for cancer patients preferring something like ecology instead". The analysis presented in Table 12 below shows that 52.38% of the American participants euphemised in informal situations, 33.33% of them did not euphemise, and 14.29% provided no response. As for the formal settings, the table shows that 38.10% of the American participants euphemised, while 42.85% of them did not euphemise which means that the American participants in formal situations tend to be more explicit and direct when announcing such devastating news. More importantly, 19.05% of the American participants did not provide a response, believing that it is not their responsibility to tell other people about the health condition of somebody else i.e., it is a private matter. Here are some examples to illustrate their use.

- (35) *I don't feel comfortable sharing that information.*
(36) *I suggest that you reach him and ask him.*

Table 12: The use of euphemism in the topic of disease by the American group.

| Situations | Euphemise | | Did not euphemise | | No Responses | | Total | Chi ² | Sig. | |
|------------|-----------|------|-------------------|------|--------------|------|--------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | total | freq | % | freq | % | freq | | | | % |
| Formal | 21 | 9 | 42.85% | 8 | 38.10% | 4 | 19.05% | 100% | 2.000 | 0.368 |
| Informal | 21 | 11 | 52.38% | 7 | 33.33% | 3 | 14.29% | 100% | 4.571 | 0.102 |

Table 12 also shows that there are no statistically significant differences between those who euphemised and those who did not euphemise in the topic of disease in formal and informal situations. The Chi² values are 2.000 and 4.571, respectively, which are not significant at the level of 0.05, and the variance is not significant.

As for strategies of euphemism, the analysis in Table 13 below shows that one strategy was used in the topic of disease represented by the participants. This strategy is *vagueness*, with a frequency of 18 in both types of situations. In the formal setting, it was used by 38.89% of the participants and, in the informal setting, it was used by 61.11%. The results show that there are no statistically significant differences between the formal and informal settings regarding the use of the *vagueness* strategy. The Chi² value is 0.889 which is not significant at the level of 0.05.

Table 13: The use of strategies of euphemism in the topic of disease by the American group.

| Strategies | Formal | | Informal | | Chi ² | Sig. | | |
|------------|--------|------|----------|--------|------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | | | | |
| Vagueness | 18 | 100% | 7 | 38.89% | 11 | 61.11% | 0.889 | 0.346 |
| Total | 18 | 100% | | | | | | |

*: Significant at level of 0.05.

The American participants who euphemised used only one strategy when dealing with the topic of disease, namely vagueness, as noted above. Vagueness is used as a device to avoid naming diseases such as cancer, or to substitute the name with non-specific terms such as disease or illness. Con-

sequently, the fatal nature of diseases such as cancer and leukaemia makes the participants use *vagueness* to avoid traumatizing the receiver. The participants resorted to this strategy in informal situations (61.11%) more than in formal ones (38.89%). We can justify these numbers by saying that the decision to use *vagueness* depends on the kind of the relationship between the interlocutors. For instance, the relationship between the boss and his employee is different from that between cousins, and hence the way of interaction is different. This professional relationship between them makes the participants make this piece of information that their bosses are asking for devoid of emotion. As a result, most of them did not euphemise in the formal setting, as they prefer to refer to the disease directly and clearly (see examples below). The first two are in informal situations, and the second two are in formal ones.

(37) *She/he is very sick.*

(38) *They have found out he has a serious illness. Please do your best to be attentive in this difficult time.*

(39) *He is seriously ill, and it might be best to talk to my colleague instead of me.*

(40) *He is very sick, and I think it's pretty serious, unfortunately.*

Turning now to the Algerian participants, the analysis shows that there is a statistically significant difference between those who euphemised and those who did not euphemise in the topic of disease in informal situations. The Chi² value is 13.762 which is significant at the level of 0.05, and the variance is in favor of those who euphemised. However, the results show that there are no statistically significant differences between those who euphemised in formal situations and those who did not. The Chi² value is 2.33 which is not significant at the level of (0.05). Moreover, the analysis reveals that 90.47% of the participants used euphemism in informal situations, whereas only 9.53% of them did not. In formal situations, 66.66% used euphemism, while 33.34% did not.

Table 14: The use of euphemism in the topic of disease by the Algerian group.

| Situations | total | Euphemise | | Did not euphemise | | Total | Chi ² | Sig. |
|------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------|------------------|-------|
| | | freq | % | freq | % | | | |
| Formal | 21 | 14 | 66.66% | 7 | 33.34% | 100% | 2.33 | 0.127 |
| Informal | 21 | 19 | 90.47% | 2 | 9.53% | 100% | 13.762 | 0.00* |

As for strategies of euphemism, the results in Table 15 below show that there were statistically significant differences in the use of euphemistic strategies by the Algerian participants in the topic of disease, with the *vagueness*

strategy ranking first (62.96%), *metaphor* second (22.22%), and *deletion* third (14.82%). The Chi² value is 10.889 which is significant at the level of 0.05, and the variance is in favor of the *vagueness* strategy. In the use of *vagueness* and *metaphor*, there were no statistically significant differences between formal and informal situations. The Chi² values were 0.529, and 0.667, respectively which are not significant at the level of 0.05. There was no use of the *deletion* strategy in formal situations.

Table 15: The use of strategies of euphemism in the topic of disease by the Algerian group.

| Strategies | Formal | | Informal | | Chi ² | Sig. | | |
|---|--------|--------|----------|--------|------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | | | | |
| Vagueness | 17 | 62.96% | 7 | 41.17% | 10 | 58.83% | 0.529 | 0.467 |
| Metaphor | 6 | 22.22% | 2 | 33.33% | 4 | 66.67% | 0.667 | 0.414 |
| Deletion | 4 | 14.82% | / | / | 4 | 100% | - | - |
| Total | 27 | 100% | | | | | | |
| Chi ² = 10.889 Sig. (0.004*) | | | | | | | | |

*: Significant at level of 0.05.

Three strategies were adopted by the Algerian participants, as noted above. The first is *vagueness* (62.96%). Here, the participants seem to avoid mentioning or naming the disease because diseases such as cancer are fatal. Therefore, they tend to use vague and non-specific words to refer to it to avoid traumatizing the listener. They used expressions or phrases such as (thak El-mard= that disease) or (rah marid= he is ill) which are too general to refer to a specific disease, namely cancer. Similar to the American participants, the Algerians employed *vagueness* in the informal context (58.83%) more than in the formal one (41.17%), as shown in the following examples: (The first two are informal, and the second two are formal).

- (41) راه شوية مريض نشأ الله ربي يشفيه دايولو
 /ʔidʕiiwluh jɪʃfiɪh rabbi ʔinʃaalah mareidʔ ʃwɪjjah raah/
 'He is a little bit ill god willing he will heal just pray for him.'
- (42) نقولهم جازكم الفلاني راه مريض بمرض ماشي ملبح ساعفوه ومتتغشوش منو وضعفوه نديولو على بالو
 متقلاقوش
 /matqalaquuhʃ baaluh ʃla nahiiwuluh wdʔahkuuh minnuh
 wmatityaʃuuf saaʃfuuh mliih maaʃi bimardʔ mareidʔ raah ʔilflaani
 dʒaarkum ngulhum/

'I will tell them that our neighbor is ill with a disease that it is not good to be with him make him laugh and don't stress him.'

- (43) ربي يعافينا ويعافيكم ان شاء الله راه مريض بهذالت المرض ربي يشفيه ويقدره على المرض التامو
/taaʕuh ʔilmardʔ ʕala wiqadruh jiʕaafiih rabbi ʔalmardʔ bhaadaak
mareidʔ raah allah faaʔ ʔin wiʕaafiikum jiʕaafiina rabbi/
'God may protect us God willing, he is ill he has that disease may
God heal him and give him the strength to defeat his disease.'

- (44) راه مريض شوية ويحتاجي منا الدعاء انشاء الله يشفيه ويعطيه الصحة.
/ʔalsʔihah wjaʕtʔiih jiʕfiih ʔinʕaallah ʔidduʕaaʔ minna wihtaaz ʕwaja
mareidʔ raah/
'He is ill, and he needs our Doaa. God willing, may God heal him
and give him health.'

The second strategy which was used only by the Algerians is the *metaphor* strategy (22.22%). The use of this strategy shows that the participants resorted to metaphors to refer to Cancer indirectly. They adopted this strategy in informal situations (66.67%) more than in formal situations (33.33%) because formal settings necessitate that the speaker be concise and precise, and using metaphors would seem inappropriate. The participants used metaphors such as (marad لخبثه alkhabith = the malicious disease), as shown in the examples below (the first in informal, and the second is formal):

- (45) راه فيه المرض الخبيثه
/ʔilxabiitʔ ʔilmardʔ fiuh raah/
'He has the malicious disease.'
- (46) ادعوهو انشاء الله . تداولي عندو المرض المرض الخبيثه الله يشافيه
/jjaafiih ʔallah ʔilxabiitʔ ʔilmardʔ ʕinduh tbaanli ʔinʕaallah
ʔidʕuuluh/
'Pray for him I think that he has a malicious disease.'

The third strategy employed by the Algerians is *deletion* (14.82%). Here, the participants tend to use 'religious phrases' such as Doaa in addition to deleting the name of the disease. This tactic was employed only in the informal context (100%) because, as mentioned above, formal settings require that speakers give precise answers to questions from bosses. Otherwise, the speaker might be accused of hiding the truth which is an unaccepted act in a professional setting. The following examples show this use. The first is formal and the second is informal.

- (47) مسكين راه في حالة ادعوه ربي ينفقه عليه
/ʕalajh jxaffif rabbi ʔidʕuulah haalah fi raah maskiin/
'The poor ...pray for him.'

- (48) الله يجعلها زكاة نفس الصبر
/ʔisʔsʔabir nafs zakaat jidʔʔallah ʔallah/
'May God make it Zakat for his soul.'

5. Conclusion

This contrastive study has examined the similarities and differences between Algerian native speakers and American native speakers when handling taboo topics, namely death, lying, and disease. The data have revealed that when dealing with *death*, the Algerians have euphemised more than the Americans in both formal and informal situations. Both groups of participants have used three strategies to euphemise. The most frequent strategy used by the Algerians is *part-for-the-whole*, the second is *overstatement* and the third is *synonymy*. As for the Americans, *part-for-the-whole* was the second most used strategy after *synonymy*. *Deletion* was the least used strategy. The analysis has shown that the Algerians prefer to use religious phrases and expressions when delivering the news about death which reflects their religious background as Muslims. Concerning the *part-for-the-whole* strategy, the Americans used it more in the informal context, while the Algerians used it more in the formal context.

When dealing with the second topic, *lying*, all Americans (100%) euphemised in the formal situation; however, not all the Algerians euphemised in formal settings (77.42%). In informal situations, the Algerians euphemised more than the Americans did. Both parties used two strategies to euphemise in the topic of lying. The first one is *understatement*; it was used by both parties. Both have resorted to *understatement* in the formal context more than the informal one, but it was found in the Americans' responses more than the Algerian ones. The second strategies used by the Americans and the Algerians are different. The former used *deletion* while the latter used *metaphor*.

Moving to the third topic, namely *disease*, the study has found that the Algerians euphemised more than the Americans did in both formal and informal situations. The Americans used only one strategy, namely *vagueness*. The Algerians used three strategies: *vagueness*, *metaphor* and *deletion*. The Americans used *vagueness* in informal situations more whereas the Algerians used it more in formal situations. These differences are due to the different cultures, backgrounds, and mentalities of both groups that are mirrored through their responses. In the end, euphemism is a universal phenomenon; however, it differs from one culture or one language to another, and our aim was to explore how this phenomenon is manifested across different societies. We have found out that linguistic and cultural differences lead to differences in the use of euphemism. For example, some languages include less indirect expressions than direct ones. In addition, in some cul-

tures such as the Algerian, people feel more united, more emotional and more caring for others' feelings than in other cultures. Therefore, the way euphemism is used may differ from one culture to another and from one language to another.

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Appendix

DCT

Thank you for your participation in this piece of research. You are invited to read all the situations and to write your answers in your language (or dialect) in the boxes below each situation. Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Gender Male Female Nationality: Algerian American

Topic 1: Death

In informal Situation: You have been informed that your friend's mother has died. You want to pass this information to your friend. How would you say it?

In formal Situation: You need to inform your boss that his/her mother has died. What would you say to him/her?

Topic 2: Lying

In an informal Situation: A friend lied to you and you want to tell him /her that what he/she said is a lie. What would you say to inform him/her of this?

In a formal situation: you are in a meeting at work and one of your colleagues is telling lies and you want to expose him in front of your boss. How would you say it?

Topic 3: Disease

In informal Situation: Your neighbor was sick and you visited him in the hospital and you have been informed that he was diagnosed with cancer. How would you tell people when they ask you about his/her health?

In formal Situation: Your Colleague at work was diagnosed with Leukemia. And your boss asked you about his/her health. How would you tell him about his disease?