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Literary Theories

Difficulties Facing EFL Learners in Using English Euphemism in conversational Language

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Abstract: The problems facing EFL learners in using English euphemism in conversational Language are many. The study aimed at identifying the problems in using English naturally and finding the effective strategies which can help solve these problems. The study adopted the analytical descriptive method to achieve these objectives. A diagnostic test and a questionnaire are used as tools for data collection. The sample of the study consisted of fifty (50) students from School of Foreign Languages, Wad Medani Ahlia University, Sudan. They were chosen randomly from the target population. The questionnaire was distributed to twenty (20) lecturers from University of Gezira, University of Holly Qura'an and Taseel of Sciences and Wad Medani Ahlia University. The results of the questionnaire and the test have been analyzed by using (SPSS) for program. The study Program has come up with some results, the most important of which are that (95%) of the lecturers strongly agree that the oral production of EFL learners is affected with their mother tongue, (75%) strongly agree that idiomatic expressions always hinder EFL learners performance in spoken and written discourse, (90%) strongly agree that EFL learners reliance on text books contributes to their weakness in conversational language (90%) attribute their weakness to their inability to use English dictionary skills, and the final results of the diagnostic test show that (87.2%) are unable to use English euphemism in conversational language. The study recommends that syllabus designers should focus on topics from everyday use of English, English euphemism should be incorporated into the prescribed syllabus, and English dictionary should be prescribed at pre-university levels as a supportive teaching material for promoting the students' pronunciation and enriching their lexical, syntactical and semantic input. Modern technology should be used as a supportive teaching material to raise the students' motivation and interaction.

Keywords: Pragmatic Competence, Euphemism, EFL Learners, Spoken English.

Introduction

It is known that the human being is the only living being on earth that can speak a well-defined language. People need to communicate with each other day and night, to satisfy their psychological desires, strengthen their social relations, and fulfill their daily needs, and so on. The suitable means that can satisfy all these needs is language. Since one acquires his/her first language before going to school to learn, it is not a problem to communicate with those of his/her mother tongue even if he/she never joins a school. But many people prefer studying another language for several reasons, such as being fond of the community of that language, getting a better job, creating chances for studying abroad, participating in international conferences, and so on. One of those is Sudanese EFL learners who face difficulties in natural communication with each other as well as in misunderstanding and responding to native speakers, particularly when they use euphemisms in English conversation. As a matter of fact, euphemism refers to the pleasant and mild use of language instead of an accurate and direct one. Additionally, the negligence of the culture surrounding that language is considered another problem. Sudanese EFL learners often face significant hurdles when navigating natural communication, particularly regarding the use of euphemisms and idiomatic expressions (Eldow, 2015). Looking into the history of the English language in Sudan, three historical eras are to be considered. The first one is during the colonization period, when the Governor General of Sudan assessed the English language as a subject at the intermediate level and a medium of instruction at secondary and university levels. People who graduated at that time were only a few. Still, they were competent in both written and spoken English, because native speakers were available everywhere, different techniques were used, intensive exposure, different teaching aids and materials, and so on. The second period is post-independence, during which national Governors insisted on orienting education towards the reflection of people's national identity. Consequently, Arabic replaced English as a medium of instruction at the secondary level. During this period, the English language began to deteriorate, and the performance of university graduates in spoken and written English became weaker in comparison with the previous generation. The third era started soon after the announcement of the National Salvation Revolution, when Arabic had replaced English as a medium of instruction at the university level, which negatively affected the four skills of language learning.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It has been noticed that most EFL learners at the university level do not use English euphemisms appropriately in a conversational context. This problem emerges, especially when they meet native speakers. As a result, the communication process between them can be hindered or affected. In other words, this is always seen when EFL learners express themselves in apologies, condolences, congratulations, requests, greetings, imperatives, and so on. This makes it difficult to understand and respond appropriately to native speakers.

Moreover, EFL learners are observed insisting on using fully constructed sentences which are not, to a great extent, suitable to be used in the required situations, and they rarely use euphemism in such situations or contexts. The researcher attributes this to two reasons: the first is that EFL learners are not widely exposed to euphemism in the curriculum that they have studied, while the second is that they do not know more about the target language culture. So, if these problems are not solved, the whole communication process between EFL learners and native speakers can be affected negatively. Hence, the researcher attempts to investigate new strategies that can contribute to solving the problems facing EFL learners in using English euphemism in conversation.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- 1.To explore the difficulties that EFL learners face when using English euphemisms and idiomatic expressions in conversation.
- 2.To investigate the reasons that hinder the student's use of English euphemism and idiomatic expressions in conversation.
- 3.To find out the appropriate strategies to solve the problems of using English euphemisms and idiomatic expressions in conversation.
- 4.To investigate the role of the dictionary in increasing EFL learners' vocabulary, correcting pronunciation, and parts of speech.

1.3 Questions of the Study

1. What are the difficulties EFL learners face in conversation when they use euphemisms and idiomatic expressions?
2. What are the reasons that make EFL learners misuse or do not use euphemism and idiomatic expressions in English conversation?
3. What are the suitable strategies that can be used to solve the problems of using English euphemisms and idiomatic expressions in conversation?
4. How best do EFL learners use the dictionary for increasing vocabulary, correcting pronunciation, and parts of speech?

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

1. The majority of EFL learners face difficulties when using euphemism and idiomatic expressions in English conversation, such as (died) instead of (passed away), the thing which shocks native speakers.
2. Most EFL learners misuse or do not use euphemisms and idiomatic expressions in English conversation, as they are not widely exposed to them during their learning process.
3. Using appropriate strategies in teaching communicative skills and offering the students enough time for practicing language increases the students' awareness and helps to overcome the problems of using euphemism and idiomatic expressions in English conversation.
4. Lack of skillful use of the dictionary contributes to EFL learners' inability in pronunciation, vocabulary, and parts of speech.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is an attempt to investigate the difficulties that EFL learners at the university level face in using euphemism and idiomatic expressions in English conversation. Besides, it draws the teacher's attention to these difficulties. Thus, his study is expected to be useful for both teachers and EFL learners concerning the appropriate use of language in different situations. In addition, the study might help material writers, syllabus designers, and educational circles by suggesting techniques and materials to be incorporated into the syllabus to help solve the problems of using English appropriately in different situations.

1.6 Methodology of the Study

The descriptive analytical method is followed to conduct this study. A sample of fifty students is chosen from the target population to participate in this study. They are tested by the researcher on certain euphemistic expressions. In addition to twenty university lecturers teaching the English language. The tools for collecting data for this research are: a questionnaire for twenty university lecturers who teach English at the University of Gezira, Ahlia university and the University of Holy Quran and Taseel of Sciences, and a test for fifty students from Ahlia University. The data is analyzed by the SPSS programme by calculating the percentage, the means, and the standard deviation.

2. Literature review

The review includes definitions of the key words in the title, besides the different reasons and factors that contribute to the students' misuse of euphemism in English conversation, in addition to the previous studies conducted in this area of linguistics.

In this section of the study, the theoretical background is shown, including most of the related topics to this study, which scholars have written and found as supportive topics to be supportive of the present study.

2.1 Definition of Euphemism

A euphemism refers to the use of a mild, indirect, or less explicit expression in place of one that may be considered harsh, unpleasant, or socially sensitive. Euphemisms function as pragmatic linguistic strategies that allow speakers and writers to address taboo, emotionally charged, or face-threatening topics in a socially acceptable manner, thereby maintaining politeness and reducing potential discomfort in communication (Merriam-Webster, 2023; Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

2.2 Euphemism

In fact, human languages have many ways of reflecting unpleasant meanings in acceptable ways. One of these processes is euphemism, which is defined by Webster (1989:428) as “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant”. He declares that it originates from the Greek word euphemisms, from euphemism, auspicious, sounding good, from eupheme speech from phanai to speak. Keyes (2010:30-1) ascertains the difficulty of avoiding speaking about unpleasant issues completely. This makes people in anon stop investigating to find proper ways of speaking about the phenomena they feared, disliked, worshiped, or knew as

taboo. He claims that "euphemisms are a key indicator of increasing the complexity of speech".

To him, people saying what they mean requires a higher order of intelligence. It takes an even higher order not say what they mean while they are conveying their thought. He concludes that attempts to use euphemism are as old as people's ability to use language.

Concerning Arab students, they are facing problems in using English euphemism due to the different cultural backgrounds; adherence to the use of euphemism in social contexts differs in the first and target language culture, that is to say, Arabic and English. While some situations call for the use of euphemism in one culture, the other sees no need for using it for such situations. However, it is beneficial to know the different ways through which euphemism is formed and used in English society.

2.3 Formation of Euphemism

As it is one of the linguistic branches through which meanings are conveyed. It is fruitful to know the various categories of forming English euphemisms. One of these categories is borrowing lexemes from other languages.

1) Borrowing from other languages: Since the English language historically receives and accepts lexemes from other languages, it adopts this process as one of the ways of talking about things that are difficult to talk about directly. According to Burridge (1991), English has borrowed terms from other European languages such as Latin, French, and many others. For example, from Latin it borrows Latin terminology for body parts, which are used by educators, such as "halitosis," which is used by physicians to mean bad breath. Another way of forming euphemism is conveying the meanings through different ways of forming a new expression to the intended meaning, adopting a process known as semantic change.

2) Semantic change: As it is said, semantic change is one of the many ways that people use to express meanings acceptably. However, it follows its own techniques to talk about things. One of these is circumlocution, which means using longer expressions such as " little girls' room " meaning toilet," post-consumer secondary material "meaning garbage, and " terminological inaccuracy " meaning lie. The second is widening, which means increasing the level of abstraction, like " growth " instead of cancer", the situation instead of pregnancy. The third one is metaphorical transfer, like " blossom " meaning pimple. The fourth is phonetic distortion. Keyes (2010) explained the four branches that are related to this process; they are clipping, abbreviations, reduplications, and distortion of pronunciation.

He supported his opinions with some examples for each of them. For instance, " ladies " instead of ladies' room, "BS" for bull shit, " Jeoper's creeper "means " Jesus Christ" and" crispes " or "crust" for Christ. In conclusion, it can be said that the ways to form euphemism are even more varied than the aforementioned ones; unfortunately, few EFL learners know this fact. However, there are many different reasons and motives for using euphemism.

2.4. The Reasons and Motives for Using Euphemism

According to Lixin et al. (1988:29), who point out that euphemism is used by speakers to serve one of three functions: "taboo, politeness and cover ". They add that English people do not talk about death directly as it is taboo in English culture to utter the word death thinking that it is an invitation to death to come or drawing its attention, hence they use other words for death instead, for instance, they say he is fading quickly for one who is dying and for one who died they say passed away or departed. Concerning the function of politeness, euphemism is used almost in everyday life in English society. For example, they use "simple-minded or unsound mind" for mad, and to the lower class in society, they use "domestic help," which means maid or poverty. Also, for "unemployed" they use discontinue. Allan and Burrige in Cumming cites (2003) declare that " A euphemism is used as an alternative to dispersed expression to avoid possible loss of face; either ones' own face or through giving offense, that of the audience or of some third party " Walker (2011) points out that the motives for euphemizing are not the same adding that they are fear and superstitions, being polite and kind, avoiding embarrassment and playful ways to extract the outsiders. He adds that people need to know the difference between "strategic euphemism" and " instinctive euphemism". The latter includes religious terminology, swearwords as replacing" oh my god "with" oh my gosh "or "hell" with "hock", and "pass away "when talking about the loss of beloved ones. While the first one is a strategic euphemism, which is also known as political correctness and doublespeak.

2.5 Inflated Language

Inflated language is the kind of language that Orwell refers to as a negative side of euphemism, while Lutz (2012: 351) goes beyond this, saying that it is a language:

"Designed to make the ordinary seem extraordinary, to make everyday things seem impressive, to give an air of importance to people, situations, or things. That would not normally be considered important to make the simple seem complex".

He considers this kind amusing and dangerous, which can be divided into two categories: amusing and dangerous.

2.6 Dangerous Doublespeak

According to Lutz (2012:352-53), doublespeak is dangerous if it is used to deceive, when people do not know what is really meant by certain speech they listen to. Herman and Chomsky (2002) declare that the important thing in the world of doublespeak is to be able to lie without being caught by your audience. To them, lying means having the ability to select and shape facts that do not support a certain agenda or programme. In this way, doublespeak is useful since listeners believe that what they are told is the truth, while really it is not. The information is transmitted in the way that "makes murder sound respectable". They add that in modern democratic societies, public decisions are made by both of decision-makers and social participants, therefore decision-makers have to use language

2.7 Death and Illness

It is deeply rooted in Western culture that talking about death directly is considered as an invitation to death; euphemism is used instead of direct words that refer to death. Keith and Burridge (1991:153) believe in the fact that death is one of the topics about which people feel uneasy when talking about it. Pyles et al. (2009) agree with Keith and Burridge that death is always connected with pain over the loss of dearest people, trying to lessen this pain is one of the reasons behind using words that are not shocking. Adding that, since death nowadays often happens far from home, in health care circles, it has become physicians' daily routine to inform the patient's relative about his/ her health, so doctors did their best to select the words that are capable of conveying their message smoothly.

Keys (2010: 138) declares that doctors are more afraid of dying in comparison with others, attributing the reason behind their study of medicine to this fact. As they always work for people's rest, in case of death, they simply say "a patient went" or 'she went peacefully' or "they have lost a patient," avoiding the known euphemistic words used to refer to death. One can add the global movement of people from their homelands in search of better life conditions to their families and supporting those who are unable to leave for different reasons. Many of these people die away from home, and this is considered another reason to use euphemism for death. However, Orwell (2012:8) explains that people either talk about concrete objects or abstract ones. For the former, they depend on seeing the object, then think about the most suitable words to describe it. While for the latter, they need much more selection of words, and this is the main reason that even ready-made euphemisms are not favoured to talk about death. Euphemistic expressions for death are shown below.

No longer with us, feeling no pain
 Finished departed
 A sleep gets a one –way ticket
 Go west,run, etc.

It can be said that these euphemism terms and others show how taboo death is stuck into westerners' mind the thing that requires great effort from EFL learners to master. The third topic for which euphemism is used is sex, which is not going to be discussed in detail in this thesis for religious and cultural reasons. The best example is Clinton's answer in the courtroom when he was asked about his actions with Monica. The judge himself used euphemism in his question, saying:

Judge: Did you sleep with this woman?

Clinton: Not a wink, your honor.

It is the euphemism that inspired Clinton to cleverly deny committing the known case. However, EFL learners have to investigate this area to know the different terms used to refer to sex in the target language

3. Methodology of the study

The methodology of the study includes the samples, tools for collecting data, and means of data analysis. The study follows the analytical descriptive method.

3.1 The Sample of the Study

The sample of the study is made up of two groups, the first one is twenty (20) lecturers who specialized and spent long time in teaching English language at university of Gezira, Ahlia university and university of Holly Qura'an and Taseel of Sciences and the second group is fifty (50) EFL learners from School of Foreign Languages, Medani Ahlia University. They are tested by the researcher on certain euphemistic expressions, idiomatic phrasal verbs, and pure idioms, and checking the lecturers' different opinions related to the topic of the study. This is done through a questionnaire for lecturers and a test for the students.

3.2 The Content of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was made up of twenty (20) questions, nineteen of which are multiple choice questions, while the twentieth is open ended question designed to know the lecturers' different strategies that can be used to answer the problems of using English euphemism and idiomatic expressions in conversation.

3.3 The Content of the Test

The test was made up of thirty questions, ten of which are set to check the students' abilities in using euphemism, while the other twenty are divided into two parts, one for phrasal verbs and the other for pure idioms and proverbs. This test aims to verify the assumption that most EFL learners misuse euphemism in conversational language. The questions from one to ten are set to check the students' ability to use euphemism in different conversational contexts. The second section, which includes questions from eleven to twenty, aims to investigate their knowledge of using the appropriate phrasal verbs. The third section, which includes questions from twenty-one to thirty, is chosen to reveal their abilities in understanding and responding to pure idioms and proverbs.

3.4 Procedure of Data Analysis

Statistical packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyze the data collected by reflecting on the frequency and percentage, whereas tables and graphs were used to present the results.

4. Data analysis and discussion

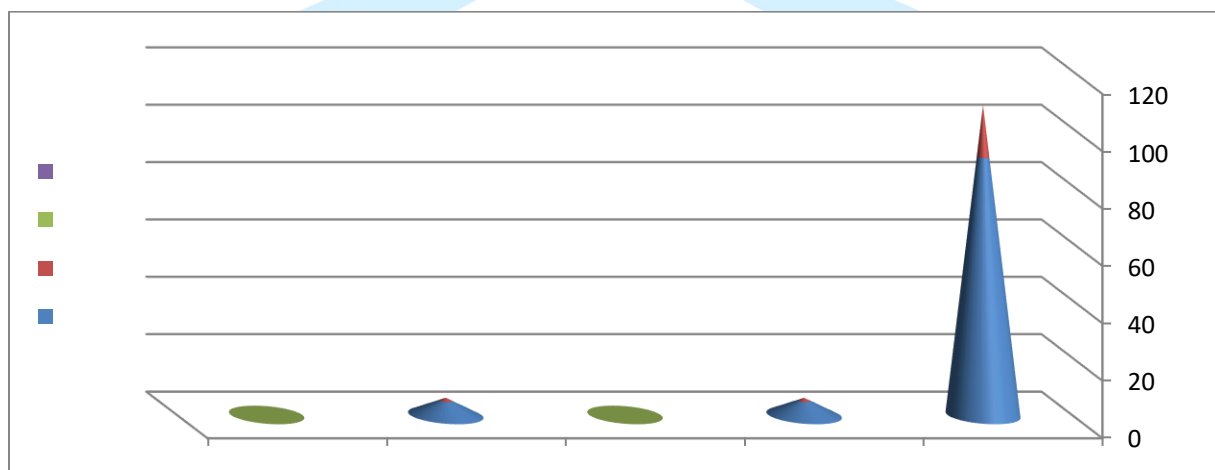
The data have been collected by means of the English test for the learners, and the questionnaire for the lecturers is analyzed statistically. The results are summarized and presented in tables and graphs.

4.1 Data Analysis

The following tables and graphs display the responses given by EFL lecturers to the questionnaire.

Table (4.1.1) EFL learners face difficulties when using English in conversation

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	18	90
Agree	1	5
Neutral	-	-
Disagree	1	5
Strongly disagree	-	-
Total	20	100

**Figure (4.1) EFL learners face difficulties when using English conversation.**

According to the previous table and graph, it is clear that the majority of the respondents (95%) agree that EFL learners face difficulties when using conversation, while (5%) disagree, and no one is either neutral or strongly disagrees.

Table (4.1.2) EFL learners misuse or do not use euphemism and idiomatic expressions in English conversation.

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	16	80
Agree	1	5
Neutral	2	10
Disagree	1	5
Strongly disagree	-	-
Total	20	100

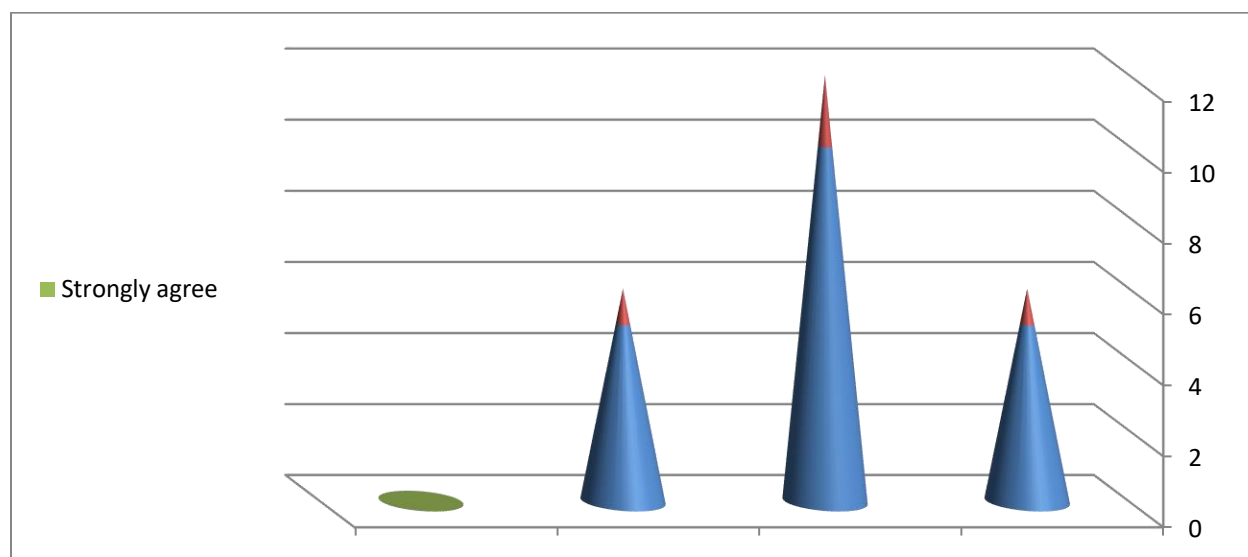


Figure (4.1.2) EFL learners misuse or do not use euphemism and idiomatic expressions in English conversation.

This result shows that more than two-thirds of the respondents (85%) agree that EFL learners misuse or do not use euphemism and idiomatic expressions in English conversation, while (10%) are neutral, and (5%) disagree, while no one strongly disagrees.

Table (4.1.3) Neglecting the practice of intonation and stress aggravates EFL learners' weakness in English conversation

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	15	75
Agree	1	5
Neutral	2	10
Disagree	2	10
Strongly disagree	-	-
Total	20	100

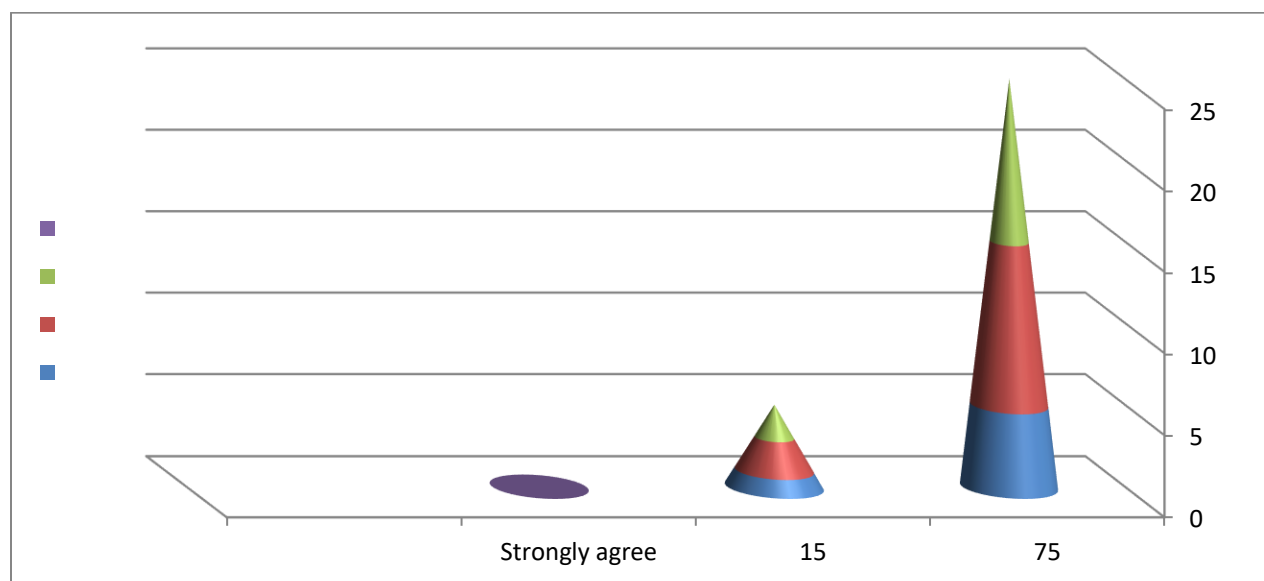


Figure (4.1.3) neglecting the practice of intonation and stress aggravates EFL learners' weakness in English conversation.

In the above table and figure (80%) agree that neglecting the practice of intonation and stress aggravates EFL learners' weakness in English conversation, (10%) neutral, and (10%) disagree, while no one strongly disagrees.

5. Findings

The study has found the following:

1. The learners of English face many difficulties when using the English naturally.
2. The influence of mother tongue is obviously seen in EFL learners' oral production.
3. One of the solutions to the problem of using English euphemism and idiomatic expressions in conversational language is achieved through giving enough time for practicing oral communication.
4. EFL learners' reliance on textbooks only results in their inability to use English euphemism and idiomatic expressions in conversational.
5. Lack of knowledge of spoken English characteristics causes the problem of using English euphemism in conversational language.
6. The absence of an English dictionary at the pre-university level results in EFL learners' inability to use English euphemism and idiomatic expressions in conversational.
7. Adopting the use of modern technology in teaching –learning process facilitates EFL learners' communicative tasks.

6.1 Conclusion

This study has investigated the pragmatic challenges Sudanese EFL learners face when navigating the indirect landscape of English euphemisms. The findings clearly demonstrate that while students may achieve high levels of grammatical and lexical accuracy, they frequently experience sociopragmatic failure when forced to manage sensitive social topics.

The diagnostic data reveals a significant reliance on literal translation and directness, which—though linguistically correct—often results in interaction that appears blunt, unnatural, or culturally insensitive to the target audience. As corroborated by the participating lecturers, this gap is largely a result of limited exposure to authentic, colloquial English and a pedagogical focus that prioritizes formal structure over social application.

Ultimately, the development of communicative competence requires more than a mastery of vocabulary; it necessitates a deep awareness of the cultural norms that govern when and how to be indirect. To bridge this gap, Sudanese higher education must move toward a more "pragmatically-informed" curriculum. By integrating authentic cultural materials and explicit instruction on politeness strategies, educators can empower learners to communicate with the sophistication and sensitivity required for successful global interaction. In addition, the study recommends that: syllabus designers should focus on topics from everyday use of English. English euphemism should be incorporated into the prescribed syllabus. English literature as a vehicle of culture should be intensified in teaching – learning process. Teachers talking time should be minimized, and students talking time should be maximized.

6.2 Recommendations

The study recommends the following

- 1.Syllabus designers should focus on topics from everyday use of English
- 2.English literature as a vehicle of culture should be intensified in teaching –learning process.
- 3.An English dictionary should be prescribed at pre-university levels as a supportive teaching – learning material for promoting the students' pronunciation and enriching their lexical, syntactic, and semantic input.
- 4.Teachers talking time should be minimized, and students talking time should be maximized.
- 5.English clubs should be promoted to help the students use English away from formal contexts (formal classes).

6. Learners of English should maximize the time of using English and minimize the use of their mother tongue.

7. Universities should offer opportunities to those who have demonstrated performance to go and spend a definite time in the home of the second language, which will raise the competition among the learners.

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