

# Students' and Lecturers' Perceptions of Euphemism Use in Everyday and Academic Communication

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## ABSTRACT

Euphemism is used to manage potentially sensitive language and interpersonal relationships. However, limited research has examined how students and lecturers perceive its use across everyday and academic communication. To address this gap, this mixed-methods study examined students' and lecturers' perceptions of euphemism use, including its reported forms and perceived functions, across these two settings. Data were collected through an online questionnaire completed by 96 students from five universities in Yogyakarta and 26 lecturers from ten universities in and outside Yogyakarta. Both groups regarded euphemism as a necessary part of communication. In everyday communication, it was mainly associated with avoiding vulgar, taboo, socially unacceptable, embarrassing, or potentially hurtful expressions. Students more frequently associated euphemism with avoiding awkward situations, whereas lecturers more frequently associated it with empathy and sensitivity. In academic communication, particularly classroom interaction, euphemism was more strongly associated with mutual respect and a supportive, non-threatening environment; few participants linked it with softening correction. The findings highlight the importance of balancing tactful wording with clarity across everyday and academic communication.

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## INTRODUCTION

Communication between lecturers and students is central to effective teaching and learning, particularly in higher education, where feedback, correction, and interpersonal relationships are very important. In academic contexts, language does not merely transfer knowledge; it also plays an important role in showing politeness, maintaining face, and negotiating power relations. Euphemisms also play a role in everyday communication, where speakers may avoid words or expressions that are considered inappropriate, rude, or hurtful.

Euphemisms, defined as words or expressions used to avoid language considered inappropriate, rude, or hurtful, are important linguistic strategies in academic communities (Allan & Burridge, 1991, 2006; Bloch-Rozmej, 2023). Euphemisms have both psychological and pragmatic dimensions in managing interpersonal relationships and preventing negative social consequences (Allan, 2019; Allan & Burridge, 1991, 2006; Bednarek, 2019; Pan, 2013). In Indonesia, where social values prioritize respect, hierarchy, and harmonious relationships, euphemisms are likely to influence both everyday communication and lecturer-student communication.

Previous studies on politeness have highlighted the role of euphemisms. For example, Anugrawati and Syam (2024) studied politeness strategies in the Eastern Indonesian academic context, and found that indirectness, honorifics, and softened language serve to maintain hierarchical lecturer-student relations. Similarly, in their research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) interaction between Indonesian students and lecturers, Sudewi et al. (2023) revealed that euphemistic strategies contribute to softening requests and feedback because both interlocutors use polite and mitigated expressions when interacting in both face-to-face and online modes. In a school context, Astiti (2011) studied teachers' use of euphemisms in report card comments to mitigate their negative evaluations and to save the face of students and parents. Haryati (2020), in a study of English Department students at a university in Banten, Indonesia, found that social and gender norms played a role in the choice of euphemistic expressions for taboos.

The use of euphemisms in English language teaching can also be seen in teachers' tendency to soften negative feedback or sensitive topics. Such language use may help sustain positive relationships in the classroom (Mijuk, 2019). Anugrawati and Syam (2024) also found that, in lecturer-student interactions in Eastern Indonesia, euphemism functions as part of broader politeness strategies used to negotiate asymmetrical power relations. Studies outside Indonesia have examined euphemisms among young people, especially college students, in everyday conversation (Morsalin & Adnan, 2022; Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012; Yıldız, 2021). Other studies by Bloch-Rozmej (2023) and Muhsin et al. (2025) found that euphemisms in teacher-student interactions function as mechanisms for politeness, rapport-building, and conflict avoidance. Taken together, these studies indicate that euphemism use may vary according to communicative setting, relationship, and the social sensitivity of the topic being discussed.

Although previous studies have shown that euphemisms help maintain politeness and harmony in both educational and everyday settings, several gaps remain. Most previous studies have focused on overt language use to maintain politeness or on euphemism use in a single communicative setting, rather than on how students and lecturers perceive euphemisms across everyday and academic communication. Little attention has been paid to whether their perceptions differ between everyday communication and academic interactions, such as lectures, presentations, feedback, consultations, supervision, and other meetings. In addition, little research has examined the types of words most frequently replaced by euphemisms, the forms these euphemisms take, or the reasons for their use across everyday and academic communication.

To address this gap, this study investigates students' and lecturers' perceptions of euphemism use in everyday and academic communication. It explores the perceptions of euphemisms by students and lecturers in everyday situations as well as academic settings, including interactions inside and outside the classroom. The study also examines the types of words that are most frequently replaced by euphemisms. This examination provides a clearer account of issues considered sensitive in participants' everyday and academic communication. To replace such words, students and lecturers may use different euphemistic forms. Examining these replaced words and euphemistic forms may help explain how euphemisms are constructed and used in everyday and academic communication.

Overall, by examining perceptions, replaced words, forms, and reasons for using euphemisms, this study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the role of euphemisms in everyday and academic communication among students and lecturers in Indonesian higher education settings.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This section reviews previous studies on euphemisms. It first discusses the role of euphemisms in social interaction and then explains how euphemisms are used in classroom interaction.

## Euphemism and Its Role in Social Interaction

Euphemism is recognized as more than just a stylistic variation and is accepted as a pragmatic and cognitive process shaped by cultural and social factors. Allan and Burrige (2006) describe it as “a substitute for a dispreferred expression, to mitigate potential face threat” (p. 32).

Several scholars have highlighted the social aspect of euphemisms. Pan (2013) focuses on the psychological and pragmatic factors of euphemisms and describes them as a means by which speakers can maintain smooth social relationships and avoid conflicts by using more neutral and indirect language. Gómez (2009) also emphasizes the social aspect of euphemisms and describes them as more than just a list of polite words. Euphemisms can be understood as a process of conceptual reframing, in which the speaker recasts a socially sensitive and “forbidden reality” as a different and less menacing reality; they operate at the cognitive, pragmatic, and sociocultural levels. These functions make euphemism relevant to everyday communication, where speakers may need to discuss sensitive issues while managing social relationships.

Typologies of euphemism provide a key basis for empirical study, including the following categories: figurative language, circumlocution, abbreviation, omission, synecdoche, hyperbole, jargon, and borrowing (Allan & Burrige, 1991, 2006). More recent studies have included other strategies such as metaphorical and metonymical substitution, implicature, and rhetorical devices (Warren, 1992; Zhang, 2025). A study on youth language has shown that euphemisms are created, among other factors, through pragmatic creativity, such as the use of implicature, rhetorical questions, and “I-language” to refer to sensitive issues (Yıldız, 2021). These models, therefore, show that euphemism is not just the substitution of one word with another but may take many different forms. These categories are used to code the euphemistic forms reported by students and lecturers across everyday and academic communication.

The communicative functions of euphemisms, on the other hand, are similarly diverse. According to Allan and Burrige (2006), euphemisms are important because they help speakers avoid taboos, soften the impact of messages, and support diplomatic communication. In addition, Allan and Burrige (1991) and Warren (1992) point out that euphemisms also help reduce face-threatening acts (FTAs) in everyday interactions. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is relevant to this discussion, especially because euphemisms are often employed to mitigate FTAs such as corrections, criticisms, and requests.

These functions may be relevant in both everyday and academic communication. For example, in a lecturer-student interaction, the lecturer may employ euphemistic devices to soften corrections or criticism that may embarrass the student. Students, in turn, may employ euphemisms to disagree or show doubt without directly challenging the lecturer's face. Aside from the politeness function, euphemisms are also used to maintain rapport, reduce anxiety, and create a positive learning environment (Mijuk, 2019; Pan, 2013).

The form and meaning of euphemisms are strongly dependent on context and culture. Bednarek (2019) stresses that “taboos vary across cultures... therefore, euphemistic strategies need to be examined within the sociocultural context” (p. 29). Cross-cultural research by Bachriani et al. (2018) confirms that cultural background significantly impacts the choice of euphemisms. Meanwhile, research into youth language reveals distinct generational differences in how euphemisms are created (Yıldız, 2021). In Indonesia, the context for the creation of euphemisms is multilingual, with *Bahasa Indonesia*, English, and local languages involved. This multilingual context not only broadens the range of euphemistic strategies but also makes their interpretation more complex, as the same word can be interpreted differently across languages. In everyday

and academic communication, the use of euphemisms is shaped by social, cultural, and institutional norms, including hierarchy and the need to maintain harmony.

This study examines euphemism use across everyday and academic communication through three dimensions: form, function, and cultural grounding. Euphemism forms range from lexical substitution to implicature, while euphemism functions refer to the roles that euphemisms perform in communication, ranging from showing politeness to saving face and encouraging the other speaker. Euphemism cultural grounding refers to the context that shapes the use and comprehension of euphemisms, including the communicative setting and the cultural background of the speaker and the listener. This paper draws on cognitive pragmatic theory (Gómez, 2009), concepts and classifications (Allan & Burridge, 1991, 2006; Warren, 1992), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and cultural aspects (Bachriani et al., 2018; Bednarek, 2019) to develop an analytical basis for examining students' and lecturers' perceptions of euphemism use in everyday and academic communication.

### **Euphemisms in Academic Communication**

Academic communication includes classroom interaction as well as other exchanges between lecturers and students, such as feedback, consultations, and supervision. Effective classroom interaction enables lecturers and students to communicate ideas and information, negotiate meaning, and at the same time, create and recreate their individual and social identities. Gebhard (1998) points out that effective interactions create a warm learning environment where students feel accepted and feel free to take part. In this context, lecturers face the challenge of teaching while sustaining a learning environment where students feel free to express themselves without any fear of embarrassment. Similar concerns may also arise in other academic encounters in which lecturers and students need to discuss performance, difficulties, or sensitive issues.

Euphemisms have an important role to play in this interactional process. As Pan (2013) states, the deliberate use of euphemisms helps to create a more positive ambience in the classroom setting by softening criticism, reducing confrontations, and reducing students' anxiety levels. Euphemisms, therefore, can support learning by enabling lecturers to deliver feedback, questions, and evaluations in less face-threatening ways. For instance, instead of simply saying, "That is wrong," a lecturer can say, "Your answer is almost right" or "That's a good try, but let's work on it a little more." Such wording does not hide the correction; rather, it softens it, keeps students engaged, and helps them avoid the emotional burden of being corrected directly.

Salih (2017) studied the use of euphemisms in English teaching for Libyan secondary school students. He found that English teachers employed euphemistic strategies to address unpleasant and discouraging issues. They employed these strategies to maintain students' motivation and stimulate students' participation, especially when dealing with students' errors and poor performance. Lei (2017) related euphemisms to politeness theories and explained that lecturers can use direct and indirect forms of euphemisms according to students' needs. Another study by Khalil and Mohammed (2024) found that the use of euphemistic expressions can enhance the performance of students. These studies illustrate that the use of euphemisms is not merely decorative language use but can also contribute to positive academic relationships.

The importance of how students receive and perceive euphemistic expressions has also been emphasized by EFL studies. Alsabbah and Al-Shemmery (2021) studied Iraqi EFL students and found that they had difficulty producing and comprehending euphemisms. The researchers found that more explicit instruction improved students' comprehension of the expressions. Although lecturers use euphemisms, these expressions may not be effective if students do not understand them correctly. The findings of the study may also be relevant to the

Indonesian higher education setting due to the presence of multilingual and multicultural elements. In addition to English, students may use Indonesian or local languages when communicating. As mentioned earlier, euphemism is also connected to cultural values. Consequently, students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may have different perceptions of euphemisms. Misunderstandings may arise when students are unfamiliar with the meaning or cultural values of the expressions used. Understanding students' perceptions of euphemisms is therefore important in the Indonesian higher education system because it can help lecturers and students communicate more clearly and effectively.

This issue is also related to cultural and institutional contexts that can affect the role of euphemisms in classroom interactions. For example, research on politeness strategies in Indonesian EFL classrooms has shown that teachers and students tend to use indirect speech and softening phrases to avoid conflict and create social harmony (Ginting & Pasaribu, 2023). Harmia (2024) further explains that, although these politeness strategies can create positive interaction, teachers still face difficulties balancing clarity and diplomacy, especially when giving corrections. Thus, euphemisms may bridge the need for politeness and the need for clarity.

In academic communication, including classroom interaction, euphemism can serve as an effective device that helps achieve both instructional and relational objectives. It enables lecturers to correct, ask questions, and comment in a manner that is considerate of students, encouraging, and beneficial to the classroom environment. When students become aware of and understand the use of euphemisms, this may reflect their developing ability to use language appropriately, which is an important aspect of language education. However, the usefulness of euphemism depends on whether the intended meaning remains clear to the listener. In this study, examining euphemisms in everyday and academic communication demonstrates how language choices and their uses are related to social relationships, cultural expectations, and the goals of language education, especially in a multilingual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting in which culture and institutional rules influence the manner in which individuals communicate.

## METHOD

This mixed-methods study examined students' and lecturers' perceptions of euphemism use, including its reported forms and functions, in everyday and academic communication. In this study, academic communication was examined primarily through items concerning classroom interaction between lecturers and students. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from April to August 2025, and the two data sets were combined to provide a comprehensive analysis in line with the research objectives.

Data collection was administered through a semi-structured questionnaire, which was completed voluntarily by 96 students from five universities in Yogyakarta and 26 lecturers in ten universities in and outside Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The questionnaire was adapted from Bloch-Rozmej (2023) but questions related to COVID-19 were excluded because they were not relevant to the present study. Closed-ended questions were designed to elicit data on respondents' perceptions of euphemism, their reported use of euphemism, perceptions of groups who use euphemisms, and other related issues that could be quantified. Respondents could select more than one answer where more than one option reflected their views or experiences. To obtain richer data from the questionnaire, open-ended questions were included to ask respondents to provide euphemisms they had used or heard others use to replace sensitive or direct expressions.

For quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were employed to determine the number of respondents who chose a particular response to questions regarding their perceptions of euphemism use in everyday and

academic communication. The percentage of respondents selecting each answer option was calculated. The forms and frequencies of the euphemistic expressions provided by respondents in the open-ended questions were also examined to identify possible patterns of euphemism use in everyday and academic communication. The quantitative findings were further used to analyze patterns and trends in participants' perceptions and reported use of euphemisms. The answers to the open-ended questions were subjected to thematic analysis. The forms, themes, and meanings of the euphemistic expressions were then identified, analyzed, and interpreted.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion in three parts: students' and lecturers' perceptions of euphemism use in everyday and academic communication, reported forms of euphemisms, and perceived reasons for using euphemisms in classroom interaction.

### Students' and Lecturers' Perceptions of Euphemism Use

This section discusses students' and lecturers' perceptions of euphemisms in two contexts: everyday communication and academic communication, including classroom interaction.

#### *Perceptions of Euphemism Use in Everyday Communication*

The analysis suggests that students and lecturers share a broadly similar metapragmatic understanding of euphemism; that is, they hold similar beliefs about when euphemism is appropriate and what it is expected to accomplish. These findings do not show how often euphemisms are used in actual interactions. Rather, they show the social norms that participants associate with euphemistic language.

Four general patterns emerge from the responses. First, both students and lecturers recognize the importance of euphemisms in everyday and academic contexts. Second, both groups recognize similar groups of euphemism users and show similar views of how euphemisms are practiced in society. Third, both groups have similar perceptions of the types of words commonly replaced by euphemisms, such as taboo and socially unacceptable words. Fourth, both groups report similar reasons for using euphemisms: to avoid hurting someone's feelings, to avoid sounding vulgar, and to build a positive environment.

**Table 1.**

*Perceptions of Euphemism Use in Everyday Communication*

Usage	Students	Lecturers
As a lack of courage	7%	7.7%
As a necessity in some situations	66.7%	73.1%
As a sign of creativity	20.8%	23.1%
As a manifestation of good manners	28.1%	26.9%
As a sign of a language trend	13.5%	3.8%
As a way to avoid an awkward situation (or negative consequences)	57.3%	42.3%
As a sign of empathy	38.5%	57.7%
As a sign of responsibility	24%	19.2%
As a way to show politeness	61.5%	80.8%
As a way to show respect	57.3%	69.2%
As a way to avoid censorship	1%	-

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of students (66.7%) and lecturers (73.1%) view the use of euphemisms as a necessity in certain situations. This result positions euphemism not as an ornamental linguistic choice but as a socially expected means of managing potentially uncomfortable interaction. Because respondents appear to have been able to select more than one option, the percentages should be read as indicators of salience rather than as mutually exclusive preferences. The relatively high selections for politeness and respect also suggest that directness is not always regarded as the most appropriate choice for maintaining social harmony in everyday interpersonal communication. Overall, the findings indicate that participants associate euphemism with relational work: avoiding embarrassment, showing consideration, and maintaining harmony.

Interestingly, the two groups showed slightly differing preferences. While students more frequently associated euphemisms with avoiding awkward situations (57.3% compared with 42.3% of lecturers), lecturers more frequently associated them with empathy (57.7% compared with 38.5% of students). This difference may suggest that students understand euphemism more in terms of avoiding personal discomfort, whereas lecturers place greater value on its interpersonal-care function.

The open-ended responses also illustrate these attitudes through reported examples rather than records of naturally occurring interactions. Students reported using the milder expression “to use the restroom” to replace “to urinate” because they did not want to sound embarrassing. This suggests that direct references to bodily functions may be regarded as inappropriate in some formal or socially sensitive contexts. Lecturers, on the other hand, provided examples of softened criticism. A lecturer might say, “That’s an interesting idea, but let’s explore some other options” instead of interrupting with “you are wrong,” which may discourage students or create tension. Taken together, these examples show that euphemism is associated with two distinct forms of face management: avoiding embarrassment when discussing sensitive referents and reducing the interpersonal force of evaluative comments.

**Table 2.**

*Groups Associated with Euphemism Use*

Users	Students	Lecturers
Parents	57.3%	80.8%
Politicians	41.7%	50%
Teachers	67.7%	88.5%
Students	41.7%	42.3%
Bloggers	30.2%	11.5%
People with good manners	39.6%	26.9%
Intelligent People	56.3%	65.4%
Priests and monks	31.3%	42.3%
Women	28.1%	23.1%
Men	17.7%	11.5%
Anonymous internet users	1%	-
Social media users	1%	-

Furthermore, as indicated in Table 2, both students and lecturers identified teachers as the group most strongly associated with euphemism use, with 67.7% of the students and 88.5% of the lecturers selecting this category. This result suggests that participants link euphemistic language with professional expectations of teachers. In this view, linguistic tact is not simply a personal preference; it is part of the role expected of someone who holds institutional authority and evaluates others' work. The higher percentage among lecturers may also indicate that lecturers see tactful language as part of their professional identity. For instance, teachers may use euphemisms to establish a positive academic relationship with their students which may help students improve their performance (Lei, 2017; Salih, 2017).

Other groups strongly associated with the use of euphemisms were parents (57.3% of students, 80.8% of lecturers) and “intelligent people” (56.3% of students, 65.4% of lecturers). These associations indicate that euphemism is treated as a marker of social competence, self-control, and educated speech. In other words, participants appear to attach social value to the ability to avoid language judged as harsh or inappropriate. Parents may be associated with euphemism because they are expected to communicate sensitively with children, whereas the category of “intelligent people” appears to reflect participants’ association of indirect language with education and social refinement.

Interestingly, politicians were also associated with the regular use of euphemisms (41.7% of students, 50% of lecturers). This association may reflect the public perception that political discourse often uses indirect or less offensive expressions when addressing sensitive issues. In political discourse, euphemism may function as a rhetorical strategy for presenting contentious or unpleasant topics in more acceptable terms (Allahverdiyeva et al., 2021; Crespo-Fernández, 2018). This finding is relevant to the broader everyday-communication context of the study, although it is not used as evidence about academic communication.

As indicated by Table 3, it is clear that both students and lecturers have a similar notion that euphemisms replace taboo, vulgar, or socially unacceptable words. Among the students, 38.5% identify words considered taboo, 35.4% identify words considered vulgar, and 34.4% identify words related to sexual organs as areas where euphemisms are commonly used. Similarly, 38.5% of lecturers identify words considered vulgar, and 34.5% identify words considered taboo as areas where euphemisms are commonly used. More than half of respondents in both groups indicate that socially unacceptable words are the main category replaced by euphemisms, showing a shared understanding that euphemisms are primarily used when referring to socially sensitive topics.

This pattern suggests that participants understand euphemism broadly as a way of managing language considered socially unsuitable, rather than merely as a way of avoiding fixed taboo terms. The categories in Table 3 may also overlap: a word can be taboo, vulgar, socially unacceptable, and potentially hurtful at the same time. The percentages should therefore be read as dimensions of perceived sensitivity, rather than as separate and mutually exclusive word classes.

**Table 3.**

*Words Perceived as Commonly Replaced by Euphemisms*

Words	Students	Lecturers
Vulgar words	35.4%	38.5%
Taboo words	38.5%	34.5%
Words related to sexual organs	34.4%	30.8%
Words that may hurt others’ feelings	24%	30.8%
Words that are frightening or disgusting	29.2%	23.1%
Politically inappropriate words	19.8%	15.4%
Socially unacceptable words	56.3%	65.4%

The perception of the use of euphemisms by the students and lecturers, particularly in avoiding the use of vulgar words, supports the arguments of Ren and Yu (2013) that language would be perceived as vulgar, rude, and impolite without the use of euphemisms. The use of euphemisms in avoiding taboo words has a connection with the prohibition of doing or saying something, depending on societal norms (Allan & Burrige, 1991, 2006; Ren & Yu, 2013). What is regarded as taboo or socially inappropriate, however, depends on cultural norms and the communicative context.

Many student respondents identified references to sexual organs as a category for which euphemistic expressions are commonly used. The open-ended responses provide examples of how this category was

expressed in the data. Examples included less harsh terms such as “Miss V” for the vagina and “Mr. P” for the penis were mentioned. Javanese metaphorical terms, such as *tempe* (soybean cake) for the vagina, and *manuk* (cock/bird) for the penis, were also used.

These examples reveal how speakers may draw on indirect labels and local-language metaphors to avoid cultural taboos. The euphemisms for the same referents were already mentioned by the respondents in their respective languages, each with distinct cultural associations, which suggests the culture-specificity of the use of euphemism (Bednarek, 2019; Bloch-Rozmej, 2023). This study further supports the argument of Bachriani et al. (2018) that cultural experiences are also embodied in euphemisms. However, because the questionnaire did not require respondents to identify the setting in which these expressions were used, these examples should be understood as part of participants' broader everyday linguistic repertoire rather than as evidence of academic interaction.

In terms of socially unacceptable words, the participants reported replacing *pelacur* (prostitute) with a more acceptable term by using the abbreviation of *PSK*, which stands for *Pekerja Seks Komersial*, or commercial sex worker. This illustrates how euphemisms may operate by shifting an overtly stigmatized expression into a more institutional or formal register. Similarly, “Miss V” and “Mr. P” replace direct references with indirect labels. These examples show that many forms of euphemisms have the same purpose of replacing socially uncomfortable words with more acceptable ones, suggesting the speakers' awareness and sensitivity to social and cultural norms.

Table 4 shows the reasons for the use of euphemisms, with avoiding hurt feelings emerging as the most commonly selected reason for both students and lecturers. This is confirmed by 74% of the students and even more strongly by the lecturers (84.6%). These findings illustrate the central role of euphemisms as a politeness strategy and as a marker of interpersonal sensitivity. The result suggests that protecting the interlocutor's feelings is the strongest shared orientation in participants' reported reasons for using euphemism.

**Table 4**

*Perceived Reasons for Euphemism Use*

Reasons	Students	Lecturers
To avoid sounding vulgar	63.5%	61.5%
To avoid hurting others' feelings	74%	84.6%
To impress my interlocutor	6.3%	11.5%
To avoid being censored	28.1%	15.4%
To use politically appropriate language	10.4%	15.4%
To hide information from some listeners (e.g., children)	43.8%	38.5%
To adjust to other people's communication style	31.3%	30.8%
To make serious things sound lighter	31.3%	23.1%
To build a positive, non-threatening classroom environment	41.7%	46.2%

Another important factor is the need to avoid vulgarity, which is cited by 63.5% of students and 61.5% of lecturers. This suggests that participants associate euphemism with avoiding language considered vulgar or socially inappropriate and with making expressions more controlled and socially acceptable.

A smaller but still substantial proportion also selected the creation of a positive, non-threatening classroom environment (41.7% of students and 46.2% of lecturers). This item links the broader everyday perceptions reported in Table 4 with the academic-communication findings discussed later. It indicates that participants see euphemism as potentially relevant to classroom climate, although it does not demonstrate its actual use in classroom interaction.

Some of these reasons seem to point to more context-specific uses. For example, 43.8% of students and 38.5% of lecturers use euphemisms to hide sensitive information from certain listeners, such as children. This can be classified as a protective use of euphemism, as language is being adjusted to fit a particular group. Some may also use euphemisms to reduce the severity of a problem (31.3% of students, 23.1% of lecturers), or to adjust to others' communicative style (31.3% of students, 30.8% of lecturers). Taken together, these results suggest that euphemism is not used solely to avoid offence. It may also regulate access to sensitive information, reduce the perceived severity of a message, and adjust language to the needs of particular interlocutors.

### *Perceptions of Euphemism Use in Academic Communication*

The preceding section described participants' general perceptions of euphemism in everyday communication. This section considers their perceptions of academic communication, particularly lecturer-student interaction in classroom settings. Table 5 identifies factors that participants consider important for lecturer-student interaction.

**Table 5.**  
*Perceived Factors Influencing Lecturer–Student Interaction*

Factor	Students	Lecturers
Lecturer's personality	59.4%	88.5%
Lecturer's teaching qualifications	35.4%	57.7%
Lecturer's subject knowledge	55.2%	57.7%
Classroom language (e.g., forms of address, expressions of criticism, and comments on learners' mistakes, etc.)	84.4%	73.1%
Learners' attitude toward the subject	53.1%	61.5%
Attitude towards each other	1%	-
Depend on teachers' and students' attitudes	-	3.8%

As shown in Table 5, students and lecturers identified several factors that may influence the quality of lecturer–student interaction. The two groups, however, placed different emphasis on these factors. Lecturers most frequently selected teacher personality (88.5%), whereas students most frequently selected classroom language (84.4%). Teacher personality was also selected by 59.4% of students. This difference may suggest that lecturers and students attend to different aspects of academic interaction: lecturers may give greater importance to the lecturer's overall manner, whereas students may be more attentive to the language they directly encounter in classroom exchanges. Because the questionnaire did not define “teacher personality,” the findings do not identify the particular qualities that participants considered important. They only indicate that both groups regard it as relevant to lecturer–student interaction.

Classroom language, including forms of address, expressions of criticism, and comments on learners' mistakes, was selected by 84.4% of students and 73.1% of lecturers. This was the item most closely related to the present study because it concerns the wording used in academic communication. The finding suggests that both groups recognize that language choices can shape how lecturer–student interaction is experienced. Students' higher percentage may indicate that they are particularly attentive to the wording of feedback, criticism, and correction.

Although classroom language includes more than euphemism, the result shows that students and lecturers regard wording, such as forms of address, criticism, and comments on errors, as important in academic communication. Euphemism may therefore be understood as one form of mitigated language within a broader set of linguistic resources used to reduce the interpersonal force of feedback, requests, and criticism. For

example, a lecturer may say, “Maybe we could look at it another way,” rather than “You are wrong.” This type of mitigated feedback may reduce the force of criticism and help students remain engaged with the feedback. Such use of softened language is consistent with Mijuk’s (2019) discussion of euphemistic language in English language teaching and Fitriyani and Andriyanti’s (2020) study of politeness strategies in EFL classroom interaction.

Other factors in Table 5, including teacher qualifications, subject knowledge, and learners’ attitudes toward the subject, were also selected by substantial proportions of respondents. This pattern indicates that academic interaction cannot be explained by language choice alone. Euphemistic or other mitigated language may contribute to a respectful interactional climate, but it operates alongside lecturer expertise, students’ attitudes, and the broader lecturer–student relationship.

Euphemistic language, however, may not always lead to positive outcomes in academic communication. Alsabbah and Al-Shemmary (2021) found that Iraqi EFL learners experienced difficulties producing and comprehending euphemistic expressions. Zaid et al. (2018) similarly noted that euphemistic expressions can be challenging for L2 learners. In multilingual academic settings, indirect language may reduce the risk of offence but may also create uncertainty when students do not understand the intended meaning. Thus, euphemistic or mitigated expressions should remain clear enough for students to understand the feedback, instruction, or evaluation being conveyed.

### Reported Forms of Euphemisms

Data on euphemisms (77 expressions reported by participants as their own use and 69 expressions reported as used by other people) were collected through open-ended questions. Because respondents were not required to identify the setting in which each expression was used, the reported forms may reflect participants’ broader experience of euphemism use in everyday and academic communication. The findings do not compare euphemistic forms across the two settings.

**Table 6**

#### *Reported Forms of Euphemisms*

Forms	Reported as used by participants		Reported as used by other people	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Figurative expressions	13	16.9%	16	23.2%
Circumlocution	45	58.4%	32	46.4%
Abbreviations	6	7.8%	4	5.8%
Omission	4	5.2%	9	13%
Synecdoche	-	-	-	-
Hyperbole	-	-	-	-
Technical terms	8	10.4%	6	8.7%
Loanwords	1	1.3%	2	2.9%
	77	100%	69	100%

As shown in Table 6, circumlocution accounted for 58.4% of the euphemistic expressions reported by participants as their own use and 46.4% of the expressions reported as being used by other people. Circumlocution refers to the use of a longer or indirect expression in place of a direct term. A euphemistic circumlocution is used to soften a word or idea that is regarded as taboo, harsh, or unpleasant. For instance, respondents reported the phrase “students with different learning needs” instead of “slow learner” and “special

needs” instead of “disability.” These examples suggest an attempt to replace labels perceived as negative with less direct expressions.

However, indirect language is not automatically more respectful. Gernsbacher et al. (2016) found that many people considered “special needs” an ineffective euphemism and preferred the more direct term “disability.” Another example is the more neutral expression “mental health issues,” which is used as a replacement for “crazy.” In this case, the phrase may reduce stigma by avoiding a broad and derogatory label.

The second most frequently reported type was figurative expression, which accounted for 16.9% of the expressions used by participants themselves and 23.2% of the expressions reported as being used by other people. Figurative expressions convey meaning indirectly rather than literally. In euphemistic use, they may replace a direct or potentially harsh expression with an indirect reference. Examples given by respondents included *bola*, which means “ball” and was reported as an indirect reference to the LGBTQ+ community, and *datang bulan*, literally “come month,” referring to menstruation. These examples show that figurative euphemisms may depend on culturally shared knowledge. Their meanings may not be understood by listeners who are unfamiliar with the expression or its social context.

Technical terms were the third most frequent category in expressions reported by participants as their own use (10.4%), whereas omission was the third most frequent category in expressions reported as used by other people (13%). Medical, psychological, or academic terminology may provide a more formal or professional way of referring to sensitive situations. The examples given by respondents included *cacat*, which means “handicapped,” replaced by *difabel*, or “differently abled,” and *pemalu* or *penyendiri*, which were described using the psychological term “introvert.” Such expressions may shift a term into a more formal register, although not every professional or psychological label necessarily functions as a euphemism. Technical terminology may reduce the apparent bluntness of an expression while also giving it a more formal tone.

Abbreviations (7.8% of the expressions used by participants themselves and 5.8% of the expressions reported as being used by other people) also appeared as a form of euphemism. By reducing a longer expression to initials, abbreviations may create distance from a potentially harsh or stigmatizing term. The respondents provided the following examples: *orang gila* (crazy person) becomes “ODGJ” (*Orang Dengan Gangguan Jiwa*, or person with mental health issues), while *pembantu* (maid) becomes “ART” (*Asisten Rumah Tangga*, or household assistant). These abbreviations may make an expression appear more institutional or neutral, although their effect depends on how they are understood and used in context.

The key findings show that circumlocution was the most frequent form in both sets of reported expressions. Among expressions reported by participants as their own use, the next most frequent forms were figurative expressions and technical terms. Among expressions reported as used by other people, the next most frequent forms were figurative expressions and omission. This pattern suggests that respondents commonly associated euphemism with indirect wording that softens meanings that may otherwise sound harsh or socially uncomfortable. However, because the data consist of reported examples and relatively small frequencies, the results should be interpreted as descriptive patterns rather than evidence of the most common euphemistic forms in actual communication.

### **Perceived Reasons for Using Euphemisms in Classroom Interactions**

As part of academic communication, classroom interaction involves both instructional and interpersonal concerns. Table 7 presents students’ and lecturers’ reported reasons for using euphemistic language in class interaction. Because respondents could select more than one reason, the percentages indicate the proportion of respondents selecting each reason rather than mutually exclusive categories.

**Table 7.**  
*Perceived Reasons for Euphemism Use in Classroom Interaction*

Reasons	Students	Lecturers
Reducing existing tensions	39.6%	38.5%
Supporting mutual respect and sensitivity	75%	96.2%
Maintaining lecturer' neutrality	34.4%	30.8%
Creating a supportive and non-threatening learning environment	66.7%	61.5%
Enhancing students' motivation through encouraging language	39.6%	65.4%
Softening correction	1%	-

Table 7 shows that euphemisms are perceived as having several roles in lecturer–student communication. The main reason for using euphemisms is supporting mutual respect and sensitivity, as identified by a majority of students (75%) and lecturers (96.2%). This finding suggests that both groups associate euphemism with respectful communication, although lecturers appear to place greater importance on this function. Euphemisms are therefore perceived as one means of maintaining friendly relationships and promoting politeness in academic communication. This perception is also consistent with the everyday-communication findings, in which participants associated euphemism with avoiding offence and protecting others' feelings.

Students and lecturers also perceived euphemisms as relevant to creating a supportive and non-threatening learning environment, as selected by 66.7% of students and 61.5% of lecturers. This suggests that participants associate euphemistic language with the emotional climate of classroom interaction. However, the data indicate perceived functions rather than direct evidence that euphemism improves the learning environment or student achievement. Research by Khalil and Mohammed (2024) has similarly linked euphemistic teaching expressions with EFL students' performance, although the present study does not measure learning outcomes.

Another reported function concerns supporting students' motivation through encouraging language, as selected by 39.6% of students and 65.4% of lecturers. The higher percentage among lecturers may suggest that lecturers are more likely to link softened or encouraging language with students' motivation. Euphemisms were also associated with reducing existing tensions by 39.6% of students and 38.5% of lecturers. The similar percentages suggest that both groups recognize a comparable, although less prominent, role for euphemistic language in easing uncomfortable interactions. Furthermore, 34.4% of students and 30.8% of lecturers regarded euphemisms as a way to maintain lecturers' neutrality. This suggests that euphemistic language may help lecturers avoid sounding judgmental or biased when addressing students' work or performance.

At the same time, very few participants associated euphemisms with softening correction: 1% of students and none of the lecturers selected this reason. This result does not support a strong claim that euphemisms are commonly used to soften correction. Instead, it may indicate that participants distinguish euphemism from other forms of mitigated feedback, or that they associate euphemism more strongly with respect and classroom atmosphere than with correction itself. Harmia (2024) similarly notes that teachers may face difficulty balancing clarity and diplomacy when providing feedback, because indirect wording can create uncertainty for students.

These results are consistent with politeness theory, which explains how speakers use linguistic strategies to minimize face-threatening acts (FTAs). Brown and Levinson (1987) state that politeness strategies function as redressive actions that counterbalance face-threatening acts. In academic communication, feedback, criticism, requests, and correction may threaten students' face, particularly in relationships marked by unequal institutional roles. Participants' emphasis on mutual respect, sensitivity, and a non-threatening environment suggests that they view euphemism as one possible resource for managing these interpersonal risks.

From the perspective of pedagogical discourse, carefully worded language may also contribute to what Walsh (2011) calls classroom interactional competence, in which teachers' language helps elicit students' responses and participation. However, euphemism should be distinguished from politeness more generally. Not all polite or softened expressions are euphemisms, and euphemistic wording may not always be clear to students. Alsabbah and Al-Shemmery (2021) found that Iraqi EFL learners experienced difficulties producing and comprehending euphemistic expressions. Zaid et al. (2018) similarly noted that euphemistic expressions can be challenging for L2 learners. Thus, in academic communication, euphemistic or other mitigated language needs to balance interpersonal sensitivity with clarity, particularly when lecturers provide instructions, feedback, or evaluation.

This is consistent with Allan and Burridge's (1991) view of euphemism as a means of avoiding offence and maintaining social harmony. Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) also note that euphemism is culturally shaped and commonly associated with indirectness and politeness. In this study, the findings suggest that students and lecturers perceive euphemism in classroom interaction mainly as a resource for maintaining respect and sensitivity, rather than as a routine strategy for softening correction.

### **Comparison of Euphemism Use in Everyday and Academic Communication**

Taken together, the findings indicate that students and lecturers associate euphemism with related but differently emphasized purposes across everyday and academic communication. In everyday communication, euphemism is mainly associated with avoiding vulgar, taboo, socially unacceptable, embarrassing, or potentially hurtful expressions. Participants therefore appear to view euphemism as a way of managing sensitive referents and maintaining social harmony in interpersonal interaction.

In academic communication, particularly classroom interaction, euphemism is more strongly associated with maintaining mutual respect and sensitivity and creating a supportive, non-threatening learning environment. The findings suggest that participants regard euphemistic language as one possible resource for managing the interpersonal demands of lecturer–student interaction. However, they do not strongly associate euphemism with softening correction. This may indicate that participants distinguish euphemism from other forms of mitigated feedback or consider respect and classroom atmosphere more central to its role.

This comparison concerns participants' perceptions and reported examples rather than naturally occurring language use. It therefore addresses the perceived purposes of euphemism in everyday and academic communication, rather than setting-specific differences in the linguistic forms reported by participants. Across both settings, the findings also point to the need to balance tactful wording with clarity, particularly when an indirect expression may be unfamiliar or open to different interpretations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined students' and lecturers' perceptions of euphemism use in everyday and academic communication. The findings indicate that participants associate euphemism with different, although related, purposes across the two settings. In everyday communication, euphemism is mainly associated with avoiding vulgar, taboo, socially unacceptable, embarrassing, or potentially hurtful expressions. In academic communication, particularly classroom interaction, euphemism is more strongly associated with maintaining mutual respect and sensitivity and creating a supportive, non-threatening learning environment. However, participants did not strongly associate euphemism with softening correction.

These findings suggest that euphemism is not perceived merely as a way of replacing taboo words. Its perceived role changes according to the communicative setting. In everyday interaction, it is mainly associated

with managing socially sensitive referents and avoiding offence. In academic interaction, it is associated more closely with managing lecturer–student relationships and classroom atmosphere. The practical implication is that lecturers need to consider both tact and clarity when addressing sensitive topics, giving instructions, or responding to students' work. Indirect or softened wording may support respectful interaction, but it should not make the intended message unclear.

Because this study relied on questionnaire responses and reported examples, it does not show how frequently euphemisms occur in naturally occurring communication. Future studies should collect setting-specific examples and examine classroom recordings, interviews, or observations to compare euphemism use in everyday and academic communication more directly.

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