

## **A Corpus-Based Investigation of Euphemistic Expressions in Iranian and American Journalistic Materials (2014-2019): A Political Correctness Perspective**

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**Abstract:** To date, a number of studies have investigated the use of euphemism in media to classify and analyze the euphemisms of different categories. However, these studies were mostly based on political contexts and the corpora have been limited due to the qualitative nature of the studies. Moreover, few studies have investigated the use of euphemism in countries where English is practiced as a foreign language. This study was an attempt to not only compare and contrast Iranian-published English newspapers and the New York Times thematically in terms of euphemistic expressions but also to ascertain the most frequently used ones in both. To this end, three corpora of all the sections of three journalistic materials within (2014-2019) were thoroughly examined. The data were collected using the search section of the three newspapers to look for the euphemistic expressions based on the Oxford Dictionary of Euphemisms as a point of reference. The results indicated that the most frequently used expression in the New York Times was ‘African American’ whereas the most frequently used expression in both Iran Daily and Tehran Times was ‘conflict’. The thematic changes between the three journalistic materials were also examined. The results revealed that the most frequently used category of euphemistic expressions in the New York Times was ‘Commerce, Banking, and Industry’, and the most frequently used category of euphemistic expression in Iran Daily and Tehran Times was similarly ‘Warfare’. The study might inform learners about a rich source of euphemistic expressions and enable them to recognize the most prevalent categories of euphemistic expressions thematically

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistic Competence, Political Correctness, Euphemistic Expressions, Journalistic Materials.

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## Introduction

In recent years, sociolinguistic competence, defined as the knowledge of culturally-appropriate forms (Lyster, 1994), has gained much attention in language teaching. In fact, it can be regarded as one of the crucial aspects of communication without which learners might encounter possible communicative breakdowns due to potential negative perlocutionary effects (Tarone & Swain, 1995). A growing body of research indicates that even linguistically-competent speakers often lack appropriate linguistic tools and behavior in various contexts to convey an intended message properly (e.g. Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Renkwitz, Schneider, Sell, & Sickinger, 2018; Trosborg, 1987).

In many cases, the aim of sociolinguistic competence can be achieved through ‘political correctness’. The term is defined as “a suit of social practices that involve avoiding or policing behavior-usually speech-that is seen as derogating people in subordinated social groups” (Aly & Simpson, 2018, p. 159). Political correctness which involves the search for new means of expression and is defined by Chait (2015, p. 11) as “a style of politics in which the more radical members of the left attempt to regulate political discourse by defining opposing views as bigoted and illegitimate”. In the context of the study, it is referred to as the sociolinguistically-accepted forms of prohibited language, used in the context of journalistic materials.

Halmari (2011) has associated political correctness with the wide use of euphemisms that allow not to hurt the feelings of representatives of different social groups. Therefore, euphemism can be considered as one of the main tools of political correctness. Euphemism refers to mild or polite means of expressing harsh realities that have been used to convey an intention through socially-accepted terms when it comes to taboo or prohibited topics. The word euphemism is defined by online Merriam-Webster as “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant” (2018, p. 6). Leech (1981, p. 53) gives semantic meaning to euphemism saying that “euphemism is the practice of referring to something offensive or delicate in terms that make it sound more pleasant or becoming than it really is”. Euphemistic terms can pose confusion and misinterpretation not only for the students but also for language teachers (Hammond & Bransford, 2012). Thus, these euphemistic terms are of paramount importance since students are considerably exposed to them both inside and outside classroom environments and the apprehension of the intended meaning inherent in such expressions might pose a serious

challenge to language learners and cause communication breakdowns. Accordingly, both ESL and EFL students need to be cognizant of such euphemistic expressions to the extent possible so that they will succeed in accomplishing either pedagogic or real-life tasks.

To equip students with certain aspects of pragmatic knowledge, teachers will have to resort to awareness-raising activities (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). The inclusion of authentic materials in awareness-raising activities can enable students to encounter language as it is used in the real world which is the appropriate form of language in different contexts. Newspapers are among authentic materials whose relevance to the daily life of students and their peculiar charm outweighs other materials of this kind. However, when it comes to local newspapers of EFL contexts, there seems to be a void to be properly filled. Accordingly, the study is an attempt to thoroughly delve into the most prevalent euphemistic expressions in journalistic materials to ascertain whether such locally-released newspapers written in English in EFL contexts can be compared and contrasted with those written by native speakers of English.

## Literature Review

### *Euphemism as a Means of Political Correctness*

As defined by Chain (2015), political correctness is “a style of politics in which the more radical members of the left attempt to regulate political discourse by defining opposing views as bigoted and illegitimate” (p. 11). In fact, politicians’ choice of language will always imply certain political messages. A number of studies have implied that politicians tend to resort to political correctness to save face and not stain their image or reputation from the public point of view. For instance, the specific use of pronouns “we” and “they” can indicate positive self- and negative other-presentation. Furthermore, the specific use of modality can enable politicians to present the future as possible and within reach. In fact, political language aims at removing doubt because people expect their leaders to delineate a plan of well-specified future actions, rather than a set of hypothetical abstractions (Charteris-Black, 2002, 2014; Wodak, 2009). “Euphemism” has been looked upon as a methodology to which politicians resort to convey their message in the least offensive manner ever since political correctness was introduced into the mainstream pedagogy. Accordingly, Burrige (2017), states that “euphemism has existed throughout recorded history; it is used among preliterate people, and has probably been around ever since recognizably human language developed” (p. 42).

From the earliest time in history, taboo language has been extracted from sensitive

themes. The forbidden behavior or taboo language has caused harm to the speaker and the addressee. Thus, it has led to significant impacts on language and such taboo languages have been projected to censoring. Therefore, euphemism and dysphemism can function when people decide to shun an inappropriate style of language (Burrige, 2017). Etymologically, the English word “euphemism” originates from the Greek, “euphemismos” consisting of the prefix “eu” meaning “good” and the root “phemi” meaning “speaking”. Euphemism and dysphemism (Greek dys “bad, unfavorable”) are opposite sides of the same coin (Burrige, 2017; McArthur, 1992). Therefore, euphemism can be defined as the replacement of dispreferred expressions, typically recognized as taboo terms (dysphemistic terms), to neutralize the unpleasantness of certain subjects. In some cases, neither sweet-sounding or overly polite (euphemistic), nor harsh or offensive (dysphemistic) language is desired. To fill this gap, Allan (2007) created orthophemism (Greek ortho- “proper, straight, normal”). Orthophemisms are alternatives to offensive expressions and, like euphemisms, are typically preferred as desirable or appropriate terms. Examples of all three kinds of “phemistic” language might be pass away (euphemism), snuff it (dysphemism), and die (orthophemis).

### ***Journalistic Materials as Authentic Materials in Pedagogic Settings***

Using authentic materials in the classroom can provide language learners with many advantages and evokes their interest and motivation and promotes their communicative competence. Scholars have also argued that using authentic materials in the classroom can help students bridge the gap between the classroom environment and the outside world (Akbari & Razavi, 2016; Guariento & Morley, 2001).

Newspapers are among authentic materials by which the students create a synergy between the real world and the pedagogic environment. As Cornish (2007) stated, applying newspapers in pedagogy is not new; it dates back to June 8, 1795.” He also added that using newspapers for education is a nationally recognized collaboration between schools, local newspapers, and community sponsors. Cornish has also maintained that students who read newspapers score higher on reading comprehension tasks and are more capable of developing critical thinking skills.

### **Empirical Studies**

The body of research has not been confined to the study of political terms. Rabab’ah and Al-Qarni (2012) investigated euphemistic strategy use in Saudi Arabic and English. The results were indicative of the fact that Saudi Arabic has more ways of expressing euphemism and

found that there is no taboo when handling death and lying. They also suggest that increasing second/foreign language learners' awareness of euphemism is essential for intercultural communication.

The English-speaking media, including newspapers, magazines, satellite television, and radio channels regularly utilize a large number of euphemisms (Mercer, 2000). Further, these media are becoming increasingly accessible to EFL/ESL learners and are being enormously used in different ESL/EFL settings for pedagogic purposes. Therefore, euphemisms and figurative language pose grave challenges to foreign language learners since they often lack the necessary background knowledge to make sense of euphemistic and figurative words used in various contexts.

Halmari (2011) probed into the use of euphemistic terms regarding diseases and "people first" in order to refer to people. She examined the distribution of euphemistic patterns in electronic archives of the Houston Chronicle, the seventh-largest newspaper in the United States from 2002 to 2007, and compared the results to the usage patterns in Google News. It was concluded that the Houston Chronicle seemed to employ non-politically correct usage by 70 percent.

To date, a number of studies have investigated the use of euphemism in media to classify and analyze the euphemisms of different categories (Harkova & Shigapova, 2014; Wodak, 2009). However, these studies were mostly based on political contexts and the corpora have been limited due to the qualitative nature of the studies. Moreover, few studies have investigated the use of euphemism in countries where English is practiced as a foreign language. In the same vein, no study has been conducted to not only examine the use of euphemism in Iranian English-language newspapers but also to compare and contrast such euphemistic terms of the locally-written English newspaper (Iran Daily and Tehran Times) with their natively-written counterpart (the New York Times) in terms of frequency of occurrences in the news articles and their thematic developments over a specified time period as well. This study was an attempt to not only compare and contrast Iranian-published English newspapers and the New York Times thematically in terms of euphemistic expressions but also to ascertain the most frequently used ones in both. To achieve the above-stated objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the most frequent euphemistic expressions used in the New York Times and Iranian-published English newspapers?
2. How have frequent euphemistic expressions changed thematically over time?

3. How do Iranian-published English newspapers and the New York Times differ thematically in terms of euphemistic expressions?

## **Method**

### ***Corpora***

Three corpora of all the sections of three journalistic materials within the time limit of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 were included in the study. The first corpus, Iran Daily newspaper, founded in 1997, and the second corpus, Tehran Times, founded in 1979, and the third, as their native counterpart, the New York Times, founded in 1851, were examined. The basis for the selection of the Iranian newspapers was their prevalence in language learning and pedagogic settings, the advice given by the experts of the field, and the ease of access to their electronic versions within the already-specified time limit.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Data collection procedure was made possible using the search section of the three newspapers to search for the euphemistic expressions based on the Oxford Dictionary of Euphemism (Holder, 2002) as a point of reference. The euphemistic expressions organized thematically in the index section of the Oxford Dictionary were employed. The categories that were examined were as follows: Abortion and Miscarriage, Age, Aircraft, Animals, Auctions and Real Estate, Bankruptcy and Indebtedness, Bawds, Boasting and Flattery, Bribery, Charity, Cheating, Childbirth and Pregnancy, Clothing, Commerce, Banking and Industry, Cosmetics, Marriage, Cowardice, Crime (other than Stealing), Cuckoldry, Death, Defecation, Dismissal, Drunkenness, Education, Employment, Entertainment, Espionage, Extortion and Violence, Funerals, Gambling, Illness and Injury, Intoxicants, Killing and Suicide, Low Intelligence, Lying, Mental Illness, Narcotics, Obesity, Parts of the Body, Police, Politics, Poverty, Pregnancy, Prison, Race, Religion and Superstition, and Warfare.

Every euphemistic expression given in each category was carefully examined in each corpus and the date was limited to the time frame of 2014 to 2019. Those expressions used in a different context with a different meaning from the meaning expected were crossed out. Some expressions appeared in a lexical bundle; therefore, a precise examination of the articles in the search results was required to assure that the euphemistic expression has actually been used as a cluster and the consisting words do not appear separately in the article.

### *Data Analysis*

Frequency analyses were run to determine the number of occurrences of the euphemistic expressions in the three corpora. This enabled the researchers to readily compare and contrast the appropriateness of journalistic materials in terms of their euphemistic expressions. The data were analyzed in three steps. First, all euphemistic expressions organized thematically in the index section of the Oxford Dictionary of euphemisms (Holder, 2002) were employed to identify the number of their occurrences in each journalistic material and this was done separately for each year within the time limit of the study. Second, an in-depth corpus-based analysis was conducted to identify the most frequently used expressions thematically in the three newspapers and the most frequent ones within each year from 2014 to 2019. In the third stage, the three newspapers were compared and contrasted in terms of the most frequently used euphemistic expressions.

### **Results**

#### *The Most Frequent Euphemistic Expressions*

##### *The New York Times*

Table 1 displays some of the most frequent euphemistic expressions regardless of their category along with their frequency of occurrences in the news articles in the corpus of the New York Times newspaper. As displayed in Table 1, the ten most frequent expressions were: African American, conflict, nursing home, racist, abuse, free, pass away, con artist, Native American, and lame duck. The most frequent expression was “African American” which occurred in 2720 news articles in this newspaper.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Statistics of the New York Times (2014-2019)*

<b>Euphemistic expression</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
African American	2720
Conflict	2343
nursing home	2120
Racist	1970
Abuse	1603
Free	1512
pass away	1023
con artist	812
native American	805
lame duck	618

##### *Iran Daily*

As shown in Table 2, some of the most frequent expressions used in this corpus were: conflict, security, aid, abuse, African American, welfare, confrontation, racism, discrimination, and strategic. The most frequent expression used in this corpus was “conflict” which occurred 813 times.

**Table 2.** *Descriptive Statistics of Iran Daily (2014-2019)*

<b>Euphemistic expression</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Conflict	813
Security	802
Aid	470
Abuse	417
African American	197
Welfare	180
Confrontation	143
Racist	117
Discrimination	89
Strategic	68

### ***Tehran Times***

Table 3 reveals some of the most frequent euphemistic expressions in the corpus of Tehran Times newspaper. As shown in Table 3, the ten most frequent expressions were: conflict, aid, welfare, security, strategic, abuse, discrimination, disabled, African American, and racism. Just like Iran Daily, the most frequent expression was “conflict” which occurred in 1438 news articles in this newspaper.

**Table 3.** *Descriptive Statistics of Tehran Times (2014-2019)*

<b>Euphemistic expression</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Conflict	1438
Aid	715
Welfare	658
Security	623
Strategic	332
Abuse	177
Discrimination	156
Disabled	148
African American	107
Racist	93

### ***Thematic Developments of Euphemistic Expressions over Time***

The second research question of the study intended to address the thematic changes of the most frequent euphemistic expressions over the time period of Jan 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 to Dec 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019. Table 4 shows the thematic category of euphemistic expressions in the corpora of Iran Daily, Tehran Times, and the New York Times newspapers along with their annual frequency of news articles

using such expressions and also the total number of their occurrences within the six-year time limit.

**Table 4.** *Descriptive Statistics of Euphemistic Categories within the Time limit (2014-2019)*

<i>Euphemistic Category</i>	Frequency of Euphemistic Expressions within Each Year							Percentage
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total	
Abortion and Miscarriage	154/0/0	335/4/0	290/0/2	306/0/0	264/0/0	298/0/0	1647/4/2	0.48/0.00/0.00
Age	595/2/0	542/0/0	612/1/3	893/5/1	960/12/23	923/3/1	4525/23/28	0.60/0.03/0.04
Aircraft	344/3/1	217/4/0	236/5/3	160/11/1	205/8/0	238/5/3	1400/36/8	0.42/0.04/0.00
Animals	19/0/0	15/0/0	7/0/1	5/0/0	11/2/0	5/0/0	62/2/1	0.01/0.00/0.00
Auction and Real State	103/5/1	221/1/0	92/0/3	131/0/2	68/1/3	93/0/1	708/7/10	0.23/0.01/0.01
Bankruptcy	118/0/2	243/3/1	280/2/5	307/1/2	275/2/3	208/5/3	1431/13/16	0.45/0.01/0.02
Charity	187/90/113	146/120/215	320/175/189	247/153/312	320/114/217	315/94/16	1535/746/1162	0.45/0.99/1.68
Cheating	103/3/4	87/5/2	96/4/2	90/5/2	76/3/3	88/6/4	530/26/17	0.16/0.03/0.02
Clothing	0/0/0	0/0/0	0/0/0	0/0/0	0/0/0	0/0/0	0/0/0	0.00/0.00/0.00
Commerce, Banking and Industry	1730/2/7	2098/4/12	2170/8/3	2387/5/6	2240/2/4	2155/3/4	12780/20/36	4.10/0.02/0.05
Cosmetics	23/4/2	12/0/2	21/3/6	16/0/0	14/2/3	16/0/2	92/9/15	0.04/0.01/0.02
Cowardice	8/0/2	5/1/1	5/0/0	7/0/3	11/1/3	10/0/0	46/2/9	0.01/0.00/0.01
Crime (other than Stealing)	317/49/25	590/73/33	678/86/29	465/98/56	570/117/43	488/93/51	3108/516/237	0.98/0.64/0.29
Death	348/12/4	360/5/6	268/10/8	315/15/21	350/6/12	263/8/12	1904/56/63	0.59/0.07/0.08
Defecation	56/3/1	43/0/0	15/0/1	8/0/0	11/0/0	10/0/0	143/3/2	0.04/0.00/0.00
Dismissal	38/5/2	51/3/2	27/0/1	30/1/2	33/0/0	25/0/0	204/9/7	0.06/0.01/0.01
Drunkenness	217/0/0	367/0/0	292/1/0	341/0/0	368/0/0	348/0/0	1933/1/0	0.57/0.00/0.00
Education	27/2/1	35/3/4	15/0/1	28/1/2	33/2/0	27/1/3	165/9/11	0.06/0.01/0.01
Employment	411/2/5	346/5/3	298/2/9	315/0/4	350/3/7	215/0/1	1935/12/29	0.70/0.01/0.04
Entertainment	13/0/0	10/0/1	16/0/0	19/0/2	16/0/0	12/0/0	86/0/3	0.03/0.00/0.00
Espionage	4/0/1	6/0/0	9/0/1	5/0/0	4/0/0	2/0/0	30/0/2	0.00/0.00/0.00
Extortion and Violence	12/2/4	16/0/3	8/1/0	15/1/1	16/1/3	8/0/3	75/5/14	0.02/0.00/0.01
Funerals	8/0/1	12/3/5	5/1/1	9/5/3	12/3/4	10/3/5	56/15/19	0.01/0.02/0.02
Gambling	4/0/0	3/0/0	8/0/0	4/0/0	5/0/0	2/0/0	26/0/0	0.00/0.00/0.00
Illness and Injury	137/12/32	211/12/36	98/23/43	105/31/73	117/18/86	112/14/23	780/110/293	0.26/0.14/0.43
Intoxication	4/0/2	11/0/0	16/3/2	14/0/4	8/1/3	3/0/0	56/4/11	0.01/0.00/0.01

Killing and Suicide	215/3/1	243/8/12	315/11/9	273/10/1 1	301/14/1 7	254/12/8	1601/58/58	0.50/0.07/0.0 8
Low Intelligence	8/0/2	7/0/0	11/2/2	8/4/3	9/4/3	11/2/0	54/12/10	0.01/0.01/0.0 1
Lying	13/0/0	15/0/0	8/0/1	12/0/0	7/0/0	3/0/0	48/0/1	0.01/0.00/0.0 0
Marriage	65/7/9	115/6/3	53/8/4	88/6/2	35/4/2	22/1/3	378/32/23	0.12/0.04/0.0 3
Mental Illness	158/2/3	108/0/1	138/3/1	129/0/0	217/0/0	162/1/0	912/6/5	0.29/0.00/0.0 0
Narcotics	18/0/2	21/1/4	32/0/5	16/2/1	36/5/3	13/0/0	136/8/15	0.04/0.01/0.0 2
Obesity	56/4/5	78/2/6	63/5/7	68/4/4	73/5/2	65/2/6	403/22/30	0.11/0.03/0.0 3
Police	18/0/0	13/0/0	21/0/0	15/0/0	19/0/0	8/0/0	94/0/0	0.03/0.00/0.0 0
Politics	54/0/3	68/4/6	38/0/2	54/0/0	49/0/1	56/0/0	319/4/12	0.09/0.00/0.0 1
Poverty	350/63/ 12	278/162/1 1	293/117/ 18	308/132/ 13	278/215/ 13	301/189/ 17	1808/878/84	0.61/0.09/0.0 1
Pregnancy	35/2/6	38/6/9	31/5/7	39/4/2	28/5/3	30/2/4	201/24/31	0.05/0.03/0.0 4
Prison	21/0/0	18/0/0	23/2/0	19/0/1	18/0/0	23/0/0	101/2/1	0.03/0.00/0.0 0
Race	463/88/ 75	2190/69/6 0	891/84/6 9	760/53/7 8	826/86/6 3	942/67/5 6	6072/447/40 1	1.95/0.59/0.6 0
Religion and Superstition	16/0/0	12/0/0	15/0/0	11/0/0	8/0/0	4/0/0	66/0/0	0.02/0.0/0.0/ 0.00
Warfare	530/241 /533	431/217/4 25	516/346/ 536	750/326/ 490	876/520/ 686	815/453/ 646	3918/2103/3 316	1.23/2.86/4.9 2
Total							51368/5212/ 5867	11.36/5.77 /8.50

### *The New York Times*

As revealed in Table 4, the most frequently used category of euphemistic expressions within the first year of the study (2014) was 'Commerce, Banking, and Industry' with 1730 occurrences in different news articles. However, in 2015, the leading category of euphemistic expressions changed to 'Race' appearing in 2190 news articles. In 2016, 'Commerce, Banking, and Industry' again took the lead with 2170 occurrences in various news articles and retained its place in the following years: 2017 (2387 occurrences), 2018 (2240 occurrences), and 2019 (2155 occurrences).

### *Iran Daily*

As demonstrated in Table 4, in 2014, Iran Daily capitalized maximally on the number of expressions used from the category of Warfare, appearing in 240 news articles and interestingly enough, it maintained its place in the following years within the specified time limit: 2015 (217 occurrences), 2016 (346 occurrences), 2017 (326 occurrences), 2018 (occurrences), 2019 (415 occurrences).

### *Tehran Times*

As shown in Table 4, the most frequently used category of euphemistic expressions in 2014 was Warfare (533 occurrences) and it continued to be the most frequently used one during the years 2015 (425 occurrences), 2016 (536 occurrences), 2017 (490 occurrences), 2018 (686 occurrences) and 2019 (446 occurrences) in different news articles. In fact, Warfare was the most frequently used category of euphemistic expressions in this newspaper within the already-mentioned time limit of the study.

### *Thematic Differences between Iranian-Published English Newspapers and the New York Times in terms of Euphemistic Expressions*

The third research question of the present study intended to deal with the thematic developments of Iranian-published English newspapers and their native counterpart (the New York Times). As displayed in Table 4, the overall number of articles in the New York Times including expressions from Commerce, Banking, and Industry category were 12780 (4.10%) which was the highest among all other categories. The most prevalent euphemistic expressions in Iran Daily and Tehran Times were from the Warfare category (2103/2.86% and 3316/4.92%) which has been of a higher percentage than their counterparts in the New York Times. Therefore, the two Iranian-published English newspapers differed remarkably with regard to the percentage of the euphemistic expressions used.

As it can be easily discerned from Table 4, Iran Daily has never taken any advantage of Clothing, Entertainment, Espionage, Gambling, Police, and Religion and Superstitions. No articles in this journalistic material were seen to use any expressions related to such categories. In the same vein, Tehran Times had not used any categories of Clothing, Drunkenness, Gambling, Police, Religion, and Superstitions. The two newspapers were similar to their native counterparts in that the expressions of Clothing were totally dispensed with. In fact, the New York Times had only taken minimal advantage of Clothing expressions with no occurrences of other related expressions in the same category.

### *Discussion of the Results*

The first research question of this study addressed the most frequent euphemistic expressions used in the New York Times and Iranian-published English newspapers. As the results of the study indicated, the most frequently used expressions in the New York Times were: African American, conflict, nursing home, racism, abuse, free, pass away, con artist, Native American,

and the lame duck. The most frequently used expressions in Iran Daily included: conflict, security, aid, abuse, welfare, African American, confrontation, racism, discrimination, strategic. Furthermore, the most frequent expressions from Tehran Times were: conflict, aid, welfare, security, abuse, discrimination, disabled, African American, and racism.

One possible explanation for the commonality found between the most frequently used expression of Iran daily and Tehran Times can emanate from the fact that both are published in Iran sharing the same sociocultural elements. In line with Qi (2010), euphemism is a linguistic, and particularly a cultural phenomenon. In fact, the development and use of an expression are the outcomes of various socio-psychological factors. Hai-Long (2008) also concluded in a study on Chinese and English students that the origin of euphemism used was influenced by cultural differences. Relatively, the non-native writers in the present study might be influenced by their cultural values according to which some specific topics absorbed much more attention and are therefore subjected to more usage and application. As the two Iranian newspapers shared the same socio-cultural background, the two newspapers shared the first most frequent expression as well.

It was also found that these frequent expressions used in the New York Times were employed from a more diverse number of categories whereas the two Iranian newspapers had employed the expressions from a fewer number of categories. A study conducted by Altakhaineh and Rahrouh (2015) revealed that Arab EFL learners had very little knowledge of such expressions regardless of their proficiency level of the English language. Relatively, the rich diversity of the categories in the most frequent expressions in the New York Times stems from the fact that the Iranian writers of the English journalistic materials might not be aware of all various categories of expressions and only resort to the ones they have already encountered.

Another possible justification could be the fact that Iranian newspapers might have had extensive coverage of the news about warfare due to the volatility that is inherent in the Middle East region. Therefore, these two newspapers capitalized mostly on such war-related topics, and less coverage was allocated to other socio-cultural phenomena.

The second question of the present study dealt with the thematic developments of the euphemistic expressions over time. As the findings demonstrated, Commerce, Banking, and Industry were the most frequently used category of euphemistic expressions in the New York Times within the time limit except for 2015 in which the leading category had shifted to Race. One possible justification of this change of thematic category might stem from the events

taking place in this year including the homicide of nine people at an African church in Charleston, the death of Freddie Gray, the death of Sandra Bland (both African American), and the award won by an African American singer. One likely explanation for the prevalence of commerce and banking euphemistic expressions in the New York Times can be ascribed to the fact that the American government as the superpower is very much interested in making economic progress and to be economically progressive and booming on a daily basis. They want to stand on top and care a lot about possible ways to make headways in the economy, trade, commerce, and business.

Both Iranian-published English newspapers capitalized extensively on the use of the Warfare category within all the years of the already-specified time limit. One possible explanation is that the writers' encounter with the current issues facing the country had mostly remained the same. Therefore, there has been no change in the most common thematic categories of euphemistic expressions in the years of the present study.

The last research question of this study addressed the thematic difference between Iranian-published English newspapers and the New York Times in terms of euphemistic expressions. As the results indicated, the most frequent thematic category used in the New York Times was Commerce, Banking, and Industry and the most frequent thematic category in both Iranian newspapers was Warfare. In fact, the two non-native journalistic materials differed drastically from their native counterpart in terms of the most frequent thematic category. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of previous research (Hai-Long, 2008; Qi, 2010; Frajzyngier & Jirsa, 2006) in that euphemism is a cultural phenomenon which is based on cultural values and beliefs and what seems to be taboo in one society might be a norm in another. Therefore, writers of the three newspapers feel the requirement for thematic euphemistic categories based on their socio-cultural factors.

Moreover, the results were indicative of the fact that the percentage of the frequent categories of euphemistic expressions used in both Iranian newspapers has been much lower than that of the New York Times newspaper mainly written by native speakers of English. This is in line with the study conducted by Altakhaineh and Rahrouh (2015) in which more proficient EFL speakers did not necessarily generate better use of euphemistic expressions.

One probable explanation would be the fact that the two Iranian newspapers are written by proficient speakers of English in a foreign language context and since even the competent speakers of English might not be exposed to a sufficient number of euphemistic expressions, as asserted by Altakhaineh and Rahrouh (2015), writers of the two Iranian-published English

newspaper might have lacked a proper understanding and comprehensive awareness of such expressions.

Another possible justification can be the fact that media discourses, as stated by Ott and Mack (2014), which are far from being neutral are profoundly influenced by a number of factors, and the discourse one media employs can differ from the discourse taken by another media. Therefore, the two Iranian newspapers might have associated themselves with a different ideological discourse in comparison with their native counterpart (the New York Times).

Charteris-Black (2002) points out that when the writers of news attempt to write in a language other than their native language, they resort to their L1 conceptual figures of speech comfortably when they need to use figurative language that seems to be unfamiliar and ambiguous. Relatively, one final justification for such a result would be that the writers of Iranian-published English newspapers, when encountering taboo or unpleasant language, employ their L1 knowledge of euphemism as a strategy to keep their face in the Iranian community with which they share the same cultural background.

## **Conclusion**

This study was carried out to investigate the use of euphemistic expressions in journalistic materials of two native and non-native countries. The two Iranian-published English newspapers were found to employ fewer euphemistic expressions in comparison to the New York Times, their native counterpart. To recognize the most frequent euphemistic expression was another concern of this study. The results indicated that the most frequently used expression in the New York Times was 'African American' whereas the most frequently used expression in both Iran Daily and Tehran Times was 'conflict'.

Furthermore, another concern of the study was to examine the thematic developments of the most frequently used euphemistic expression in the three journalistic materials from Jan 2014 to Dec 2019. It was found that the most frequently used category of euphemistic expression in the New York Times remained unchanged except for the year 2015 when it had shifted from Commerce, Banking, and Industry to Race due to extensive media coverage on the current ongoing events. However, in the two Iranian newspapers, the most frequently used euphemistic category was Warfare and it remained unchanged within 2014-2019.

The thematic changes between the three journalistic materials were also examined in this study. The results indicated that the most frequently used category of euphemistic expressions

in the New York Times was Commerce, Banking, and Industry and the most frequently used category of euphemistic expression in Iran Daily and Tehran Times was similarly Warfare. Broadly speaking, the two non-native newspapers had almost no similarity to their native counterparts in terms of the most frequently used euphemistic expressions and the thematic categories employed in recent years.

As the significance of sociolinguistic competence becomes more and more evident to language teachers and learners, they need to be more aware of the politically-correct or euphemistic language especially in EFL contexts where such language is not practiced outside the classroom environment. In fact, euphemism can be a great tool to help students overcome the problem of communication breakdown due to the fact that some students might encounter taboo or undesirable language in various contexts and employ them without awareness of the consequence. As an example, they might use the expression “black American”, which implies racial discrimination, instead of the expression “African American”. Furthermore, Vásquez and Fioramonte (2011) have asserted that because one of the primary challenges of foreign or second language learners is to be pragmatically competent, having good command and control over euphemistic expressions is key to fruitful communication. Material developers, as well as teachers, need to delve into the subject to provide both students and teachers with proper language forms. Thus, the introduction of reliable materials that are inundated with euphemistic terms, as a tool for political correctness, is vital.

As noted by Eslami Rasekh (2005), two major techniques are commonly used to raise students’ awareness: a) teacher presentation and discussion of research findings on different aspects of pragmatics and b) student-discovery procedure in which students obtain information through observations, questionnaires, and/or interviews. Newspapers, as authentic materials, can be used in the classroom environment to raise awareness over euphemistic expressions. This study can provide both teachers and students with a reference guide to the chronologically-prevalent euphemistic terms, and facilitate their awareness-raising activities in the classrooms for the students to be more politically correct (socio-politically-acceptable). By raising students’ awareness of these terms, they will be more cautious of the language they use in various contexts.

The findings of the present study have considerable pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and learners as well as materials developers. This study might shed light on the ideological aspects of the language of which EFL learners must be aware to establish effective communication. The study also might inform learners about a rich source of euphemistic

expressions as an authentic material in the classroom and enable them to recognize the most prevalent categories of euphemistic expressions thematically to which they must pay more meticulous attention. Teachers might as well resort to the findings of the study to recognize the best journalistic materials to be used in the classroom and also get to know the most prevalent euphemistic expressions learners need to be aware of. The findings of the present study can also help material developers in the course of journalistic materials and direct their attention to the enormously useful expressions students must be exposed to.

This study is also significant since it can enable EFL teachers and students to recognize the more native-like newspaper as an authentic material used in the classrooms through a comparative analysis. Teachers in courses such as Reading Journalistic Materials can also benefit the findings of this study to facilitate students' comprehension of these texts. The findings of the study can also be a good reference for material developers to become aware of prevalent euphemistic terms used chronologically in newspapers published in native-speaking countries and the change in the topic they have undergone and therefore, adopt these terms in academic materials

As with any other study, the current study also is carried out with some limitations. One limitation is that some sentences within every newspaper might be a direct quotation of an individual and the writer would inadvertently employ a euphemistic expression in the article. Another limitation of the study would be the anonymous gender of the writers that is of great importance in some cultures where females are expected to use milder language than men.

This study delimits itself to only three newspapers and a time limit of 6 years. Moreover, no consideration was taken into account regarding the sections of the newspaper in which the expressions were used which could be very helpful for a more specific categorization. This study is an investigation of euphemistic expressions in the New York Times as a native newspaper and Iran Daily and Tehran Times as nonnative ones. Further research could be conducted to examine Iranian newspapers with other newspapers where English is practiced as a foreign language. The current study was conducted to recognize the most frequent euphemistic expressions in native and non-native journalistic materials. Further studies can be conducted to investigate such expressions in media and other contexts.

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