



## Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners' Recognition of English Euphemisms

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### Abstract

This study investigates the Iraqi EFL learners' ability to recognize euphemistic words or phrases in context and to what degree they are aware of euphemisms associated with etiquette and physical appearance. The study also tries to determine whether the participants' gender may have an impact on how often they use euphemisms in their daily lives. To achieve the aims of this research, a diagnostic test of multiple-choice items is used in which the students have to select the best response from a list of four options. The findings of this study show that Iraqi EFL learners lack knowledge concerning euphemisms in English. The results of the test also show that the students' performance was significantly influenced by their gender. Particularly, the females were more acquainted with the euphemisms than the males.

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## التحقيق في إدراك متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين للعبارات الملطفة باللغة الإنكليزية

رأفت ضياء العبيدي\*

### المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في قدرة متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين على التعرف على الكلمات أو العبارات الملطفة في السياق وإلى أي درجة يدركون العبارات الملطفة المرتبطة بالأدب والمظهر الجسدي. تحاول الدراسة أيضاً تحديد ما إذا كان جنس المشاركين قد يكون له تأثير على عدد المرات التي يستخدمون فيها العبارات الملطفة في حياتهم اليومية. لتحقيق أهداف هذا البحث، يتم استخدام اختبار تشخيصي لعناصر الاختيار من متعدد حيث يتعين على الطلاب اختيار أفضل استجابة من قائمة من أربعة خيارات. تظهر نتائج هذه الدراسة أن متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين لديهم نقص في المعرفة فيما يتعلق بالعبارات الملطفة باللغة الإنكليزية. تظهر نتائج الاختبار أيضاً أن أداء الطلاب تأثر بشكل كبير بجنسهم. على وجه الخصوص، كانت الإناث أكثر دراية بالعبارات الملطفة من الذكور. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** العبارات التلطيفية، الجنس، محرم، متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية.

### Introduction

The phenomenon of Euphemism is widespread and it is described as an indirect technique to replace a lexical item or phrase with one that is deemed to be too offensive. To put it another way, it is a courteous

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way to swap out a lexeme that is deemed rude, improper, or unpleasant. Every language is said to have a substantial amount of euphemisms, and most people prefer to appear nice and polite than being rude.

Recently, researchers began paying attention to the usage of euphemisms. This could be because of the increasing number of euphemisms being used across languages and the difficulty that Iraqi EFL learners face to figure out which appropriate euphemism is to be used in a specific situation. Various studies tackled the use of euphemisms by EFL students from different linguistic as well as cultural backgrounds, like Gomaa and Shi (2012); Guo (2010); Van Oudenhoven et al. (2008); Hai-Long (2008) and Wareing (2004:76).

Nevertheless, Iraqi EFL learners have not received much attention. This study is an attempt to investigate the recognition level of euphemisms in English among Iraqi EFL learners. The ultimate objective is to determine if Iraqi EFL learners' gender affects how they comprehend or understand euphemisms.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Alkire (2002:1) states that "for learners of EFL, euphemism is largely untaught". There are different reasons behind this, one of which is that teaching euphemism through literature is in need of a professional teacher who has sufficient knowledge of the cultural and social aspects of English. The problem of euphemism arises from the fact that many of them are inherently vague or ambiguous. They can be problematic for they channel people's thinking along certain often incorrect lines.

### **1.2 Aims of the Study**

The current research under study aims at:

- 1- Investigating and evaluating the ability of Iraqi EFL learners to recognize euphemistic expressions.
- 2- Determining if gender affects how they comprehend or understand euphemism.

### **1.3 Hypotheses of the Study**

In the current study, the following hypotheses are postulated:

- 1- Iraqi EFL learners encounter difficulty in recognizing English euphemisms.
- 2- There are statistically significant differences between the males and females.

### **1.4 The Procedure**

In order to verify the hypotheses, the following procedures have been followed:

- 1- Presenting a theoretical account of euphemism with its purposes as well as its salient classifications.
- 2- Administrating a diagnostic test applied to fourth-year students at the College of Education for Humanities in order to collect the data and to get a plausible account of the students' recognition level of euphemism.
- 3- Analyzing the obtained results of the students and their achievements.

### **1.5 Value of the Study**

This study is hoped to be helpful to people who are interested or specialized in general linguistics, it is also valuable for linguists as well as English teachers and those who are interested in translation.

## **1. The Scope of Euphemism**

### **2.1. An Overview**

According to McArthur (1992:387), the lexical item "euphemism" is traced back to the Greek term "*euphemismos*", which has "the prefix *eu-*", which denotes "good," and "the root *phemi*", which stands for "speaking." Accordingly, the complete lexical item implies "speaking properly". Speakers frequently utilize euphemisms when particular lexemes or phrases are inappropriate for a specific social environment because they are too harsh, rude, or risky. Stien (1998) asserts that language users must pay much heed to the expressions' devastating power. It is undeniably true that the emotions and bodily gestures that go with words have the power to break apart relationships and hurt the feelings of people. Euphemism is a way that facilitates effective and efficient communication.

According to Leech (1981: 45), euphemism is "the practice of referring to something offensive or

delicate in terms that make it sound more pleasant."Wardhaugh (1986: 231) states that "Perhaps one linguistic universal is that no social group uses language quite uninhibitedly."Consequently, it may be assumed that euphemisms are probably used by all cultures. One of the important issues is that euphemisms are said to be culture-specific. Also, Sanderson (1999: 259) indicates that euphemism "can be used as a way of being vague and unclear, or to cover up the truth or reality of a situation."

Euphemisms are "powerful linguistic tools that are embedded so deeply in our language that few of us, even those who pride themselves on being plain spoken, ever get through a day without using them" (Linfoot-Ham, 2005: 228; Rawson, 1981:1). Moreover, euphemism is "the use of a supposedly less objectionable variant for a word with negative connotations" (Johnstone, 2008:59). Euphemisms are used in order to prevent the words' and subjects' negative senses as well as connotations. Euphemisms often cover topics like politics, religion, death, sex, diseases, and functions of the human body.

Furthermore, Hai-long (2008: 88) states that "Language and culture are inseparable from each other. As an inalienable part of language, euphemism bears the mark of culture."He continues that it "can be easily tracked in our conversation and they reflect different levels of culture and various patterns of culture. To some extent, euphemism is a mirror of culture."

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, euphemism is defined as "the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant; also: the expression so substituted."

## 2.2 Purposes for Using Euphemism

Holder (2008) asserts that because people are afraid of the devil, they began to refer to him as Prince of the Darkness, Bad Man, or Black Lad instead of his given name. Moreover, Holder provides a semantic viewpoint in the description of euphemisms. He also maintains that euphemisms had their original, derived sense before becoming euphemisms due to association, such as metaphors for death like "*to go under*," "*to sleep*," and "*to leave the land*." Euphemisms may be employed in both written and spoken language.

Katamba (2005) concurs that using euphemisms is not only the main purpose to avoid hurting a person. He believes that individuals employ euphemisms to address social taboos that are specific to each culture. Social taboos comprise topics that people respect. Most noteworthy are the religious phrases, such as the terms: Lord, the All-Powerful, and the King of Glory which replace the name of God.

Euphemisms, according to Alkire (2002), can be employed to make spoken or written language more refined. He gives the euphemism of *attorney* as an example, which seems more sophisticated than the lexeme *lawyer*.

Crystal (2002) indicates that English has more euphemisms in its spoken form since the written form does not cope with improper words or slang. Only graphic euphemisms that contain vulgar words may be found in a text. Euphemisms are used to describe significant events of a person's life. As for Alego (2005), euphemisms frequently appear within the context that refers to the unhappy life of humans, such as disease or death, however they may also denote profoundly emotive moments like birth.

According to Neaman& Silver (1983: 1–2), euphemisms are those words that people use in order to soften the reality of what is communicated to a given listener or reader. The phenomenon of euphemism is a ubiquitous aspect of language use, and cultures often employ euphemisms to discuss topics that terrify people, such as disease, death, or war.

## 2.3 Classifications of Euphemism in English

According to Ayto (2007), euphemism can be classified into (13) categories. In this part, the wide topics of euphemism in English are dealt with. The following types are the most used in the current study:

### I. The Human Body

Ladies or girls generally avoid being referred to as "*fat*"; instead, it is usually replaced by the concept of "*weight*", as in the phrase "I intend to lose some weight" as opposed to "I am trying to lose some fat." Additionally, the terms *obese* and *overweight* frequently replace "too fat." Along with fatness, this

category also includes ugliness and baldness. *Bald* people are mostly described as "*thinning*" to denote a decrease in hair density. The terms, *high forehead*, *broad parting* and *receding* can all be used to describe a person who has lost a lot of hair. As for ugliness, *plain*, *homely*, and *less attractive* are alternatives for the word *ugly* in order to avoid its frankness.

## II. The Body and its Functions

Urination and defecation are covered in this part. One of the well-known strategies to conceal the process of getting rid of the leftovers from eating is to acknowledge that it is a natural and inevitable process by using phrases like *demand of nature* and *call of nature*. In addition, phrases like *go to the lavatory*, *using the restroom* and *relieve myself* are also acceptable. *Sweating* is a further subcategory that people modified by the lexeme *perspire* from the eighteenth century. One of the most frequent words that British English usually avoid is *vomiting*. One might lessen its impact by saying *throw up* and *be sick*. *Belches and farts* fall into the same group. The word *belch* is mostly softened by the word *burp* from individuals in Western society. Belching-provocative foods and beverages are courteously described as *gassy* or *windy*. Likewise, the expression *breaking wind* is used politely to describe gas release from the body. Moreover, the term *fart* can be replaced by more polite alternatives such as *blow off* and *backfire*.

## III. Age and Death

In Western culture, death is a well-known taboo lexical item, in which individuals try to imagine its severity by using phrases like *alive with Jesus*, *laid to rest*, *lives in the bosom of the Lord*, *kick the bucket*, and *pass away*, etc. Additionally, since it refers to a person's period of existence and life, age is probably the most infamous euphemism in English." The word *elderly* is nowadays a softer alternative for the word *old*, it is another minor gradation that is used to avoid the directness and bluntness of the term *old*. Conversely, the term *golden ages* represents that period of time as *years of ripeness*, *fulfillment*, and *the best period of life*. Another term that is used to soften this age of life is *silver surfers*.

## IV. Illness and Injuries

In this group, the human's physical disability like *blindness* is replaced by the terms *sight deprived* or *visually challenged*. The expressions *aurally challenged* and *hearing impaired* are used to describe *deafness*. Paralyzed people are referred to as *handicapped* or *disabled*. Additionally, *madness* which is a kind of mental illness, can be euphemized with *mental breakdown*, *nervous breakdown* and *mentally handicapped*. The expressions *slower minded*, *special needs* and *learning and development difficulty* are used to soften the severity of portraying people with abnormally poor mental abilities.

## V. Human Poverty

The humiliation of poverty demands people to euphemize it, since neither individuals nor countries wish to admit poverty. As a result, it is necessary to look for alternatives to the word *poor* in communication. The terms *low paid* and *poor income* are the mostly used ones in the 20th century. The payments which are sent to modest persons are typically referred to as *financial support*, *financial assistance* or *incomer support* since the word *charity* is a filthy one that requires to be softened with a more polite term.

## VI. Politics and Crime

In this group, the word *prison* is so embarrassing to those who have received a sentence for committing a crime as well as those who oversee the prison system. Thus, using the lexeme *correction* to describe prisons is common, such as using the terms *house of correction*, *place of correction*, *correction institution* or *correction facility*. The word *rebels* refers to the disobedience against the government and its system. It can be euphemized and softened by using the expression *freedom fighters*.

## VII. Work or Jobs

It has several features that should be euphemized, including *bribery*, *money*, *bankruptcy*, and

*unemployment*. Instead of using the word *cheap*, which typically implies low or not good quality, some alternatives that are used to describe reduced costs are *affordable* and *bargain*. Furthermore, one of the significant used expressions is *unemployment* which was relevant in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s, when the nation experienced an unprecedented period of unemployment. *Jobseekers* and *unwaged* are used in place of the over bluntness of the word *unemployed*. 2.4

### Previous Studies

Gomaa and Shi (2012) conduct a contrastive study of death euphemisms in Egyptian, Arabic, and Chinese. They confirm the role of cultural differences in using euphemisms. Furthermore, they reveal that death euphemisms are mainly and structurally employed in Chinese, Arabic, and Egyptian as a figure of speech and a linguistic device. Besides, Guo (2010) in a contrastive study of Chinese euphemisms and English euphemisms points out that using euphemistic expressions is particularly a linguistic and cultural phenomenon.

Van Oudenhoven et al. (2008) conduct research on euphemisms in 11 different societies (Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Netherlands, Norway, Greece, USA, and Great Britain). All the 3000 participants were asked to write down terms of abuse that they use in certain contexts. The findings reveal that cultural differences lead to the use of various euphemisms which may not be common in other societies.

Another study is carried out by Hai-Long (2008). He contends that euphemisms in Chinese and English are excessively different because of the differences in both cultures. For example, euphemisms in English can be observed to be more closely associated with religious taboos than those in Chinese. Most likely, the result can be related to the predominance of Christianity in the societies that speak English. Conversely, in contrast with religion, amongst the most common euphemistic items in Chinese relates to the distinction of class. In addition, he points out that Chinese euphemisms place a greater emphasis on the area of age as opposed to native-English societies. It can be a consequence of the Chinese culture since the elders are highly regarded in their society. Last but not least, Hai-Long draws the conclusion that euphemisms vary depending on society and culture. Therefore, understanding euphemisms improves cross-cultural communication.

In the study of Fershtman et al., (2011), the thing that is regarded as harmful and offensive could be deemed suitable. Euphemism is therefore derived from cultural principles, beliefs and behaviours. For instance, it can be observed that several taboos are related to dietetic limits like consuming "kosher food", which are seen as being a portion of the identity of Jewish. Shellfish and Pork are off-limits according to kosher regulations, also any kind of food that comes into contact with different food from kosher is not kosher. Beef is not permitted to be eaten by Hindus.

Wareing (2004:76) tackles gender and sex in another research. He points out that "sex refers to the biological category, which is usually fixed before birth. Gender refers to the social category, which is associated with certain behaviour". He also indicates that both Arabic males as well as females converse using euphemisms in particular areas (ibid). When interacting with one another, males and females have a tendency to keep the Politeness Principle in mind; females with males and vice versa. The main distinction is that it is always used in all kinds of Arabic conversations by females. At this point, it is important to note that the present study tries to uphold this claim. It also focuses on how euphemisms are used from non-native English speakers (EFL). It is crucial to check whether female learners' performance is better at using euphemisms in a foreign language (English) than male learners.

It is clear from the previous studies that a variety of global studies concentrated on the cultural variations in EFL learners' use of euphemistic items. Nevertheless, little focus has been placed on the ability of Iraqi EFL learners to understand or comprehend English euphemisms. Consequently, the current study tries to fill this gap.

### 3. Methodology

A clear description of the study and the processes used are provided in this section to achieve the objectives of the current study. The researcher devised a diagnostic test to assess the students' ability at the recognition level of English euphemisms to achieve the goals of this study.

### 3.1 Sampling of the Study

In this study, **80** Iraqi EFL learners from the 4<sup>th</sup> year at the English Department- College of Education for Humanities at the University of Mosul were involved. The students were randomly chosen and distributed into two groups depending on the variable of *gender*. The samples of this study are from the academic year 2021-2022. The students are classified into two groups: the first having **40** males and the second being constituted of **40** females.

### 3.2 Test Construction

According to Nicol (2007:54), the multiple-choice items test has been identified as the most popular and frequent tool in assessment for measuring the learners' ability, knowledge, and the complex outcomes of learning. Therefore, it has been chosen by the researcher since it is perfect to test the participants' ability in recognizing English euphemistic expressions. The test comprises 20 euphemistic words (seeAppendix1):

**Table (1): the test's distribution of euphemistic expressions**

No.	Words	Euphemistic words
1	Fat	Chubby
2	Die	Pass away
3	Skinny	Slim
4	Poor	Modest
5	Lazy	Unmotivated
6	Homeless	On the street
7	Rebels	Freedom fighters
8	Handicapped	Disabled
9	Blind	Visually challenged
10	Short	Vertically challenged
11	Prison	Correction facility
12	Unemployed	Jobseekers
13	Cheap	Affordable
14	Deaf	Aurally inconvenienced or challenged
15	Mad	Nervous breakdown
16	Vomit	Throw up
17	Belch	Burp
18	Ugly	Less attractive
19	Bald	Thinning
20	Old	Elderly

It is worth mentioning that all of the participants were familiar with the meanings of the words indicated above. The question comprises four options: 1) an accurate answer (euphemistic expression), 2) an erroneous answer (offensive expression), 3) a distracter, and 4) *I can't tell* option. It was given to reduce the possibility of selecting the incorrect response and to assure the test's reliability. The euphemisms are taken from a euphemism dictionary by Holder (2002) and a book by Ayto (2007), namely: *"How Not to Say What You Mean"* and *"Wobbly bits and other euphemisms"* respectively.

### 3.3. The Validity of the Test

According to Gronlund (1977: 130), validity is "the degree to which conclusion drawn from the outcomes of a particular assessment is suitable, expressive, and significant to the assessor's intention". Coombe( 2010: xxii) states that validity "relates to the degree to which an exam assesses what it is intended to assess". This reveals that what is taught, has to be tested and how it is taught. Validity can be classified into face, construct, consequential, and content validity (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010: 30-6).

### 3.3.1. Face Validity

Face validity is "the degree to which a test looks right, and appears to measure the knowledge or abilities it claims to measure, based on the subjective judgment of the examinees who take it, the administrative personnel who decide on its use, and other psychometrically unsophisticated observers"(Mousavi, 2009: 247) . A copy of the test was presented by the researcher to jury members to give their approval of the test items. It is worthy to mention that the jury members were specialists in linguistics, methodology, and TEFL. They gave their agreement that the items of the test were appropriate for research purposes taking into consideration some modifications that were provided by them.

### 3.4 The Pilot Study

Thabane et al., (2010:1) state that the pilot study is "a small scale preliminary study conducted in order to evaluate the feasibility, duration, cost, adverse events, and improve upon the study design prior to performance of a full-scale research project." Hence, the purpose of the pilot study is to collect data in order to access the test's usefulness rather than to assess the participants' performance.

In the study under investigation, the pilot test is performed on a small sample of the population randomly in order to make the needed modifications of the test items. Fifty students from the population who were not involved in the original sample from the College of Education for Humanities carried out the test on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April/ 2022. The purpose of the pilot study was to assist the researcher in evaluating the clarity of the test items. Moreover, the purpose of the pilot test is to determine the test's validity and the feasibility of the study. The test's items are found to be understandable and practical.

### 3.5 Item Analysis

According to Madsen (1983:180), selecting a language test that is acceptable is not enough to build up a good test. Every item of the test must work effectively so as to reinforce it. As a result, a method known as item analysis is developed as a statistical method to check the items of the subjects. Two types of item analysis are provided in the current study: item discrimination and difficulty level.

#### 3.5.1. Item Discrimination

According to Lzard (2005:26), "item discrimination" describes how each test works to separate the good or high-ability learners from the poor or low-ability ones. Poor learners are not expected to be able to answer the most challenging items, while good learners are expected to do so. According to Eble (1972: 67), the test items should be kept if their discrimination level is between and above (0.20 and 0.80). Due to its statistical popularity and widespread adaption across a wide range of research studies, the researcher chose to use the statistical rule of Eble to measure the discrimination level of the test items in the current study.

Tracing the levels of discrimination for every item in the table below, it can be noticed that they range from the lowest of (0.22) to the highest of (0.74) are all highly suitable and all the items of the test are discriminatory and should therefore be left in the test without being changed depending on Eble's standards for test item discrimination levels.

#### 3.5.2. Item Difficulty

Lzard(2005:25) states that a good test should not contain items that are either too simple for all of the learners to answer or too difficult for any of them to answer. Consequently, the extremely difficult/easy item(s) must be excluded in favor of the average of difficulty. The difficulty value (DV) of the test items must then be determined in order to assure that the test as a whole is of normal difficulty and that the learner's answer to a particular item is reliable. According to Brown (2004:58), Item difficulty ranges from (0.15) to (0.85) and it is calculated by dividing the total number of test-takers by the number of participants who correctly answered the question. (see Table 2)

**Table (2) The Discrimination Index of the Test**

NO.	Item Difficulty	Item discrimination	NO.	Item Difficulty	Item discrimination
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1	0.44	0.24	16	0.12	0.36
2	0.45	0.32	17	0.0	0.22
3	0.61	0.26	18	0.10	0.50
4	0.13	0.36	19	0.73	0.68
5	0.41	0.48	20	0.41	0.74
6	0.62	0.23			
7	0.43	0.25			
8	0.47	0.74			
9	0.63	0.45			
10	0.33	0.56			
11	0.12	0.68			
12	0.62	0.37			
13	0.59	0.72			
14	0.45	0.22			
15	0.15	0.23			

### 3.5.3 Reliability of the Test

According to Kumar (2018:26), reliability "refers to the quality of a measurement procedure that provides repeatability and accuracy ". As for Mills (2019:203), reliability is the "degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it is measuring". Moreover, reliability "can be enhanced by making the test instructions absolutely clear, restricting the scope for variety in the answers, and making sure the test conditions remain constant" (Harmer, 2001: 322).Furthermore, Heaton(1988)states that there are various methods to estimate the test's reliability like the two equivalent forms, split-half, Kurder-Richardson, and test-retest method .By applying the Kurder-Richardson formula, It is found that the correlation coefficient of the test is (0.86).

### 3.6 The Scoring Scheme of the Test

The scoring scheme of a given test refers to the scheme adopted in scoring the items of the test. The test comprises one question that consists of 20 items. Accordingly, it will be scored out of 20 marks, one mark is given for each correct item and zero mark for each incorrect item. (see Table 3)

**Table(3): The Test's Distribution of the Scores**

Question Form	Item Number	Marks	The Scores for the question
Multiple-Choice item	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20	(1-0)	20
Total			20

### 3.7 Statistical Methods

In order to fulfill the aims of the current study, a number of statistical methods have been used. The first method is the *Kurder-Richardson formula* which has been used to estimate the test's reliability. The second method which is used to estimate the items' difficulty power for the test, is *the Essay Item Difficulty level formula*. The third method which is used to estimate the discrimination level for the items in the test, is *Eble's Item Discrimination Formula*. The fourth and fifth statistical methods are the *percentage formula* and *the T -test formula*. The percentage formula is used to find the students' correct



answers' percentage and the T-test value is used to compute differences between males and females.

#### 4. Discussion of the Results

To achieve the aims of the current study, the subsequent results are conducted after analyzing the data statistically. Firstly, in order to verify the first hypothesis, the analysis of the results is made in order to discover whether Iraqi EFL learners encounter difficulty in recognizing English Euphemisms. The mean score for the participants in the test is (8.37) with a standard deviation of (2.64). The question is under (79) degrees of freedom and at (0.05) level of significance. The t-test value of the test is found to be (5.495). Additionally, the current results demonstrate that the level of significance (0.000) is lesser than (0.05). Consequently, the first hypothesis is verified in which the participants face difficulty in recognizing the euphemistic expressions in English. Table (4) summarizes the results of the participants in the recognition test.

**Table(4):The t-test results of the participants in the test**

No.	Mean	Std.v	Hypothetical Mean	d.f	(t)	Significance
80	8.37	2.64	10	79	5.495	0.000

Secondly, the analysis of the results is also made in order to discover if the mean score for the males and females in the multiple-choice question has a statistically significant difference. The mean score for the male students is (7.15) with a standard deviation of (2.06), whereas for the female ones is (9.60) with a standard deviation of (2.60). The question is under (78) degrees of freedom and at (0.05) level of significance. The t-test value of the test is found to be (4.652). Moreover, the current results demonstrate that the level of significance (0.000) is lesser than (0.05). Accordingly, there are statistically significant differences between the male group and the female group. Table (5) summarizes the results of the males and females in the recognition test:

**Table(5):The t-test results of the males and females**

Gender	No.	Mean	Std.v	d.f	(t)	Significance
Males	40	7.15	2.06	78	4.652	0.000
Females	40	9.60	2.60			

The following table presents a thorough analysis of the obtained results, including the correct responses' percentages for each test item.

**Table(5):The Percentage of the males and females' correct responses**

No.	Words	Males%	Females %	Mean for all response%
1	Chubby	35%	65 %	50%
2	Pass away	65 %	60%	62.5%
3	Slim	45 %	60%	52.5%
4	Modest	40 %	50%	45%
5	Unmotivated	20 %	40%	30%
6	On the street	20 %	35%	27.5%
7	Freedom fighters	55%	35%	45%

8	Disabled	35%	55%	45%
9	Visually challenged	20%	45%	32.5%
10	Vertically challenged	30%	40%	35%
11	Correction facility	25%	40%	32.5%
12	Jobseekers	40%	45%	42.5%
13	Affordable	25%	40%	32.5%
14	Aurally inconvenienced or challenged	30%	50%	40%
15	Nervous breakdown	30%	45%	37.5%
16	Throw up	45%	50%	47.5%
17	Burp	45%	55%	50%
18	Less attractive	40%	55%	47.5%
19	Thinning	30%	40%	35%
20	Elderly	40%	48%	44%
Mean for all responses%		36%	48%	42 %

From the foregoing table, a number of outcomes can be affirmed . First of all, Iraqi EFL students are generally unaware of euphemisms in English. Males (33.75 %) and females (44.7%) both had averages that fell below the passing mark (50 % ). Despite the females' results were better than that of males, the overall average (39.22%) demonstrates their lack of acquaintance with English euphemisms. The participants' percentage for the terms "visually challenged", "on the street" and "unmotivated" (males) was (20%) which was the lowest. This may result from their unawareness of the phenomenon of euphemism; they may not have known that using the words blind, homeless, and lazy are inappropriate. They did not select these euphemisms in the given exam, although they were familiar with their meanings.

Second, compared to *freedom fighters* (35%) or *on the street* (35%) and expressions like *chubby* (65%), *slim* and *pass away*(60%), as well as *less attractive and disabled* (55%), *aurally challenged and modest* (50%), *elderly* (48%),*visually challenged*(45%) and *vertically challenged* (40%),females performed better with these lexical items. One of the justifications could be due to the fact that the females may be more concerned with their physical appearance than the males, that is why they are more heedful to what they say when it relates to their own or others' physical appearance. For instance, most of the females avoid using "*fat*" and often use the word "*chubby*" instead of that word since they dislike someone to call them fat. When referring to physical appearance, it can be noticed that most females may perform better than males using euphemisms in this area.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that in contrast to males, females are constantly taught to talk in a very polite way in our society. If a woman speaks impolitely, she will be criticized by people, but men have a space of freedom concerning the way they talk.

Additionally, as it is known in our society, females are probably not interested in politics and violence as males do. Consequently, it is clear that females received a lower percentage for the euphemism *freedom warriors* than the overall average for the two groups (45 %). On the other hand, males scored better than females (55%) on the same item, and their average was higher than the combined scores of the two groups (45%) of that expression. To put it another way, the degree of understanding of the use of euphemisms across males and females may be affected by the various areas of euphemism.

One of the most incorrectly euphemisms used by males and females is knowing the substitution name for the word prison which is *correction facility*. It entails that this condition may not be euphemised in Arabic or if it is euphemized it may not be commonly used.

Finally, it is also obvious that the males (65%) as well as females (60%) correctly identified the meaning concerning the euphemism "*pass away*." The justification is perhaps because of the social or

cultural factors of the speakers' society. In our society, one of the highly serious events is death, and everyone in a village or town will often attend the funeral to express their consolations, whether the deceased person is one of his/her relatives or not.

## 5. Conclusions

As far as Iraqi EFL learners' recognition of English euphemisms is concerned, it can be concluded that they lack understanding and are not acquainted with these expressions as well as the cultural points of British English. The test scores also show that females did better than the males, particularly with the expressions which are linked to the area of physical appearance. The difference in their performance provides adequate evidence to uphold the allegation that the variable of gender has a significant influence in using euphemisms. This may be because of the Iraqi society's necessities that females must talk in a more polite way than males. Females are therefore somewhat aware of euphemisms associated with physical appearances. To sum up, the two hypotheses of the present study are verified depending on the scores of the participants, i.e. the males and females groups.

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### *Appendix I*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q1:** Select the most appropriate euphemistic item in the following sentences:

1-I had to take steroids and became quite ----- for a year.

- a) *chubby*      b) *sick*   c) *fat*      d) *I can't tell*

2-Jim was an honorable and ----- man, a hard worker and always willing to help anyone at any time.

- a) *poor*      b) *modest*                      c) *stupid*      d) *I can't tell*

3- Arrangements are in place for the safe evacuation of ----- people.

- a) *sick*      b) *handicapped*      c) *disabled*      d) *I can't tell*

4- Special toilets, a lift in the library, and markers for the ----- have been added to the infrastructure

- a) *office*      b) *visually challenged*                      c) *blind*      d) *I can't tell*

5-He's a scorer like George, despite being ----- relative to Pop's height.

- a) *short*      b) *tall*      c) *vertically challenge*      d) *I can't tell*

6- President Reagan asked for renewed US aid to the Contra ----- .

*a)freedom fighters      b) displaced    c) rebels    d)I can't tell*

7- Jane looks so-----,she must put on some weight.

*a)overweight    b)skinny    c) slim    d)I can't tell*

8-The super hurricane which devastated coastal Orissa in 1999, killing at least 10,000 people and making millions ----- .

*a) on the streets      b) homeless      c)dead    d)I can't tell*

9- It was a difficult year in which her grandmother -----.

*a)died    b) travelled    c) passed away    d)I can't tell*

10-Jade loses her temper on her ----- students, but runs away.

*a) unmotivated    b) keen    c) lazy    d)I can't tell.*

11- It is difficult to employ a person who spent many years in-----.

*a) prison    b) correction facility    c) abroad    d)I can't tell.*

12- Unemployment remained high until the war absorbed all the -----.

*a) unemployed    b) waged    c) jobseekers    d)I can't tell.*

13- The handbag that I recently bought and everybody admired was really ----- .

*a) affordable    b) not expensive    c) cheap    d)I can't tell.*

14- I had to repeat the instructions for her five times; I think that the old woman was -----  
-----.

*a) deaf    b) aurally challenged    c) pensive    d)I can't tell.*

15- At this point, I was at the point of feeling that I was going to have a complete-----  
- .

*a) mad    b) nervous breakdown    c) crazy    d)I can't tell.*

16- John felt that he was going to -----before the semi-final match.

*a) gag    b) vomit    c) throw up    d)I can't tell.*

17- I usually avoid fizzy drinks in front of guests in order not to -----.

*a) eructate    b) belch    c) burp    d)I can't tell.*

18- He saw the ----- girl making herself beautiful and was entranced by her beauty.

*a) less attractive    b) ugly    c) dreadful    d)I can't tell.*

19- He pulls off his Reds cap and scratches his ----- head.

*a) bald    b) injured    c) thinning    d)I can't tell.*

20-Up to 40 ----- people were injured, four requiring hospitalization.

*a) aged    b) elderly    c) old    d)I can't tel*