The Advantage of Euphemism in the New Mode of English Classroom Teaching

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Abstract: With the development of the higher education in China, college English teaching has made great improvement, such as the teaching concept, the teaching mode, and the teaching requirement and so on. The English teachers’ role has just undergone great changes, especially their languages. Euphemism, a kind of polite language, can combine the teachers’ role and the students’ personality factors together. In this paper, the application of euphemism in teaching field will be illustrated, which will strengthen the English teaching in class effectively.

Key Words: The English teaching reform, euphemism, students’ personality factors, application in teaching fields

1 Introduction

Recently, multimedia (network-based technology) has been widely applied in the foreign languages teaching, which brings a lot of modern educational advantages, such as the plenty of information, the aid of diagrams, the rapid transmission and so on. Traditionally, the textbook is the only access to the source of knowledge for both teachers and students. Facing the challenges of new technologies, more and more foreign language teachers started looking for an appropriate role model. In the limited class time, it is a question for the teachers to consider how to guide their fellow students to complete their tasks. They must take into consideration not only their own words but also the students’ personality factors in language learning. Under new circumstance, if the teachers can adjust their role, if the teachers can give enough attention to the arts of languages--- that is to make good use of the euphemism, if the teachers notice that the three personality factors: self-esteem, inhibition and anxiety have related greatly to the students’ language learning, the English teaching will be carried out effectively. Therefore, for the teachers, how to apply euphemism in English teaching process will be of great significance.

In this paper, the following points will be illustrated. The Euphemistic language used by teachers is necessary because of the demands of educational reform, because of the functions of Euphemism and because of the students’ personality factors. It also goes on details about how to apply euphemism in specific teaching situations in class.

2 The reasons why we apply euphemism in English teaching

2.1 The demands of the educational reform

In the traditional mode of teaching, teachers play a central role. They control the whole classroom activities. The teaching process must proceed step by step according to the plans and the teaching contents must be around the examinations. At the same time students are just passive receivers in class-room activities. However, since the college English reform, great changes have taken place in many aspects. The teacher’s dominate role is replaced by the students’ self-study. Instead, the teacher becomes the students’ helper and guider. Therefore it is important for the teachers to reform their traditional language. Perfecting their class-room languages is an effective way to arouse the students’ interests in English learning and encourage the students to finish the necessary tasks. Practices and experiences show that Euphemism can be of great help for the teachers to fulfill the tasks and meet the demands of the educational reform.

2.2 The function of euphemism

Euphemism is a figure of speech that consists in the substitution of a word or expression of
comparatively favorable implication or less unpleasant associations, for the harsher or more offensive one that would more precisely designate what is intended. Euphemisms play a very important role in daily communication. From the day it came into existence, it has lubricated our communication, helped establish a good relationship between human beings and even strengthened the social stability. The positive functions of euphemisms are to inflate and magnify, making the euphemistic items grander and more important than they really are. People use euphemisms to show their politeness, to avoid being offensive and to meet the psychological and beneficial needs of both speakers and listeners in communication. Accordingly, euphemisms serve three basic communicative functions: evading function, upgrading function and disguising function. In the teaching field, euphemism can stretch its upgrading function into limits. It beautifies the teachers’ language, which are comfortable for the students to listen to. Meanwhile the students will follow the teacher’s instruction and put into practice quickly. Then it will help to build a good relationship between teachers and students.

2.3 The students’ personality factors
In teaching process, all kinds of factors will influence the students’ learning process. The three important personality factors—self-esteem, inhibition and anxiety closely relate to the second language learning. Self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds towards himself. The higher self-esteem and language success interact each other. It is the teacher who can provide the students some opportunities to build higher self-esteem by specific teaching methods through the communication with them in the class. So teachers really have a positive effect on both the linguistic performance and the emotional well-being of the students. Inhibition enables people to build sets of defenses to protect the human ego. As is well-known, making mistakes is rather unavoidable in the language learning and people usually make progress through making some mistakes. However, mistake can be viewed as both internal and external threats to our ego. Teachers should create teaching techniques that reduce inhibition in the classroom; moreover, they should try to create learning situations in which inhibition and ego barriers are lowered so that free communication can take place. Language anxiety can have a negative effect on the language learning process and rank high among factors influencing language learning. This anxiety is linked directly to performing in the target language. People can easily find that the teacher’s teaching style may increase or reduce the students’ language anxiety to a certain extent. Teachers’ polite language, special behaviors even mild attitude toward different individuals can help the students remove language anxiety. The vagueness of euphemism avoids hurting the students’ self-esteem meanwhile reflects the real condition indirectly even when they make some mistakes. In fact, these mild expressions provide the students a relaxing situation to confess and correct their errors and face the problems more bravely in the future.

3 The application of English euphemism in specific teaching situations

In order to achieve teaching objectives with extra communicative effect in the class, teachers can apply euphemistic expressions in the following situations:

3.1 Applying euphemism when raising questions
It is very often for the teacher to meet such a situation that there is silence in the classroom when raising some questions. The euphemistic way of raising questions can enhance students’ study interests and create a sense of trust to the teacher, thus motivating their thinking. The euphemistic wording may help the students feel ease and comfortable in the classroom. For example, when a teacher raises a question in the class and wants to encourage one shy student to answer the question. She or he might say in this way, “Could you tell us your idea about this question? Just have a try. I am sure that you have something to say”. Other sentences are always chosen to use such as “Could you please try it again?”, “Don’t keep silent.” or “you will hide your light under the bushel.” Above all, the mild and polite tone from the
teacher enables the students to answer the questions willingly, but not reluctantly as usually in the foreign language class. It is very probably that the willingness might result in better performance under rather relaxing state and to certain extent, shorten the distance between the teacher and the student and remove the fright of showing one’s own opinion in the public place.

3.2 Applying euphemism when offering comments
Test is often regarded as a standard to check students’ study. Students are always very anxious, particularly in an evaluative situation, such as our oral English examination. Students are often alarmed about the consequences of inadequate performance on a test or other’s evaluation, regardless of whether the fears are realistic. Therefore, how to make comments on students’ performance plays a significant role in the whole teaching process.
“You have to devote yourself more diligently to your study, and I am sure you could do a better job next time.”
“I think maybe you have some reasons for not doing well this time.”
“I am afraid that you make me a little bit disappointed today. Could you do better next time?”
“You are always an honest boy. You are, aren’t you?”
These sentences are not harsh ones and protect the student’s self-image in front of other students. What’s more, these seemingly pleasant and mild sentences contain some extra meaning. Students are clear about their inadequate performance but not to be hurt.

3.3 Applying euphemism when correcting errors
Making mistakes is unavoidable in learning. Many language teachers maintain the belief that they should be directive, authoritarian and even intimidating and that they must correct every error. However, these behaviors can lead to students’ anxiety and inhibition in the classroom. The indirect, polite, and mild way can not only point out the mistake, but also not hurt the student’s self-esteem. Thus, a relaxing and harmonious teaching environment is created and the teaching objectives are attained at the same time. For instance:
“I am afraid that you didn’t pay enough attention to tense.”
“I would rather you didn’t make this mistake.”
“Maybe we could do something more to improve it.”
“This sentence, I suppose, contains one grammar mistake.”
“A little bit closer, but think of the …”
“I am sure you are nervous so that you make a mistake.”
These sentences we mentioned above naturally sound more comfortable than the harsh one “You are wrong.” They are easier to be accepted by the language learners and facilitate the smooth communication between teachers and language learners.

3.4 Applying euphemism when giving assignments
One of the main tasks for teachers is to provoke interest and involvement in the subject even when students are not initially interested in it. It is by their choice of topic, activity and linguistic content that they may be able to turn a class round. It is by their attitude to class participation, their conscientiousness, their humor and their seriousness that they may influence their students. It is by their own behaviors and enthusiasm that they may inspire the students.
For some students, language writing, reading or listening can also create fear. Whenever we mention some kinds of language tasks to the students, they feel annoyed or monotonous. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to the words when giving assignments to the students. To some extent, teachers may give the task as the enjoyment by showing the assignment euphemistically.
For example, there will be an English speech competition and the teacher wants the students to have more practice recently. The teacher could say: “We will have an English speech competition next month. I think I am confident in my students, but how can we improve our oral English and have an excellent performance at that time?” Some suggestions might naturally come from the students and teacher would provide some additions. As a result, the assignment of having more oral practice is easily given to the
students and, of course, they are willingly to accept it for part of them are their own ideas. In brief, for the sake of the educational reform, and the relationship between students’ affective factors and the language teaching, English euphemism should occupy an important position in English teaching and learning.

4 Conclusion

Briefly speaking, teachers’ language in the class should be polite, which is needed by the very profession. Euphemism is a good favorable interpretation of a bad word, which can remove the threat to the vulnerable faces of the students; therefore the self-image will be defended during the interaction. The application of euphemism in the teaching process will establish a harmonious relationship between the teacher and the students. When a student’s self-image is defended by a teacher’s mild expression in front of all the other classmates, the language anxiety and inhibition of learning a new language may disappear gradually, while the confidence and interest may arise. What’s more, the demands of English teaching reform will be met and the teacher’s new role will ne perfect. The aim of effective teaching and study will be attained successfully.

References