

**Expressions of Dysphemism and Euphemism
on The Met Gala: A Pragmatic Study**

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Abstract

"Language is the dress of thought," Samuel Johnson once remarked, and nowhere is this more evident than in the grand tapestry of the Met Gala, which is considered one of the world's most prestigious and glamorous fashion events, often referred to as 'fashion's biggest night out'. The present paper explores the spectrum of dysphemistic terms used to criticize the event, examine how euphemisms serve to mitigate the perceived vulgarity of fashion choices made by celebrities and investigates the pragmatic dynamics of dysphemism and euphemism at the Met Gala, anchored by Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Bousfield's (2008) impoliteness framework. Therefore, the present study aims at identifying the pragmatic techniques used to express dysphemism and euphemism in terms of the politeness theory of Brown & Levinson (1987) and impoliteness theory by Bousfield (2008), clarifying the variations among the dysphemistic terms and how they are used destructively against the Met Gala and demonstrating the constructing role of euphemism in beautifying the ugly style selected by the celebrates in the Met Gala. In addition, the qualitative analysis is used in this research because the researcher intends to show how the selected 'social comments' can be subjected to a linguistic analysis by applying two pragmatic theories; politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) and impoliteness by Bousfield (2008). Even though the present study is qualitative, some tables are provided to reach a deeper, better, and more understandable and comprehensible analysis. Consequently, the results have shown that; first, the vast majority of people 'commenters' tend to soften face-threatening acts by using a positive politeness strategy represented by their selection of euphemistic expressions. Second, the less used politeness strategy is the negative strategy while the most used one is the positive strategy. Furthermore, the other three politeness strategies namely; bold on record, off record and don't do the face-threatening act, have not been used in the selected comments. Finally, the percentage of using the off-record impoliteness strategy is the same as the on-record impoliteness strategy in the selected comments.

Keywords: dysphemism, euphemism, impoliteness, politeness, pragmatics.

Introduction

The Met Gala, an emblematic event in the fashion calendar, is not only a showcase of haute couture but also a fertile ground for linguistic expression. This study embarks

on a pragmatic exploration of the language used during this illustrious event, focusing on the expressions of dysphemism and euphemism two linguistic devices that reflect the interplay between language and society. Dysphemism and euphemism serve as linguistic lenses through which individuals perceive and construct reality. (Ward & Allaire, 2021).

Therefore, this study is significant due to its contribution to the broader discourse on language and identity by offering insights, at The Met Gala, into how linguistic practices can challenge, mirror and reinforce social norms. In addition, at a high-profile cultural gathering like the Met Gala, there remains gap pragmatic linguistic research concerning the use of the two expressions, dysphemism and euphemism, despite the extensive of language in many social events. Besides, this event provides an extremely rich context for linguistic expressions that usually reflects societal deep attitude and values because of its display of fashion and celebrity culture (Teather, 2024). The way in which language is used to reinforce, construct or challenge social norms have not been examined through dysphemistic and euphemistic expressions. Thus, by analysing the linguistic expressions employed in the Met Gala, and interpreting their pragmatic functions and implications, this study aims to bridge the gap consequently contribute to the understanding of how language works within the framework of a well-recognized global event.

By highlighting these aspects, the study underscores its relevance and potential impact on multiple domains, from academic scholarship to practical applications in media and education. Thus, the main objectives of the present study are: identifying the pragmatic techniques used to express dysphemism and euphemism in terms of politeness theory of Brown & Levinson (1987) and impoliteness theory by Bousfield (2008), clarifying the variations among the dysphemistic terms and how they are used destructively against the Met Gala and demonstrating the constructing role of euphemism in beautifying the ugly style selected by the celebrates in the Met Gala. As such, this study aims to enrich the field of pragmatics by documenting and analysing how language is used in a unique socio-cultural event, thereby expanding the understanding of linguistic strategies in public discourse utilizing (im)politeness theories by Brown & Levinson (1987) and Bousfield (2008) to answer the following questions of the present study:

1. What are the pragmatic techniques used to express dysphemism and euphemism in terms of politeness theory by Brown & Levinson (1987) and impoliteness theory by Bousfield (2008)?
2. What are the variations among the dysphemistic terms and how they are used destructively against the Met Gala?
3. How does euphemism play an essential role in beautifying the ugly style selected by the celebrities in the Met Gala?

Literature Review

Dysphemism and Euphemism

Language is considered as verbal behaviour by which members of a society interact with each other using this communication behaviour. People are organized into a group, within any society. Those groups are characterized by certain shared aspects like; attitudes and beliefs, that sometimes are expressed by the accepted behaviour of the group members including their language behavioural. Therefore, common beliefs, values and attitudes are reflected in the way members of a certain group use language. For example, what they choose to say and how they say it. However, in all societies, certain words are unacceptable for cultural or even social reasons; they are considered taboo words (Amberg & Vause, 2010)

Dysphemism is an expression with offensive connotations either about the audience or the denotatum or both and it is substituted a euphemistic or neutral expression for just that reason. According to Allan and Burrige (2006, p: 47) uttering a dysphemistic word in public made up by old women and men, young and old are determined to one's 'public-self-image'. Taboo words can be found in people's speech and behaviour. Thus, Allan and Burrige (ibid), argue that "taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual's behaviour where it can cause discomfort, harm or injury". For example; in some Arab countries, it is a taboo behaviour to walk wearing your shoes or when you enter your host's place or to walk on a paper written in the Arabic language since it has acquired the language of the Holy Quran, the book of Muslims. The word for "cancer" in most Arab countries is unspeakable by many people besides so many other words known as "dirty" ones because they acquire a dysphemistic connotation, (offensive), a word that may hurt people's feelings, emotions, or beliefs (Allan and Burrige, 2006, p: 47). The way of evaluating content

is paved by dysphemism and euphemism. That part expresses the speaker's attitude towards the world but doesn't describe a thing in it. The term dysphemism is the opposite of euphemism which refers to the intended use of harsh words or expressions instead of using polite words. Therefore, it is acceptable to use crude language (words) to talk or describe the same social topics. In this sense, certain words and expressions are used to produce such negative effects on listeners and readers about something. Euphemism is as common as a euphemism in everyday usage. Besides, some of the similar subjects can be euphemized as dysphemized such as life and death. That is to say, talking about a dead person, a person would say; 'passed the way', but there are certain contexts, people instead use disrespectful expressions like: 'kick the bucket'. Thus, the main reason for using euphemism is the desire for increasing positive connections or at least avoid using negative ones. Generally speaking, the degree of sensitivity, is increased by dysphemistic language. Conversely, the degree of sensitivity is decreased by euphemistic language. (Lutz, 1989, p. 38) the following table illustrates the variation of the words used to show the dysphemism, neutral and euphemism:

Table 1. Comparison of the dysphemism, neutral and euphemism words

Dysphemism	Neutral	Euphemism
Stingy	Careful	Thrifty
Terrorist	Rebel	Freedom fighter
Snuffed out	Died	Passed away
Cancer stick	Cigarette	Torch of freedom

In cooperative communicative interchanges, a common conversational strategy is verbal politeness, constitutes a major principle to analyse language of the different pragmatic theories as an integral part and as a social phenomenon that shapes linguistics behaviour since locutions are emitted in along with this principle; either by the contrast of moving away from it or to respect it. Furthermore, politeness plays an essential role in communicative exchanges to the extent that sometimes it is argued to be important more than the transmission of the information in a conversational encounter or any other exchange (As cited in, Fraser, 1990 p: 23). The most well-known theory of politeness is a face-saving theory by Brown and Levinson (1987). They have viewed politeness phenomena as a 'universal principle of human interaction' (Malmkjar, 2004, p. 426). Two basic assumptions are presented within their theory:

1. **The first assumption:** is strongly related to the idea of a model person (MP). Conversationalists have been seen by Brown and Levinson as rational agents who think in a strategic way to select the available language choices of which they are aware.
2. **The second assumption:** is related directly to the notion of face Goffman's (1967), upon which Brown and Levinson based their theory and developed it later to be the cornerstone of their theory (Locher, 2004, p. 66).

Brown and Levinson distinguished two aspects of the face:

1. **Positive face:** which represents the speaker's desire to be appreciated and liked by other members (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62)
2. **Negative face:** which represents the speaker's desire to be free of imposition of others and independent.

Dysphemism and Impoliteness

The language that is used to cause offensive or is perceived to offend, refers to impoliteness. When language conflicts with what people expect in a certain context it is considered taboo. Impoliteness represented by dysphemistic expressions that has negative emotional consequences for others or at least one participant. In addition, impoliteness covers more than taboo languages, for instance, it is possible to produce impolite utterances without saying any taboo words. For example; in a classroom, a teacher might write on a student's homework this is excrement or this is snit. Both expressions contain negative evaluation but the first expression doesn't include any taboo word while the second contains the taboo word. That is to say, dysphemistic expression can be achieved indirectly depending on the user context. (Allan & Burrige, 2006, p. 11).

Dereck Ernest Bousfield argues that impoliteness is successful only when the FTA is comprehended by the hearer and intended by the speaker. Bousfield presented two main strategies, followed by the researcher of the present study:

1. **Off record impoliteness:** the speaker in this strategy attacks the hearer's face indirectly and implicitly. To be more specific, the speakers deep meaning will be opposed to his surface meaning when applying this strategy.
2. **On record impoliteness:** this strategy is designed, on the one hand, to create some kind of disharmonies atmosphere between the speaker and the hearer and

on the other hand, to damage explicitly the hearer's face and deny the hearer's normal rights and needs (Jucker, 2009, p. 165).

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the present study, the researcher follows the following steps:

1. **Research Design:** Qualitative analysis is carried out in this study as an attempt to understand the text better and to “develop concepts that enhance the understanding of social phenomena in a natural setting with due emphasis on the meanings, experiences, and views of all participants” (Neergaard & Ulho, 2007, p. 4).
2. **Data Collection:** Collect a substantial number of comments from various posts related to The Met Gala. Ensure that the data collected is diverse and representative of different viewpoints.
3. **Identification of Euphemism and Dysphemism:** Identify expressions of euphemism and dysphemism in the comments. This could be done manually or by using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques.
4. **Application of Politeness Theory:** Apply Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to the identified expressions. Classify the comments based on the politeness strategies used: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record, and off-record.
5. **Analysis of Impoliteness:** Analyse the impoliteness in the comments using Culpeper's (1996) framework of impoliteness strategies.
6. **Interpretation:** Interpret the findings in the context of The Met Gala. Discuss how the use of euphemism, dysphemism, politeness, and impoliteness reflect the attitudes and perceptions of the commenters towards The Met Gala.
7. **Conclusion:** Draw conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of the data. Discuss the implications of the findings for understanding online discourse about cultural events like The Met Gala.

Data Analysis

Eight comments are selected to be analysed pragmatically using politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) and impoliteness theory by Bousfield (2008) to show the dysphemistic and euphemistic expressions used by the speakers 'commenters' concerning the Met Gala Exhibit. The first four comments show the dysphemistic expressions, while the final four show the euphemistic expressions.

1. First comment:



Lubna Sultana

Finally she found the right dress color which matches her personality.

12w Like Reply

6 😂

- **Classification:** The term “on record impoliteness strategy” refers to a direct way of communicating that does not attempt to mitigate the offensive nature of the statement. In the context provided, the commenter uses a dysphemistic expression a phrase that is deliberately derogatory to convey their negative feelings towards the individual named Kim. This is a clear example of an on-record impoliteness strategy because the speaker does not mince words or use euphemisms to soften the impact of their criticism.
- **Conclusion:** The statement about the colour of the dress being indicative of Kim’s personality is a direct insinuation. By choosing the word “black,” the commenter is employing a metaphorical association commonly in Western cultures, black can represent negativity or darkness. Therefore, the speaker is making a judgment about kim’s character not just commenting on the aesthetic choice. Besides, the speaker believes that the dress colour fits and appropriate by using the word ‘right’ which emphasizes the negative connotation. In both cases, the language used is unambiguous and intentionally conferential, leaving little room for misinterpretation for hearers. Disapproval and negative qualities were conveyed through the choice of the speaker.

2. Second comment:



Hugo Padilla

She's a joke and shouldn't be famous. Kanye west has the top songs on itunes and all of his music sucks his songs are boring.

11w Like Reply

- **Classification:** This is an example of on-record impoliteness, in fact, the statement; Kim is like a joke and should not be famous because she does nothing, is meant to delegitimized kim's fame not only attacking her public personality. The word 'joke' is used to imply that her statues is undeserved or somehow ridiculous which is considered a direct form of impoliteness.
- **Conclusion:** A specific form of negative evaluation is expressed by the speaker's expression of confusion about Kim's profession and the harsh critique of Kany's music (kim's husband) before marriage. In addition, this comment is subjective judgment which implies a direct relationship between the quality of his music and marriage. Furthermore, the language used expresses extremely strong negative opinion without any moral consideration or politeness strategy that would soften the written words!

3. Third comment:



Rebecka Erbin Antonisse

When you have parachute-practice at 7 then Met gala at 8.

12w Like Reply

207 🤔👍

- **Classification:** Off-record impoliteness strategy is when the speaker's intention is implied not directly stated through indirect language. the term 'parachute practice' used in this comment metaphorically to described Rhina's dress suggesting that the dress resemble a parachute suit. This comment aligns with Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory where off-record strategies are used to avoid direct face-threatening act.

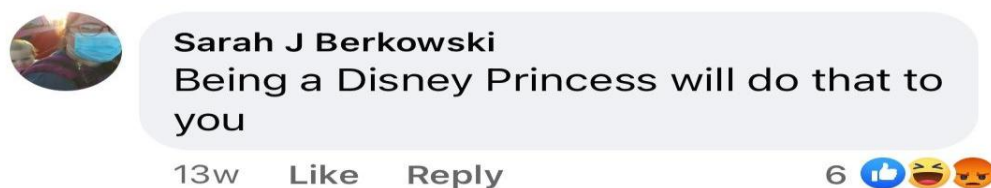
- **Conclusion:** Disapproval with a sense of humour is expressed indirectly by ‘parachute practice’ comment which reinforce mockery by implying that her attire is inappropriate for the event. As a result, language can be used to navigate social interactions in nuanced ways specifically in high social setting like the Met Gala. In addition, the importance of understanding both the broader social dynamics and linguistics mechanisms at play that inform them.

4. Fourth comment:



- **Classification:** In this dysphemistic expression, the commenter applies on-record impoliteness strategy when she comments negatively on Rehana’s dress in the Met Gala. This dysphemistic expression is considered as direct attack on Rehana’s dress therefore left no room for ambiguity or misunderstandings.
- **Conclusion:** The rhetorical question embodied in this comment emphasises the on-record impoliteness used by the commenter asking whether the event is the Met Gala or a funeral, due to the colour of Rehana’s black dress expressing clearly that she should not wear such colour to this event. In addition, he reinforces the negative critique of her black dress saying that it is not just inappropriate, but also arouse imagery of death and funerals. Thus, such analysis shows how dysphemistic language can be utilized to express strong, negative social opinions and judgment.

5. Fifth comment:



- **Classification:** A positive politeness strategy embodies through the use of the dysphemistic expression ‘being a Disney princess’ in this comment. This strategy aims at avoiding offence and negative opinions. In this comment, the commenter tries to praise Billie Elish by comparing her to a Disney princess through admiring her choice of the dress. Moreover, this strategy elevates the subject by associating the actress with positive cultural symbols and avoids any negative connotations.
- **Conclusion:** This comment can be described as a way of inclusion the readers in mutual appreciation by enhancing social bonds through shared values and aesthetic judgments. Besides, a positive social relationship is build and maintained by the use of the positive politeness strategy between the speaker, the subject and the audience.

6. Sixth comment:



Charlotte Curry

Who knew Billie had such a va va voom figure – she looks beautiful. Hope she incorporates a little of this style into her daily look!

13w Like Reply



- **Classification:** According to the positive politeness strategy, the phrase ‘va va voom’ serves as a euphemistic expression which highlight the positive aspects of the actress and her perfect choice of the dress. This phrase is used to refer to something being exciting, lively and attractive. In addition, it is also used as a popular term in many contexts including fashion to evoke a sense of dynamism and allure (Byrne, 2004)
- **Conclusion:** the positive politeness strategy used in the euphemistic expression create a kind of social relation and intimate by avoiding negative opinions and harsh terms which focuses on the readers convictions and satisfaction rather than her desire to do face-threatening-act.

7. Seventh comment:



Liså Kirkwóód

She looks like a goddess

12w Like Reply

- **Classification:** In this comment, a positive politeness strategy is used to enhance social bonds between the redear and the commenter and to create social harmony as well. The commenter, through his divine euphemistic comparison, praises the actress's appearance by expressing appreciation of beauty and elegance (Nordquist, 2020)
- **Conclusion:** A powerful tool is used in this comment 'she looks like Godes' as it is not only avoiding any potential offence but also contribute to the positive image of the subject. The commenter says that her dress is not only appropriate but is also elevating her status to a mythical figure expressed by her beauty. Moreover, this analysis shows how language plays an important role in shaping our perception

8. Eighth comment:



Jetro Maglinte

Heaven on earth. Miranda will be proud!

13w Like Reply

14 👍 😂 ❤️

- **Classification:** The commenter used a euphemistic strategy to convey strong approved in a socially acceptable manner in describing Emily Blunt's look at the Met Gala as 'sensational.' Through his words, the commenter supports and appreciates Emily Blunt's choice in fashion which makes her looks stunning.
- **Conclusion:** The expression 'Heaven on earth' suggest that Emily Blunt's look is extraordinary and unique compared to a divine or perfect experience. In addition, the commenter makes Emily Blunt feels valued and appreciated by associating her with an idealized concept. Moreover, it shows that the commenter is not only aware of Emily Blunt's work but also appreciates the

effort her character put to please Miranda (Emily's demanding boss) in the movie. This reference serves as an in-group marker, creating a sense of belonging and shared understanding between the commenter and those familiar with the film

Results and discussion

Depending on the selected comments, the analysis has shown that most speakers in social media tend to soften face-threatening acts by using positive politeness which is meant to create harmonies between speakers and hearers as Bousfield stated. The analysis has shown also that the less used politeness strategy is the negative strategy according to the selected comments, while the other three politeness strategies namely; bold on record, off record and don't do the face-threatening act, have not been used in the selected comments. Furthermore, the percentage of the impoliteness strategy 'on record', used by the speakers, is the same as the 'off bald record strategy'. The following tables (1, 2) show the politeness and impoliteness strategies used by speakers in the comments:

Table: (2), impoliteness strategy used in the selected comments

No.	Impoliteness strategy	First comment	Second comment	Third comment	Fourth comment
1.	On record impoliteness	✓	✓	✗	✓
2.	Off record impoliteness	✗	✗	✓	✗

Table: (3), politeness strategy used in the selected comments

Conclusion

The pragmatic analysis carried out in the present study is intended to identify the pragmatic techniques used to express dysphemism and euphemism in terms of politeness theory of Brown & Levinson (1987) and impoliteness theory by Bousfield (2008), clarify the variations among the dysphemistic terms and how they are used destructively against the Met Gala and demonstrate the constructing role of euphemism in beautifying the ugly style selected by the celebrates in the Met Gala. The results had shown that; first, the vast majority of people ‘commenters’ tended to soften face-threatening acts by using positive politeness strategy represented by their selection of

No.	Politeness strategy	First comment	Second comment	Third comment	Fourth comment
1.	Bald on record	✗	✗	✗	✗
2.	Positive politeness	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.	Negative politeness	✗	✗	✗	✗
4.	Off record	✗	✗	✗	✗
5.	Don't do the face-threatening act	✗	✗	✗	✗

euphemistic expressions. Second, the less used politeness strategy is the negative strategy while the most used one is the positive strategy. Furthermore, the other three politeness strategies namely; bold on record, off record and don't do the face-threatening act, had not been used in the selected comments. Finally, the percentage of using the off-record impoliteness strategy is the same as the on-record impoliteness strategy in the selected comments. Besides, all commenters didn't expect any response from those celebrates that is why they are free to say whatever they want and convey whatever they need. In addition, the embodiment of politeness and impoliteness strategies in comments are completely different from those used in real-life interaction. Thus, the variation in the use of politeness and impoliteness strategy echoes the diversity in the commenters' morality, mentality, cultivation etc. These comments reflect the speaker's reality because they are more authentic.

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Appendix

First and second comments



Third and fourth comments



Fifth and sixth comments



Seventh and eighth comments

