

effects of this trespassing / the essence of linguistic tact is the choice of ways of speaking which minimise unpleasantness, embarrassment or conflict /

the range of avoidance strategies can be summed up in three military metaphors /

first metaphor / is retreat / under this strategy we avoid meeting the person we keep away or we remain silent / or we avoid the subject or change the subject / we talk about something else /

second metaphor is the smoke-screen metaphor / now under this strategy what we do is use for example conventional politeness formulae such as 'excuse me', 'would you mind?', 'sorry to bother you' / or we go in for a lot of vagueness and ambiguity / we try to be imprecise / teenagers are very good at this when parents ask them questions / 'who was that on the phone?' I ask and my teenage son replies / 'a friend' / 'where are you going?' I ask / and he replies / 'out' / of course he could say a lot more but he chooses not to / he is avoiding saying things which he thinks might cause trouble / and of course we all make use of a variety of vague expressions which come readily to hand as we speak / uh 'sort of' / 'like' / 'lots of' / 'kind of' / and 'stuff' / words of that sort / I have just used one / and of course one of the things we do try to avoid when we are speaking to people is saying 'no' / uh 'no' is what sociologists call a dispreferred response in most contexts / and so we try to avoid it / instead of saying no / we say 'hmm yes and no' or 'that depends' or 'I suppose so' or 'up to a point' /

third and last strategy is / the camouflage strategy / in this strategy we choose nice words rather than nasty ones / kind words rather than brutally honest ones / this is what we call euphemism / defined in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as 'a figure by which / a less

distasteful word or expression is substituted for one more exactly descriptive of what is intended' / the linguist Deborah Cameron has a shorter and uh more / striking uh description of euphemism / she simply calls it verbal hygiene / it's a way of keeping ourselves linguistically clean /

there are various kinds of uh euphemism / um the example we started with is a euphemism / 'I'll think about it' / but it's a euphemistic utterance rather than a euphemistic word or phrase / we all have a repertoire of such utterances to summon into use / when circumstances demand / 'you must come around one of these days' / we say or we hear / and this of course is not to be mistaken for a serious invitation / 'that'd be really nice' we reply or they reply / and this of course is not to be mistaken for an enthusiastic acceptance / but most euphemisms are single words or short phrases which describe / people or things in a way which disguises / or camouflages things about them which make us feel uncomfortable or uneasy / here are a few quick examples / from a number of different domains /

one familiar category is expressions which make commercial products or public services less bad than they really / seem less bad than they really are / for examp... uh for example second class on British trains is called 'standard class' / sounds much better 'doesn't it?' / economy class on planes is called 'tourist class' / second-hand cars have been described as 'pre-enjoyed' / an old house in an advertisement may be called a 'period house' / a very small one may be called 'cosy' / a price increase is called a 'price adjustment' / all of these are clear examples of euphemistic language /

another area is the work area / in which the boss may be called the 'team leader' / or