

## Common ground in intercultural communication — A socio-cognitive approach to euphemism

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### **Abstract**

*The study aims at exploring the creation of common ground in intercultural communication and especially the interpretation process of euphemism by using the socio-cognitive approach. To demonstrate the real process of comprehension of euphemisms, a survey was made to collect data about individuals' use of euphemisms in daily conversation between friends or acquaintances and further interviews were conducted with volunteer informants. The survey results were directly obtained through the online platform SurveyMonkey and then the socio-cognitive approach was applied to the results and to answer the research questions. The study demonstrates that common ground can be accumulated with both parties' contribution in communication and cultural conceptualization can also affect the creation of euphemism.*

### **Keywords**

*Common ground, socio-cognitive approach, euphemism, intention, attention*

### **1. Introduction**

When people talk to each other, their communication can be smooth if they share some common knowledge; the speaker (abbreviated as S) usually assumes that the hearer (abbreviated as H) understands what S says in the way S does. The shared knowledge can be regarded as common ground (Clark 2009: 116). Common ground can be traced back to David Lewis, who uses 'common knowledge' to explain how people coordinate with each other (Clark 2009: 116). However, it is Robert Stalnaker (1978) who first introduced common ground and accounted for the relationship between presupposition and common ground (Clark 2009: 116; Stalnaker 2002: 701). In intercultural communication, people from different cultures share less common knowledge than those from the same culture. Is there still common ground shared by interlocutors in this case? As euphemism records a language community's social, historical and cultural development, the present study takes euphemism as the objects in order to discuss common ground in intercultural communication.

According to Clark (2009: 116), common ground refers to the "sum of all the information that people assume they share," which may include world views, shared values, beliefs, and situational context. There are two sides of common ground: core common ground and emergent common ground (Kecskes 2009: 347). The former common ground is usually the static and generalized common knowledge in a certain speech community; the latter common ground often refers to the dynamic, particularized knowledge created in the communication process and is created in the actual situational context (Kecskes 2009: 347). The study aims at exploring the creation of common ground in intercultural communication and especially the interpretation process of euphemism by using the socio-cognitive approach.

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As a theoretical framework, the socio-cognitive approach (abbreviated as SCA) holds two critical claims. Firstly, interlocutors enjoy equal status in the communication; secondly, communication is a dynamic process, in which hearer and speaker are affected by the social environment but they also shape it (Kecskes 2014). To demonstrate the real process of comprehension of euphemisms, a survey (revised on experiments in Makin's study) and interviews were conducted to get the first-hand data about individuals' use of euphemisms in daily conversation between friends or acquaintances. Then the volunteer informants were asked to assess the intensity of euphemistic expressions in daily conversation and tell the researcher how they express euphemistically in the same situation in their home country. Data were collected from participants who come from different cultures (such as Chinese, Hungarian, Burmese, Arabic, German and Italian, etc.) The result is assumed to demonstrate that whether there is any common ground shared by people who come from different cultures and the relationship between euphemism and cultural conceptualizations.

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- a) When euphemisms are used, is there any common ground people might share with friends or acquaintances from other cultures?
- b) What is the relationship between euphemism and cultural conceptualizations?

After a general introduction in Section 1, the rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 gives a definition of euphemism and an overview of relevant literature regarding euphemism study, Section 3 presents the sources, procedures and methods of data collection and how data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, whereas Section 4 presents and discusses the data. The final section concludes the study. The reader can find an Appendix with a survey below the references section.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Definition of euphemism

The definitions of euphemism vary from culture to culture and even from person to person. Broadly speaking, euphemism sounds sweet and not offensive. It is an alternative expression which the speaker prefers to use to substitute some vulgar or offensive expressions for the sake of "executing a particular communicative intention" (Burridge 2012: 66). While euphemism is claimed to be "the set of communicative strategies we have evolved to refer to a topic under a taboo" (Ayto 2007: 5), Allan & Burridge (1991: 3) object, arguing that "euphemism and dysphemism are not merely a response to taboo," but an attempt to avoid a "distasteful expression and/or an infelicitous style of addressing or naming." For example, if a female friend looks slightly fat, I will not say "you are overweight"; rather I prefer to say "you may live a better life recently." Here, the euphemistic expression (*you may live a better life recently*) is not a response to taboo but a more appropriate way to address my friend. Neaman & Silver (1983: 1) point out that veneering the truth by using kind words is a very significant function of euphemism. In a word, euphemism can help to build social harmony and avoid any face-threatening acts<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.2 An overview of euphemism study

The word euphemism comes from the Greek *eu*, "good," and *pheme*, "speech" or "saying," and thus means literally "speak with good words or in a pleasant manner." (Neaman & Silver

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<sup>2</sup> Face-threatening acts (FCA) is an act which challenges the face wants of an interlocutor. According to Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]), face-threatening acts may threaten either the speaker's face or the hearer's face, and they may threaten either positive face or negative face.

1983: 1) When the etymology of euphemism and the above definitions are examined, a stand-for relationship between the euphemistic expressions and the vulgar or offensive expressions is always found. For example, if a Chinese mother wants to ask her daughter whether she would like to urinate, she is likely to say “would you like to take NUMBER ONE?” Here, NUMBER ONE (Neaman & Silver 1983: 53) is a euphemistic way to refer to urine by avoiding using words which might stimulate unpleasant associations. However, from the cognitive perspective, there is a further psychological mapping between NUMBER ONE and urine. As NUMBER ONE can mean the most important and urine is regarded as one of the most important things for a man, the metaphorical pattern is formed here: IMPORTANT/URGENT IS FIRST, which is based on a metonymy: FIRST FOR IMPORTANT/URGENT (EFFECT FOR CAUSE).

The current study on euphemism is oriented towards two directions: cognitive linguistics and pragmatics. The above example represents the former direction. A most recent study (Akimov 2022) on euphemism discusses conceptualizations of DEATH, ILLNESS AND THE BODY in Chinese euphemisms, proposing a revised typology of euphemistic mechanism based on Chinese language data. As to pragmatic study, the previous study mainly employed Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory (1987), and Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory. In early 2003, Makin’s study, through doing experiments, delves into face management and demonstrates that interpersonal politeness variables shape euphemism production and comprehension. Deng (2019)’s study, based on Relevance Theory (abbreviated as RT), socio-cognitive approach (abbreviated as SCA) to pragmatics and Chen (2014)’s framework of interpreting politeness, is a good attempt to focus on the interpretation process of euphemisms through think-aloud method in the context of Chinese. Deng claims that the relationship between salience and attention in RT and SCA is different from each other. The current study assumes that the interpretation of euphemism relies on the co-construction of common ground between interlocutors; therefore, the aim of the study is to explore the creation of common ground in intercultural communication and especially the interpretation process of euphemism by using the socio-cognitive approach.

### **2.3 An overview of common ground**

In interpersonal communication, common ground plays a critical role in the smooth and successful interaction. According to Clark (1996), in order for one person to understand another, there must be a “common ground” of knowledge between them. Clark (1996) holds that people have to assess and reassess their common ground and the bases that constitute common ground can be classified into two main categories: community membership and personal experiences. Clark (2009: 117) states that, the communities are built around shared practice or expertise, such as the community of lawyers, Hungarians or English speakers. By this token, for lingua franca speakers, even though they come from different cultures, they share some common knowledge about euphemism. Suppose A comes from China, B comes from Hungarian, when A asks B about what B may say when B encounters a friend who looks a bit fatter than before, A might assume what B may say in this case. The case can explain the assumption of common ground. In the socio-cognitive view assumed common ground (both core and emergent common ground) works as a dynamically changing background on which intention and attention interact with each other (Kecskes 2014: 164). The other main base of common ground is joint experience (Clark 2009: 117). The joint experience can be perceptual, linguistic or communicative. The common ground created in the joint activities can be called “personal common ground” by Clark (2009: 117). It is very important to note that the personal common ground can be accumulated in interpersonal communications. It

further gives evidence to the possibility of co-constructing common ground in intercultural communication.

Presently there are two main approaches to common ground: the pragmatic view and the cognitive view. The pragmatic view (e.g. Stalnaker 1978; Clark and Brennan 1991; Clark 1996) considers common ground as a category of specialized mental representations that exists in the mind a priori to the actual communication process (quoted in Kecskes 2014: 155). The approach values cooperation and intention in communication, which is related to the traditions of pragmatic theory, such as Grice's (1975) four maxims. It is an ideal abstraction of verbal communication.

The other approach, the cognitive view, is a more dynamic, emergent-through-use view of common ground that conceptualizes it as an emergent property of ordinary memory processes (quoted in Kecskes 2014: 155). The approach claims that real everyday communication is more like a trial-and-error, try-again process that is co-constructed by the participants, rather than a static practice of recipient design and intention recognition (Kecskes 2014: 155). In fact, these two approaches are not contradictory but complementary to each other. Both intention and attention are needed in the construal of the real communication.

#### **2.4 An overview of socio-cognitive approach**

As the socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics can take into account both the societal factors and individual factors including cooperation and egocentrism (Kecskes 2014: 42), the present study, based on intercultural pragmatics, employed the approach as the theoretical framework. In the socio-cognitive paradigm, human functioning is viewed as the product of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura 1986). Therefore, the aim of SCA is not to deny the pragmatic idealized approach, but to propose an approach that can eliminate the conflict between pragmatic and cognitive approaches and integrate them into a holistic concept of communication (Kecskes 2014: 46).

As said in section 1, SCA values the equal status of speaker and hearer because they both produce and comprehend, which can give us an adequate account of language communication. Conventional pragmatics is more speaker-oriented. Besides, in this approach, interlocutors are considered social beings searching for meaning with individual minds embedded in a socio-cultural collectivity. Individual traits (prior experience → salience → egocentrism → attention) interact with societal traits (actual situational experience → relevance → cooperation → intention) (Kecskes 2014: 47) Each trait arises from the other. For example, prior experience leads to salience, which further results in egocentrism. With regard to intention, SCA considers intention „not only private, individual and preplanned but also emergent and social” (Kecskes 2014: 50).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

Participants of the survey come from the PhD program colleagues of Eötvös Loránd University, Hungarian friends, Chinese undergraduate, master and PhD students, and other friends who may have international background. There are altogether 27 participants who took the survey but only 20 questionnaires are valid because 7 participants did not complete the survey for technical or personal reasons. The participants come from diverse cultures, such as Chinese, Hungarian, Burmese, Arabic, German and Italian. As for the demographics of participants, 54% were females while 46% were males. As far as the age is concerned, 50% of

the respondents are between 25 to 34, 35% are between 18 to 24. In terms of education level, 35% are doctorate while 31% have been awarded master's diploma.

### 3.2 Data collection

The data for the research objectives were collected through an online questionnaire platform SurveyMonkey. The survey was revised on the basis of scenarios of Experiment 1 in Makin's study (2003). I added one more choice and comment space for each question. And I set the relations between interlocutors as friends or acquaintances. All the participants signed the consent form and there are 20 questions altogether.

In this study, I would like to know participants' views about how euphemism may (not) be used in a conversation with friends or acquaintances from another culture. The respondents decided which of the choices, in their opinion, would be the most likely way for the character in the story to finish the sentence, given three options. The first option is regarded as euphemistic phrasing, while the second one is considered as neutral phrasing. If the respondents' choice is the third one (none of the above), they will be kindly requested to write down in the box how they express themselves in the same situation. Participants' choice should reflect their own interpretation of the character's likely response in an intercultural communication; there are no right or wrong answers.

To obtain more reliable and authentic data for analysis, the researcher conducted an interview with a Hungarian friend who was willing to participate in further study, with the aim of knowing their preferences and motivation of using euphemisms. The key points will be noted down manually.

### 3.3 Data analysis

As the SurveyMonkey can analyze the results for me, I used the analysis from the platform directly. Then the SCA was applied to the results and to answer the two research questions.

## 4. Analysis and Argumentation

This section deals with the presentation and discussion of the results collected through SurveyMonkey. The analysis is grounded in intercultural pragmatics and mainly uses a socio-cognitive approach as the theoretical framework. My analysis begins with the common ground that the respondents might construct with friends or acquaintances from other cultures.

### 4.1 Common ground and euphemism

In the survey, the respondents made their own judgement about which expression would be the most likely way for the character in the story to finish the sentence, given three options. With the limited nature of the core common ground (Kecskes 2014: 151), at the very beginning of the communicative process, the respondents are likely to articulate their own thoughts with linguistic means that they could easily use (quoted in Kecskes 2014: 156). For example, in Question 16, there is such a conversation:

“So, how did your blind date go last week?” asked Jack.

“Well, she was a little different than what I expected,” replied Todd.

“She had straight, brown hair and was quite....”

Here, the respondents have three choices: 1) *large*; 2) *obese*; 3) none of the above. The survey results are as follows:

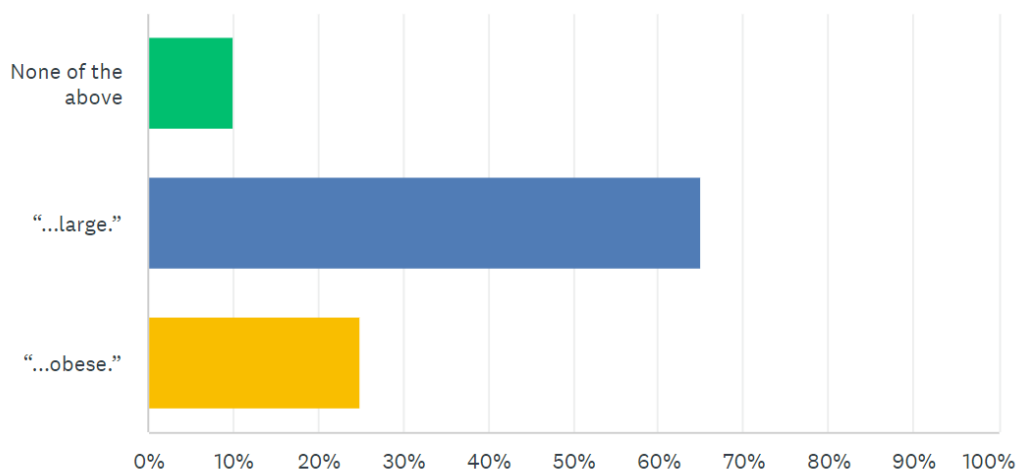


Fig. 1 Results of Question 16

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None of the above	10.00% 2
"...large."	65.00% 13
"...obese."	25.00% 5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Fig. 2 Statistical Results of Question 16

The results show that 65% people choose the euphemistic phrasing *large*, while only 25% people prefer to use the neutral phrasing *obese*. If the respondents think none of the two words might be used, they can write down other words that they may use in the same situation. Therefore, I received three comments from them. Besides the above words, they may use *overweight*, *a bit overweight*, *round*, *chubby*, and *cuddly*. The last word *cuddly* sounds very sweet and pleasant. I even asked my Hungarian friend her opinion about the same question. She gave me more personal answers than I expected. Our conversation (S stands for Sara, E stands for Elle) is as follows:

S: Do you still remember the euphemisms we discussed last time? I just want to confirm that whether the following two words are offensive: *kövér* (plump), *dagadt* (puffy)? But are the three words in the table more natural to use?

obese melléknév	elhízott
	testes
	hájás

Fig. 3 The Hungarian translations of *obese* (quoted from Angol-Magyar Szakos dictionary)

E: For me the most offensive ones are *hájás* and *dagadt*. The less offensive are *testes* and *elhízott*. *Kövér* is maybe somewhere between the offensive and the neutral.

S: Thanks a lot for your answer. I found the euphemisms sometimes were quite personal.

E: Yes. If I were obese maybe I would be more sensitive about this topic. It can be personal how many bad memories you have with these words.

From the above conversation, I find that emergent common ground is co-constructed by the interlocutors. In the first stage of communication, the interlocutors know little about each other's prior context. The survey results give me only a glimpse of the insights and trends of respondents' judgement. When I further interviewed the participants, I learned more about their cultural models and cultural beliefs. The Hungarian friend Elle let me know that she is more familiar with the Hungarian euphemisms and whether she will use euphemisms depends on the actual situational context. Sometimes people may use dysphemisms for the purpose of offending others. The survey results and further interview corroborated the Dynamic Model of Meaning (DMM) proposed by Kecskes (2014: 136). In the conversation, Sara activates mental representations of shared information about euphemisms and seeks information that potentially facilitates communication as mutual knowledge, while Elle manages to give more information than needed, bringing in her personal knowledge about euphemisms and making it a part of common ground. The study further demonstrates that communication between different cultures can be successful with the "normal communication approach".

#### **4.2 Euphemism and cultural conceptualizations**

In SCA, the production and comprehension of euphemism cannot be separated from the interplay of intention and attention (Kecskes 2014: 49). Intention is cooperation-oriented while attention is egocentrism-centered. In interpersonal communication, when expressing intention in an utterance, the speaker also needs the necessary attention, so as to respond appropriately. For example, in Question 9, the scenario is as follows:

Within the first month, Kelly was invited to a dinner party by her neighbors. Afterwards, Nina was eager to hear about the evening. "Did anything interesting happen at the dinner party?" asked Nina. Kelly answered, "Yes...when I went into the den, there was a man lying..."

Here the respondents have three choices: 1) undressed on the couch; 2) naked on the couch; 3) none of the above. The respondent might feel astonished when he/she finished reading the scenario and three given choices, because the case is not usual in daily life. Besides, there might be a challenge for the respondent to make choices due to his/her language proficiency and their familiarity with the appropriate situation-bound utterances in English. What come to their mind would be his/her native language. According to SCA, the respondent might associate the phrases offered here to his/her prior experience with the lexical items, which led to salience. Salience plays an important role in SCA because the relative salience of a particular sign can help an individual to collect a pool of information by importance and give attention to the vital one (Kecskes 2014: 56). Let's look at the survey results of Question 9:

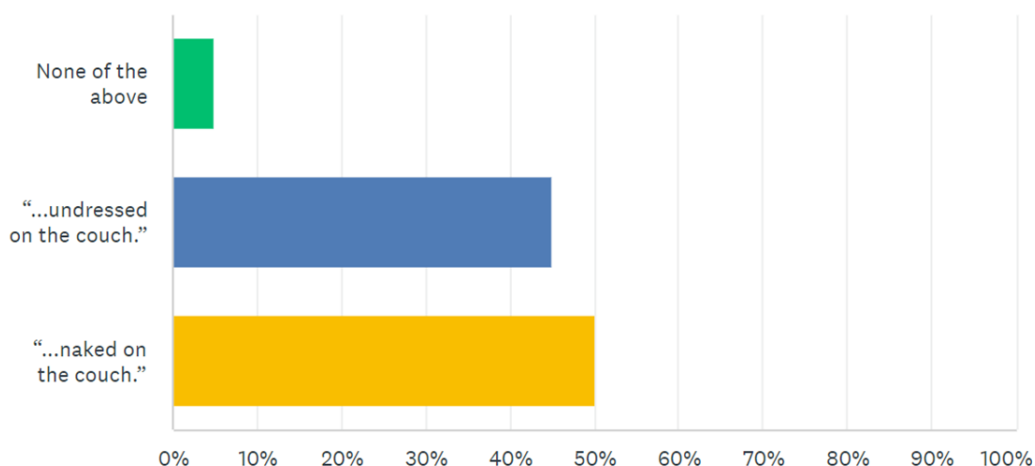


Fig. 4 Results of Question 9

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None of the above	5.00% 1
"...undressed on the couch."	45.00% 9
"...naked on the couch."	50.00% 10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Fig. 5 Statistical results of Question 9

The results show that half of the respondents chose the euphemistic phrasing *undressed on the couch* while 45% of the respondents preferred the neutral phrasing *naked on the couch*. Besides, I received three comments from the respondents. One of the comments allowed me to know that the topic is not only sensitive but also a taboo among Muslims. The respondent said that this situation was not acceptable within the society especially for a girl. The salience of the lexical items drew my attention to the word ‘naked’. In Chinese, I may use *yì sī bù guà* (一丝不挂, meaning ‘undressed’) but in some context I might use *huángdì de xīnzhuān* (皇帝的新装, meaning ‘the emperor’s new clothes’). Both my friend and I have our own particularized knowledge about the use of the word ‘naked’, but I am not aware that the word is almost forbidden to use in Muslim culture. In Muslim countries, there is a strong emphasis on modesty and covering up. Women tend to dress conservatively, covering their bodies for both religious and cultural reasons. It’s quite different from other cultures.

When the respondent brought in her personal knowledge about the taboo through her comment to Question 9, common ground emerged as a result of both parties contributing their knowledge to each other. According to Sharifian (2011: 5), cultural cognition is made up of cultural schemas and cultural categories, which are collectively referred to as cultural conceptualizations. The conceptualizations represent the cognitive systems of cultural groups, such as worldviews. When I refer to the euphemism dictionary written by Ayto (1993: 154-156), I find quite a few euphemisms which mean ‘naked’ have been created in history and in different cultures, such as *in a state of nature* (see C Wilmot 1802), *sun bathing*, *nude* (starting from 18th century art criticism), *not have a stitch on*. The term *nude*, from Latin *nudus*, is often used to describe photographic or painted naked women and seldom refers to a naked man (Allan 2012: 6). Whether a nude is artistic or pornographic depends on the viewer’s belief. The case here demonstrates the influence of cultural conceptualizations on the creation of euphemism.



## 5. Conclusion

In this research, we have discussed common ground in intercultural communication and especially how common ground is created in the production and comprehension of euphemism by using socio-cognitive approach. By reviewing the literature on euphemism study and common ground, we hope to establish a theoretical basis for the analysis and argumentation part. Socio-cognitive approach, as the framework of the study, can take into account both the societal factors and individual factors including cooperation and egocentrism. With the approach, the interpretation of euphemism can be more comprehensive and deep-rooted. The cases in the study demonstrate that common ground can be accumulated with both parties' contribution in communication and cultural conceptualization can also affect the creation of euphemism. There are a lot of complex factors which might exert an impact on the comprehension of euphemisms. The survey in the study set the relations between interlocutors as friends or acquaintances, but the independent variable in text is not limited to friend relations between people, it might include age, power, gender, etc. Thus, the present study is a new start for the future research and more contextual factors can be considered.

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### **Biographical notes**

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## APPENDIX

### *Questionnaires about use of euphemisms in intercultural communication*

#### **Section I Informed Consent and Description of Research**

Consent form (omitted)

1. I declare that I am over 18 years old. I have received all the detailed information concerning my participation of the study. I agree with the rules above and I would like to take the survey.

- 1) Agree
- 2) Disagree

#### **Section II Personal information**

This part only covers such personal information as nationality, gender, age and education level, which might be factors related to people's preferences of using euphemisms.

2. What is your gender?

- 1) Male
- 2) Female

3. What is your age?

- 1) 18-24
- 2) 25-34
- 3) 35-44
- 4) 45-54
- 5) 55-64
- 6) 65-74
- 7) 75 or older

4. What's your education level?

- 1) Less than high school diploma
- 2) High school diploma
- 3) Bachelor's diploma
- 4) Master's diploma
- 5) Doctorate

5. What's your nationality?

#### **Section III Individuals' use of euphemisms in daily conversation**

In this part, there are 16 conversations between friends or acquaintances. We would like you to decide which of the choices, in your opinion, would be the most likely way for the character in the story to finish the sentence, given the three options. The first option is regarded as euphemistic phrasing, while the second one is regarded as neutral phrasing. If your choice is the third one (none of the above), you are kindly requested to write down in the box how you express in the same situation. Just remind you, the conversations happen in intercultural communication.

6. Anita returned home for spring break. This was her first year at college, so she still had many friends from high school. She was at a friend's house one morning, discussing her

social plans for the vacation week with [her friend/her friend's mother], Meg, who was making coffee. "I heard you might be going out on a date with Scott this week," said Meg. "I don't know," replied Anita. "He has a nice personality, but his face is really

- 1) "...unappealing."
- 2) "...ugly."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

7. Paula enjoyed her job as an X-ray technician at the local hospital. [This was her first job/She had been working there for 25 years], and she particularly liked socializing with the other people in Radiology. Paula arrived a few minutes late for lunch with her work friends, but only Fran, who had just started her training, was sitting at the table. "Where's Gina?" asked Paula. Fran responded, "She went to the

- 1) "...restroom."
- 2) "...toilet."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

8. Laurie was very happy about her new apartment off-campus, because she was finally able to adopt a dog from the animal shelter; dogs hadn't been allowed in the dorms. Today, Laurie was walking her dog in the park when she ran into Eileen, [her friend and fellow doglover/the student who worked at the animal shelter]. "So, how is your new dog working out?" asked Eileen. "Things could be better," replied Laurie. "Last night he

- 1) "...made a mess on the rug."
- 2) "... defecated on the rug."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

9. Kelly was hesitant about accepting the job offer in New York, because she had never lived away from home. Luckily, her [college friend/mother's friend], Nina, lived in New York and helped her get settled in. Within the first month, Kelly was invited to a dinner party by her neighbors. Afterwards, Nina was eager to hear about the evening. "Did anything interesting happen at the dinner party?" asked Nina. Kelly answered, "Yes...when I went into the den, there was a man lying

- 1) "...undressed on the couch."
- 2) "...naked on the couch."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

10. Julie was [in eleventh grade/a substitute teacher] at the local high school. Classes were over for the day, and Julie was getting ready to go home when she ran into [her classmate/her neighbor's daughter], Alicia, [in the hall/who was in eleventh grade at that school]. "Are you still helping Simon with his chemistry homework?" asked Julie. "No," replied Alicia. "I've given up—he's too

- 1) "...slow to ever understand it."
- 2) "...stupid to ever understand it."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

11. Ellen had dragged herself through a busy week [of papers and exams/at the office], but she still wanted to meet her [classmate/daughter-in-law], Heather, for lunch on Friday. Ellen was eager to catch up on the news in Heather's family. After placing their lunch orders, Ellen and Heather started talking. "Is your sister still dating Graham?" queried Ellen. "No," said Heather. "She

- 1) "...stopped seeing him last month."
- 2) "...broke up with him last month."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

12. Lynne had just moved to the neighborhood after her college graduation last month, but she already was friendly with [another recent grad/an elderly neighbor], Martha, who lived right next door. Today, Lynne and Martha saw each other while picking up the morning paper in their driveways. "Did you see the article on the front page?" asked Martha. Lynne responded, "Yeah, I can't believe the police found Mrs. Parker in the street wearing nothing but her

- 1) "...underclothes."
- 2) "...bra and panties."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

13. Despite her [desire to prove herself in her first job after college/many years of commitment to her job], Bonnie still thought it was important to set aside some time for herself. It had been almost three months since Bonnie had seen Joan, a college intern who worked in the same office building, so Bonnie was pleased at the opportunity to get together and chat. "So, is your boyfriend still working for Synertech?" asked Bonnie. "No," answered Joan. "He was

- 1) "...let go from his job three weeks ago."
- 2) "...fired from his job three weeks ago."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

14. George had joined a Chicago law firm a few months ago, after [graduation/20 years at a competing firm]. George had just met a tight deadline, so he was happy to spend a few minutes relaxing with Mark, [another/a] junior associate at the firm. While waiting for the elevator, they started to discuss one of their colleagues. "Have you seen Nancy lately? She looks like she has gained some weight," commented George. Mark responded, "Oh, that's because she's

- 1) "...expecting."

2) "...pregnant."

3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

15. Nathan worked part-time as a waiter at a restaurant in town to help pay for college. After mastering the list of daily specials, he enjoyed helping the customers make their dinner selections, and he particularly liked the camaraderie among the other waiters after closing time. Tonight, he was cleaning up with Bill, [another college student/who had been a waiter there for as long as anyone could remember]. "Where's Steven? I haven't seen him this week," asked Bill. Nathan answered, "He's out of town. His father

1) "...passed away on Monday."

2) "...died on Monday."

3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

16. After surviving the Chemistry exam, Todd decided to drive to Chicago to visit his family for the weekend. On Sunday, he was relaxing in the den when Jack, his [friend from high school/his older uncle], stopped by for a surprise visit. Todd was pleased to see Jack and quickly turned off the stereo so that they could talk. "So, how did your blind date go last week?" asked Jack. "Well, she was a little different than what I expected," replied Todd. "She had straight, brown hair and was quite

1) "...large."

2) "...obese."

3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

17. Tim had moved to Florida right after [graduation/his retirement] and hadn't been back to visit Illinois in two years, so he was thrilled to run into Colin, [another member of his fraternity/his former neighbor's son], at a Miami restaurant. After several minutes of reminiscing, Tim asked Colin how his grandmother was doing. Colin replied, "Unfortunately, she's

1) "...no longer with us."

2) "...dead."

3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

18. Ben, who just [joined/retired from] the History department, found it hard to keep track of everything that was going on at the university, so he relied on other faculty to keep him informed. Today, he was sharing some gossip with [another/a] new assistant professor, Philip, who worked in the English department. "Is Andrew teaching anything this fall? I haven't seen him around." "I don't think so," answered Philip. "He was diagnosed with

1) "...a serious illness at the end of the summer."

2) "...cancer at the end of the summer."

3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

19. Hank had not dated anyone on a regular basis since high school, but during the fall semester of his senior year in college, he fell in love with the star forward on the women's ice hockey team. When his [high school friend/uncle], Graham, [-/who was his father's older and closest brother], attended his May graduation ceremony, there were many questions about this new girlfriend. "Well, are you serious about her?" asked Graham. "Yes," smiled Hank, "and we haven't even

- 1) "...made love yet."
- 2) "...had sex yet."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

20. Duncan had thought about borrowing some money from his roommate but decided instead to go to the bank. This turned out to be a major decision, because while he was waiting in line, someone in a ski mask held up the bank. Afterwards, Duncan discussed the robbery with others at the scene. "Weren't you afraid?" asked [another student/a retired security guard] who had also been in line at the time of the hold-up. "Yes, but not as much as the bank teller," said Duncan. "He was so scared that he

- 1) "...wet himself."
- 2) "...urinated on himself."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation

21. Patrick, who was busy working on his honors thesis, liked to do his grocery shopping at night, after the library closed. On this particular evening, there were very few customers in the supermarket, so Patrick was surprised to run into Alan, [his former housemate/his father's oldest friend], in the produce aisle. Within moments, they were catching up on each other's news. "How's your dog Laser?" asked Alan. Patrick responded, "The veterinarian had to

- 1) "...put her to sleep last week."
- 2) "...kill her last week."
- 3) None of the above

Other words that you may say in the same situation