

Euphemism (euphemistic understatement)

A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.

Some common euphemisms in business English

Downsizing = to fire people

To overlook = to forget

An issue = a problem/question

A (slight) misunderstanding = a communication breakdown

Concerned = worried

Between jobs = unemployed

An oversight = a mistake

Poor = bad

A heated discussion = an angry argument

Outsourcing = transferring work tasks to external suppliers/contractors to reduce costs (i.e. lay off staff)

Negative cash flow = broke

We also use negative antonyms to soften messages

Bad = not very good

Stupid = not very intelligent

Ugly = not very good-looking ... etc

Double speak

When politicians use euphemism, we call it “double-speak”. The intention is often to mislead or hide the truth, rather than to soften the message

- “Collateral damage” instead of “multiple fatalities”
- “Pre-emptive strike” instead of “unprovoked attack”
- “Enhanced interrogation” instead of “torture”
- “Ethnic cleansing” instead of “genocide”
- “I misspoke” instead of “I lied” or “I said something incorrect, by mistake”