

GOOD NEWS, DEAR. I'M GOING
TO BE SPENDING MORE TIME
WITH THE FAMILY!





*I am letting
you go*

**YOU'RE
FIRED**



Lecture One: *Euphemism as a Communication Strategy*

Uncomfortable
Offensive
Insensitive

Euphemism

Polite
Understanding
Sensitive

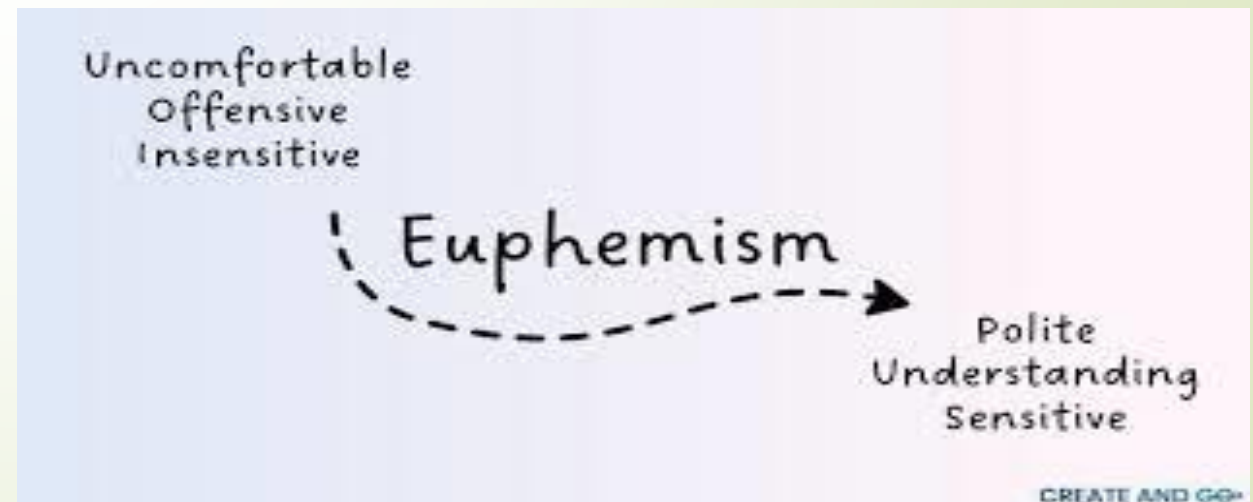
CREATE AND GO


To be polite and minimize any face threatening, people tend to select appropriate words in their interactions. This **communication strategy**, a figure of speech, is linguistically described as **euphemism**.

1- Definition

The term “**euphemism**” comes from the Greek “**eu**”, meaning “**good**”, and “**pheme**”, meaning “**speech**” or “**saying**”, and thus it literally means “**to speak with good words**” (Halliday 2001).

- ❑ **Euphemism** is considered as part of politeness and it deals with how to avoid being rude to others or **too direct**.
- ❑ The use of euphemisms is a sign of very well developed communication skills.





❑ Euphemism is conveyed according to the **conventional norms** of certain societies. Epoge (2013), for example, discusses how euphemism in Cameroon can be either **sweet speech** or a deception.

❑ In **Arabic**, euphemism is referred to as “**Talteef**” which comes from the word “Lutf” which means to do or speak in a very gentle and smooth way.

❑ According to Halliday & Hasan (1985), it is important to pay attention to the “**social context**” when using euphemism; doing this will enable speakers to interact accordingly.

2- In What Situations is Euphemism Typically Used?



Euphemism is typically used in three situations– in times of **mitigation**, **avoidance**, and occasionally for **rhetorical purposes**.

2-1 Mitigation

As previously mentioned, euphemisms can soften the blow of **bad news** or **difficult conditions**. For example, when the government explains US economic decline, words like “**recession**” or “**disinflation**” are used instead of speaking literally.

2-2 Avoidance

Euphemisms are probably most commonly used to avoid the awkwardness of a certain topic or situation. For example, instead of saying that someone **was fired**, the phrase “**let go**” is used.

2-3 Rhetoric

Euphemism can also be used as a **rhetorical device** to avoid harsher or more blunt terminology. It allows authors to speak about possibly taboo or embarrassing subjects without **addressing them directly**.

“Trust me, you won't be sorry!”

"You won't be sorry" is a phrase often said to mean the opposite, meaning, ***"you won't be sorry, you'll be happy."*** though the "you'll be happy" part is implied.



3. Euphemism as a Means to Improve the Image of the Society




- ❑ Euphemisms used to talk about people who suffer from various handicaps may have led to the increasing level of acceptance of “the handicapped” by society. Recently, there has been a trend to include “children with special needs” in mainstream education, rather than educating them separately.
- ❑ This approach has really contributed to changing the image of “the handicapped citizens” for the better. By making the word “crippled” politically incorrect or even taboo, the society creates a better image of itself (Šebková, 2012).



4. The Role of Euphemism in Medical Communication

- ❑ Euphemisms are the highest form of **lexical diplomacy** in medicine because they are more **affordable** and **substitutes** for unwanted or inappropriate words for a particular situation.
- ❑ Euphemisms are necessary for communication with terminally ill adults in hospices and children who suffer from an incurable disease. The **consciously chosen language** contributes substantially to the achievement of optimal results in diagnosis and treatment.



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- ❑ In modern medical practice, mastering the correct use of euphemism is no longer a sign of good breeding and medical professionalism, but a legal requirement.
 - ❑ Euphemisms are used to name stressful medical pathology, and to deliver bad news in a descriptive and acceptable way, e.g., information about cancer, poor prognosis, reporting the death of a patient to his/her relatives. The following are some examples for medical euphemism:

EXAMPLE

Common Death Euphemisms in English

- They slipped away.
- They're at rest.
- They lost their life.
- They left this life.
- They entered eternal rest.
- They were called back to God.
- They were called home.
- They joined their ancestors.
- They passed beyond the veil.
- They're in a better place.
- They've departed.
- They're not with us anymore.
- **They're at the pearly gates.**



Common Death Euphemisms in Arabic

Euphemism	Frequency	Percentage
انتقل إلى رحمة الله	23	23%
الله أخذ أمانته	11	11%
أعطاك عمره	1	1%
الله أخذ وداعته	7	7%
انتقل إلى جوار ربه	5	5%
البقاء لله	31	31%
الله استخاره	2	2%
العمر لك	20	20%
Total	100	100%




Euphemistic language, like language in general, is influenced by its users' **cultural** and **religious beliefs, life-styles, and norms**.




4. EUPHEMISM IN BUSINESS NEGOTIATION

Euphemism in **business English** is a kind of expression in a polite, indirect and face-saving way. It is a kind of tact **communication** that is applied to achieve satisfactory communicative effects.



**A-Hedging
Expression**



**B-Syntactic
Strategies**



**C-Conceding
Strategy**

4.1 Hedging Expression

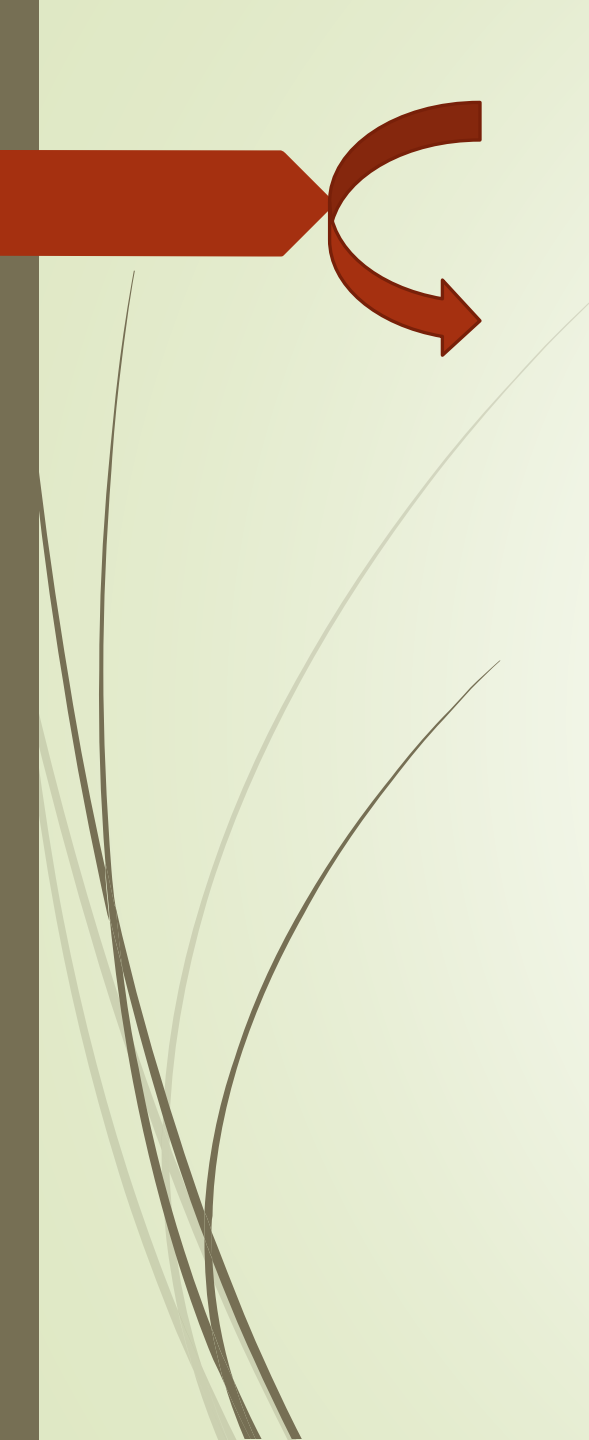
- ❑ **Hedging Expression** is often applied in by negotiators to hide their own opinions by means of **hedging words** or phrases for not showing their disagreement too obviously.
- ❑ When **disagreement** or **criticism** is unavoidable, the following expressions are often used, such as “**I'm afraid that...**”, “**it seems that...**”, “**a little**”, “**quite**”, “**sort of**” or “**rather**”, etc.

(I) A: We can't agree to your request.

B: I am afraid that we can't agree to your request.

(II) A: It was unwise of you to delay the delivery.

➡ B:



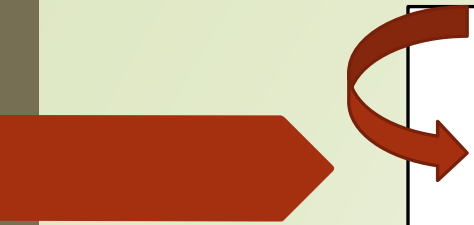
Sample **I** is a kind of disagreement while **II** is a criticism, both of which will threaten the hearer's face. But by adding the hedging phrases “I'm afraid” and “It seems to me”, the speaker reduces the force and makes the words more acceptable.

4.2 Syntactic Strategies

- ❑ Syntactic strategies refer to the use of various **syntactic devices** including **tense**, **passive voice**, **transitional word “but”**, and **interrogative sentences** to achieve euphemistic effects.

4-2-1 Use of Tense

Past tense can be used to express politeness so that euphemistic effect can be achieved. As the tense is switched from present to past, the speaker **distances** himself from the “**here and now**”. And the **more remote** the speaker using the past tense, the more likely it is to save the hearer's face. Look at these three examples:



A: Can you send us a catalogue by airmail?

B: Could you send us a catalogue by airmail?

C: I wondered whether you could send us a catalogue by airmail.

We can feel that **politeness** in these examples increase because of the use of the past tense.

4-2-2 Use of Passive Voice

Sometimes **passive voice** is more appropriate and favorable for negotiators especially when one speaker wants to express such ideas as **request**, **suggestion**, or **denial** because he should avoid pinning down someone who is responsible for the action which causes **embarrassment** or **displeasure** as in business negotiations.

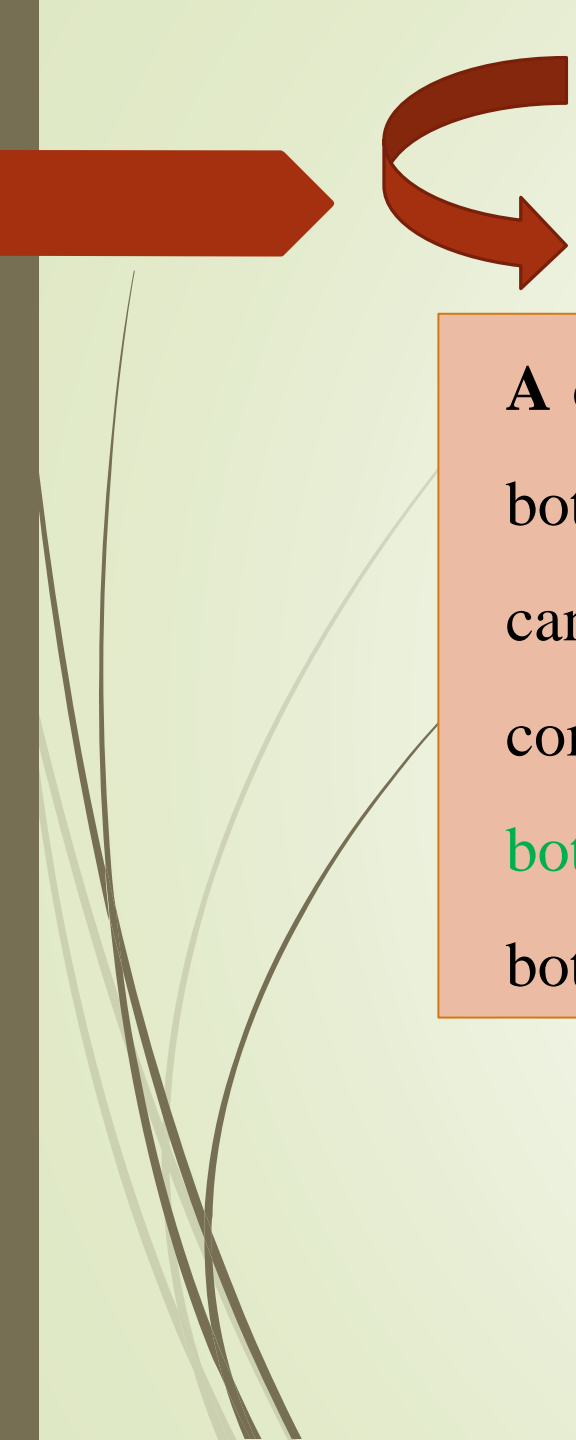
❑ Passive voice can be used to **avoid making reference** to both the speaker and the hearer.

A: You didn't list the specification we need.

B: The specification we need wasn't listed here.

C: The specification as required wasn't listed here.





A can be regarded as the most impolite expression by making reference to both the speaker and the hearer. B, without making reference to the hearer, can be a little more polite by hinting that no one particular should be complained about or criticized in this case. And without making reference to both the speaker and hearer, C is the politest one because it saves the face of both the speaker and the hearer.

4-2-3 Use of “But”


❑ There are many **discrepancies** and **disagreements** between business negotiators. However, it is proved to be unfavorable to show the disagreement directly. One of the effective ways to show disagreement indirectly is the use of **the transitional word “but”** which has the power to **conceal** the force of disagreement.

(I) A: It's impossible to accept the price.

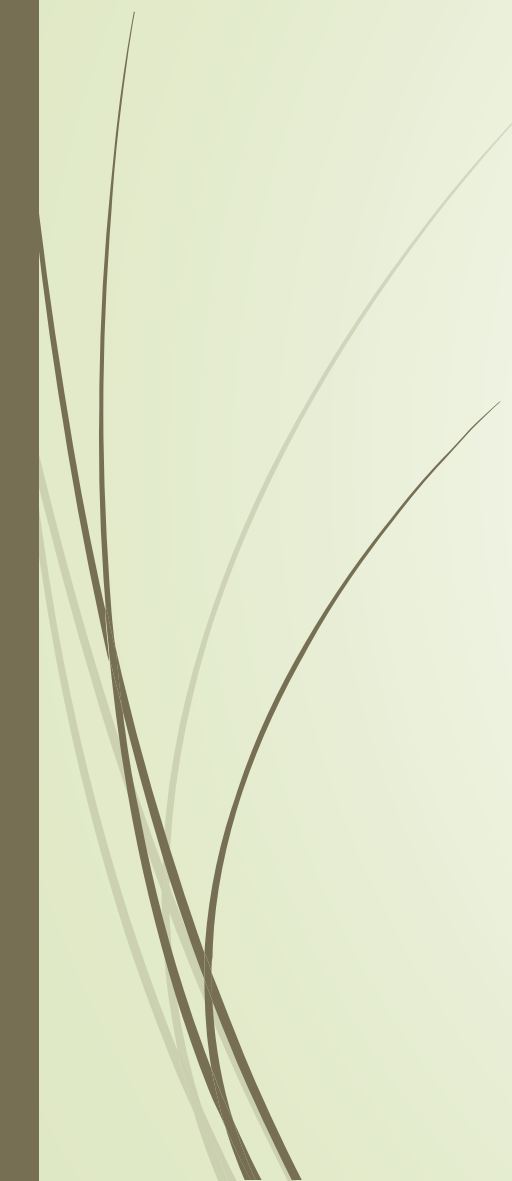
B: I understand your position, but it's impossible to accept the price.

(II) A: It's too, expensive to have all, these technical data translated into Chinese.

➡ B:



(I) B and (II) B threaten the hearers' face **less seriously** than (I) A and (II) A, because the use of “*but*”. In (I) and (II), the speaker simply admits that he is impinging on the hearer's face.



4-2-4 Use of interrogative sentences

- According to the politeness scale, the more indirect the question is, the more polite and euphemistic the speaker is. Thus, interrogative sentences with such **modals** as *ought to*, *would*, *should*, would be more polite than interrogative sentences with such modals as *can*, *may*, *must*, *will*, *shall*.

A- **Would** you deliver the first 500 in four weeks and the second part two weeks later?

B- We want to increase our supply by one ship load.

- **The modals** make the requests indirect and polite, because in these interrogatives the speaker doesn't assume that the hearer is able and willing to do what he requests or suggests. Thus, the hearer gets **much freedom** and the speaker in such a soft tone would not lose his face even if he is rejected.

4.3 Conceding Strategy

❑ **Conceding strategy** is usually adopted when people refuse to admit their mistake. Under this circumstance, one can reduce the embarrassing situation by pointing out that hearer(s) can find out the reasons for some kinds of problems themselves, which can save the hearer's face.

A: We know that the quality of your products is not so good.

B: We know *where you are about* the quality of your products.

In example **A**, the speaker makes his business partner embarrassed by a direct statement. In example **B**, the speaker bears in mind the bad quality of the products. He uses the **euphemistic expression** “*where you are*” to save the hearer’s face and **avoid direct verbal conflict**.

From the above analysis, we can see that euphemistic expressions are very useful in the contexts of international business negotiation. They can increase the negotiating **flexibility** and **possibility** and improve the negotiating results.





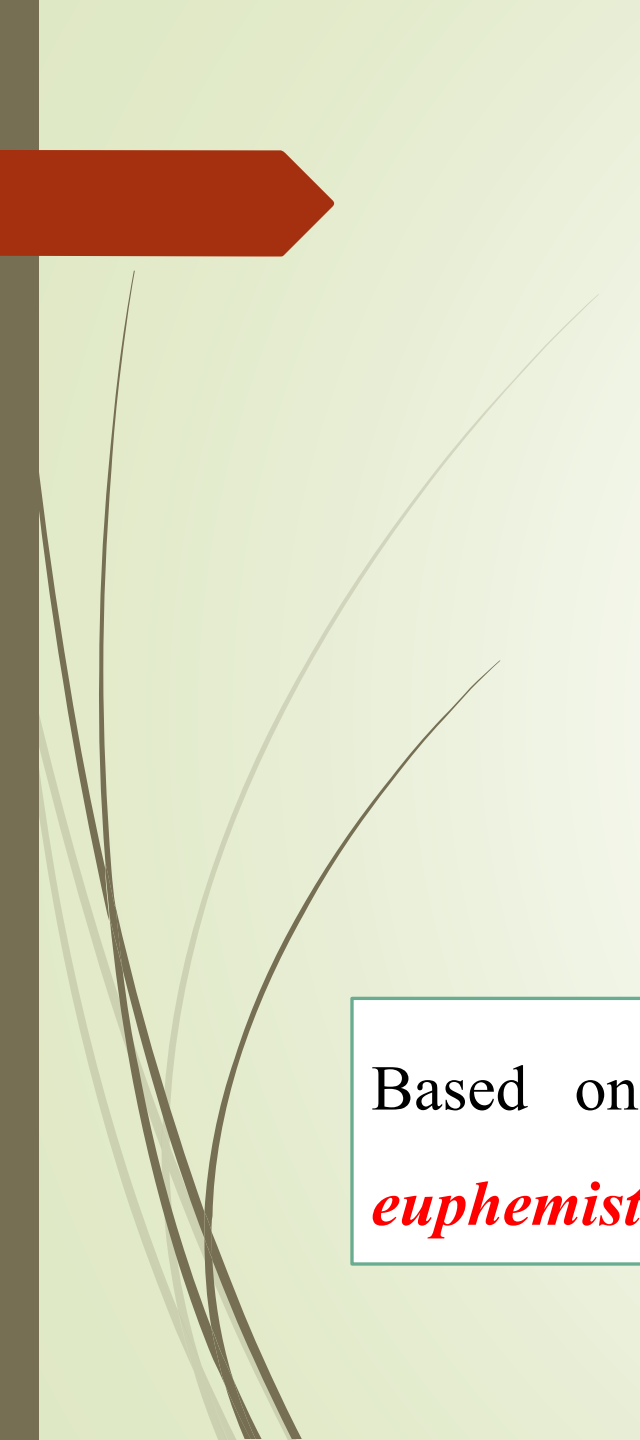
N.B

There are two sides to the euphemism coin, which are important to keep in mind when discussing and observing the use of euphemism. On the one hand, it can allow us to talk about uncomfortable topics more easily and without losing face, but on the other it can mask the truth or even be used to actively confuse others.

Why has Martin Luther King's speech "I have a dream" been widely spread around the world since 53 years ago?




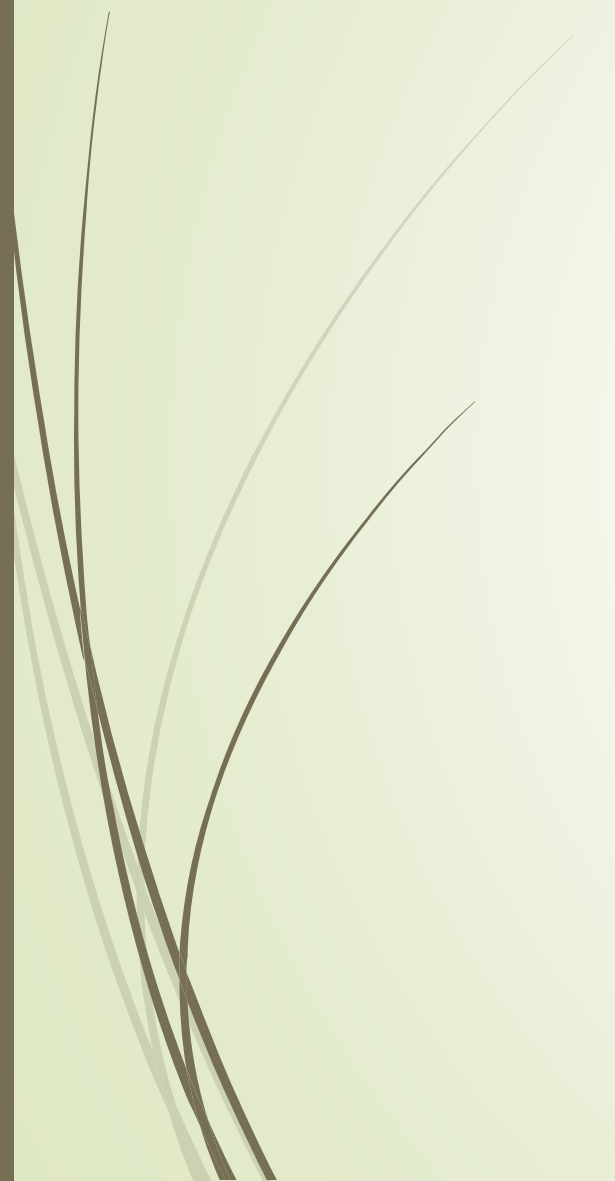
One of the most important reasons is that *Martin Luther King* employed abundant rhetorical devices from the perspectives of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, including *euphemism*, metaphor, irony, etc.



**“It came as a joyous daybreak
to end the long night of
captivity”**

(King, 1963)

Based on the quote given by *Martin Luther King*, detect the *euphemistic* word or expression and explain what does it imply?

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- ❑ The word ***captivity*** is a euphemistic. As we know, many black people were captured to be slaves and forced to live in slavery. ***Martin Luther King*** never mentioned the word ***slavery*** in the whole speech because it would bring to minds the sad and humiliating picture of the past.
 - ❑ To some extent, the use of this word reflects King's desire to change the course of the history. The word ***captivity*** means more than it is suggested.