CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preliminaries
This chapter deals with the problem of the current study. It also presents its hypotheses, aims and objectives, and research methodology adopted to achieve this study. The procedures as well as the significance of the study are stated. The chapter summarizes the structure of the thesis.

1.2 The Problem
The aim of the present study is to make a comparative analysis of the use of taboo words and euphemism in English and Arabic. Though there are some common features in these languages, particularly related to the themes of taboo words and euphemism, there are some marked differences. These differences are mostly related to the cultural factors. The researcher probes into these variables and arrives at certain findings.

Taboo
Linguists, sociolinguists and psycholinguists have pointed out the striking resemblance among different societies towards the taboo idea, the mixture of prohibition, sacredness, danger, fear and decency attendant upon the performance of certain acts and the utterance of certain words. In the realm of language, a taboo word is one deemed vulgar or offensive because of inhibiting social or cultural morals such as a profanity or a distasteful sexual term or it is one avoided because of its uncomfortable or negative ones.
In *Semantics*, Ullmann (1962) classifies linguistic taboos into three more or less distinct groups. The classification is based upon the psychological and social motivations behind them:

**Taboo of Fear**

In some cultures certain words are believed to invite evil consequences such as to exasperate demons, alienate the gods or activate a calamitous meteorological phenomenon. Among certain people, the uttering of a word is believed to invoke unseen powers. Some people believe that superstitions try to avert evil by charming it with a lucky name. Some Arab people, for example, refer to the الحمى (fever) as المبروكة (the blessed).

**Taboo of Delicacy**

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2004:332), delicacy is defined as "the fact that a situation is difficult and somebody may be easily offended". It is a general human tendency to avoid direct reference to unpleasant or embarrassing subjects or to avoid hurting others’ feelings. For example, *garbage collectors* are called sanitary engineers, *old people’s home* is named retirement village, and an *old person* is referred to as senior citizen. In Arabic, an *office boy*, فَرَاش is named معيّن (assistant).

To refer to a lady expecting a child, most Arab people use حامل (lady in waiting; mother – to – be; expectant). However, in rare occasions they may say حلي (pregnant) which is not appropriate because of lack of delicacy.

**Taboo of Decency**

The three main fields immediately influenced by this group of taboo are sex, certain parts and functions of the body, and swearing. Words that are
related to sex, sex organs and natural body functions constitute a large part of the set of taboo words of many cultures. However, there is no linguistic reason why the word *vagina*, for instance, is clean, whereas *cunt* is dirty; or *cock* is taboo, but *penis* is acknowledged; or why educated people use ‘clean words’ but only vulgar people use ‘dirty words’.

Taboo words occur in most languages, and failure to adhere to the often strict rules governing their use can lead to punishment or public shame. Few people never use words of this type, and most others only employ them in a restricted set of situations.

Generally, the type of word that is prohibited or is treated as a taboo in a particular language is a representative reflection of at least part of the system of values and beliefs of the society in question. It is the words themselves which are felt to be wrong or improper. However, in most cases the taboo word is abandoned, at least in certain contexts and situations, and a more delicate, less direct substitute is introduced to fill the gap. The mild substitutes are euphemisms.

**Euphemism**

Euphemism simply means the use of words and expressions to soften the reality of what we talk about. Allan and Burridge (1991:11) and (1992:1) define it as "alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or of some third party", or it is "the substitution of an inoffensive or a pleasant expression for a more unpleasant one, or for a term which more directly evokes a distasteful or taboo subject". It is the opposite of taboo too. Thus, euphemism is the use of indirect way of
speaking. It exists in all societies and is widely used by speakers. Roundabout expressions are given through euphemism to express undesirable matters. So the main motivation behind euphemism is to avoid expressing linguistic taboo.

It is confirmed that the most productive themes of euphemism are death, sex, illness and excretion. Let us examine the following examples from both English and Arabic. In English death is euphemized by using *pass away, breathe one’s last, depart this life, be called, be taken, go to a better world*, etc. Likewise, in Arabic, a long list of euphemistic expressions is employed for *ممات* (died) among which are *صعدت روحه إلى السماء* (his spirit ascended to heaven), *رحل إلى قارق الحياة* (departed life), *فاصلت روحه* (his spirit flowed), etc.

Taboo and euphemism are of a vital importance in communication since failing to use an appropriate euphemistic expression which refers to a taboo word in a given situation may cause embarrassment or problem of interaction. It follows then that learning when, where and to whom one can use a particular taboo or euphemistic expression is essential to make interaction fruitful. As is well – known, English and Arabic belong to different language families (English is a member of the Indo – European family, whereas Arabic is a member of the Semitic one), and it is only natural that the two languages show some differences in this area of linguistics. Languages attempt to express a taboo expression in various methods. For instance, the word *يجامع* (fuck) in Arabic is expressed in various ways as follows:

- a compounding word as in *تشتهي قريبه* (desires (him) to be near her)
- metonymy as in التماس الشهوة (looking for desire)
- metaphor as in كشف القناع (raised the mask)
- overstatement as in قضى ليليته معها (spent his night with her)
- innuendos as in إذا اردت شيئا قتال الي (if you desired something, come to me)

Thus, this study is designed to investigate taboo issues in English and Arabic. Languages use various euphemisms to express taboo matters in society.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study
The hypotheses that will contribute to resolving the problem of the study are the following:
1. There is no difference between English and Arabic as far as the themes of taboo and motivations of euphemism which have the same framework are concerned.
2. The two languages use more euphemistic expressions in the field of sex than in any other field of taboo subjects.
3. 'Religious taboo' in Arabic is so harmful as 'sex' in English.

1.4 Aims and Objectives of the Study
The main aims of this study are the following:
1. To present taboo words and euphemistic expressions used in English and Arabic.
2. To show the similarities and differences in the use of taboo words and euphemism in the two languages in question.

The Objectives of the study can be listed as follows:
1. Presenting a theoretical background of the notions of taboo and euphemism and other related issues.

2. Studying the types of motivations (religious, psychological, sociolinguistic, etc) behind avoiding using taboo words in English and Arabic.

3. Identifying the major themes of taboo in the two languages under investigation.

4. Discussing the notion of euphemism from semantic and pragmatic points of view. The structure and positions taboo words occupy are explained.

5. Showing the points of similarity and difference with respect to taboo words and euphemism in the two languages under investigation.

6. Putting forward some suggestions and recommendations which can be beneficial for learners and those who are interested in contrastive studies.

1.5 Research Methodology

The procedure to be followed in the present study consists of the steps below:

1. Defining with elaborating the notion of taboo in both languages under study and classifying taboo themes in English and Arabic.

2. Presenting the features of taboo: cultural, psychological, religious, etc. in the two languages under investigation.

3. Presenting a theoretical background on the notion of euphemism and other related issues and terms.

4. Conducting a contrastive analysis of taboo and euphemism in English and Arabic to find out the points of similarity and difference to test the validity of the hypotheses of the study.
5. Drawing the relevant conclusions and offering suggestions and recommendations.

1.6 Data of the Study
The present study depends on sources and references in language and linguistics related to taboo words and euphemism in English.

As far as taboo and euphemism in Arabic are concerned, some books on Arabic language and rhetoric are used. Also, because of the lack of enough references on these two topics, the researcher depends on his own insights and the consultations with specialists in this field.

1.7 The Scope of the Study
The scope of the study is framed as follows:
1. It is totally concerned with the themes of taboo, motivation, and taboo (words and acts) in English and Arabic.
2. The study is confined to investigate the semantic and pragmatic aspects of taboo and euphemism in the two languages; however, syntax is touched upon where necessary.
3. It shows the points of similarity and difference between taboo words and euphemism in the two languages under investigation.

1.8 Significance of the Study
The study is thought to be significant in that:
1. It provides readers with a clear idea about the notion of taboo and its themes.
2. It provides learners and those who are interested in translation with solid knowledge on how to deal with taboo and euphemism in both languages under study.
3. It sheds light upon the field of contrastive semantic investigation of taboo and euphemism.
4. It gives an idea about the social, religious, and psychological motivations behind certain topics in language.
5. The present study helps understand the role of culture in language change through taboo words and euphemistic expressions.

1.9 Scheme of Chapterisation

Chapter One is an introductory chapter. It gives a general idea about the notion of taboo and euphemism in language. It states the problem and how to address it. It shows the procedure to be followed, scope, significance, hypotheses, data, and the research methodology of the study.

Chapter Two deals with taboo in English. The etymology, history of taboo in English, and some important areas of taboo and terms are discussed.

Chapter Three sheds light on taboo in Arabic. How early Arab linguists dealt with the topic and the most taboo areas in Arabic are the core of this chapter.

Chapter Four is on euphemism in English. The origin and definitions of the term are given. The important role of culture is explained. Gender-related matters are given.

Chapter Five focuses on euphemism in Arabic. The contributions of early Arab linguists to topic and definitions are examined. Semantic and pragmatic points are discussed.

Chapter Six summarizes the most important results. This study also states possibilities of further studies and pedagogical implications.
1.10 Conclusion
This chapter states the problem of the current study which is an attempt to investigate taboo and euphemism in English and Arabic, it explores how euphemisms are created to express taboo matters in these two languages. It is hypothesized that there are no differences in the themes of taboo and motivations in these two languages. They also differ in using linguistic devices. Aims and objectives, research methodology, data, scope, and significance of the study are presented. Finally, it shows the scheme of chapters.