

# Euphemisms and teacher–student interactions

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## Abstract

The quality of teacher-student interactions appears to be one of the most significant prerequisites for effective instruction. One of the factors involved in determining this quality is definitely teacher talk that should adequately correspond both to the type of knowledge the teacher intends to transfer and students' ability to absorb this knowledge. The latter we claim is directly related to the students' attitude to the subject itself and the teacher. In this article we will delve into the problem of euphemisms as part of teacher and student talk with a view to determining the extent to which they might affect teacher-student interactions. The issue of euphemism use and their role in building positive relations in the language classroom will be discussed from the perspective of teachers' experiences. To this end, we chose the research tool of an online questionnaire addressed at university teachers. The survey was administered in June 2023 and the results will be described and analyzed in the forthcoming pages. Euphemism use will also be considered as a manifestation of language creativity that should characterize good language teachers.

**Keywords:** euphemism, classroom interaction, creativity, teacher talk

## 1. Introduction

This article discusses the problem of euphemism use in university teachers' talk, both inside and outside the language classroom, with a view to determining their attitude to this language means and its role in building positive teacher-student interactions. This discussion summarizes the findings of the second part of the research whose former stage focused on language students' perceptions of the phenomenon of euphemisms (see Bloch-Rozmej 2023, in press). Hence, our teacher participants of the study were asked very similar, or in some cases even the same, questions as their students. This parallelism will enable a neat comparison of the two research groups and formulation of conclusions that will be valid for the whole process of building positive teacher-student interactions in the classroom. The research tool used in this study is an online questionnaire addressed at teachers working in the Institute of Linguistics (English Studies) at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The main research questions that we hope to answer through our study are thus as follows.

1. Do teachers recognize the significance of euphemisms in teacher – student interactions?
2. What exact functions does euphemistic language play in classroom talk?

### 3. Do teachers perceive euphemisms as a manifestation of language creativity?

The questions formulated above reflect the major areas of interest of this study but important facts can be learnt from teachers' answers to all of the 24 questions of the survey. The analysis of teachers' responses to individual questions will thus build the overall picture from which the final conclusions will emerge.

The article is organized as follows. We start by presenting a brief discussion of the nature of teacher-student interaction. Further, the phenomenon of euphemism is addressed and, to round up the theoretical part, we consider the problem of creativity in classroom interaction. In the research methodology section, the aims of the study, the research tools and participants are presented. Next, we report on the major research findings, obtained through the online questionnaire, which will be subject to analysis. Finally, research conclusions will be formulated.

## 2. Teacher-student interaction

Positive teacher-student interaction is certainly a necessary component of the language classroom if instruction goals are to be accomplished. It enables meaningful communication between the teacher and her students based on mutual understanding and respect. It also presupposes active engagement of students in classroom activities, which will take place when young people's needs and sensitivity are recognized and respected. Following Ellis (1990), we maintain that interaction is meaning-focused and carried out to facilitate the exchange of information and prevent communication breakdowns. Also Brown (2007) perceives interaction as the basis of L2 learning since it both enables learners to develop their communicative abilities and develop socially by constructing their identities through collaboration and negotiation.

Teaching itself, in its deepest sense, must be an interactive process, running continuously within the trigger-response cycle, thus leading to effective and meaningful teacher-student and student-student communication. As noted by Tickoo (2009), a productive class will be characterized by features such as those listed in (1) below.

- (1) Features of the productive lesson
- Teacher interacts with the whole class
  - Teacher interacts with a group and/or individual student
  - Students interact with one another, either in pairs or groups
  - Students work with materials, either individually, or in pairs/groups, etc.

As can be seen, interaction in the classroom can take on different forms and interpersonal configurations. Flanders and Moskowitz (cited in Brown, 2001:170) provide us with following characteristics of the teacher talk in terms of its direct and indirect influences.

**Table 1:** *Teacher talk (FLINT – the foreign language interaction model (Moskowitz 1968, as cited in Brown 2001: 170)*

Indirect Influence	Direct Influence
1. Deals with feelings: in a non-threatening way, accepting, discussing, refereeing to or communicating	5. Gives information: giving information facts, own opinion or ideas: lecturing or asking rhetorical questions.

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<p>understanding of past, present or future feelings of students.</p> <p>2. Praises or encourages: praising, complimenting, telling students why what they have said or done is valued. Encouraging students to continue, trying to give them confidence, confirming that their answers are correct.</p> <p>2.a. jokes: intentional joking, kidding,, making puns, attempting to be humorous, providing the joking is not at anyone's expense. (unintentional humor is not included in this category)</p> <p>3. Uses ideas of students: clarifying, using interpreting, summarizing the ideas of students. The ideas must be rephrased by the teacher but still be recognized as being students' contributions.</p> <p>3.a. repeats students response verbatim: Repeating the exact words of students after they participate</p> <p>4. Asks questions: asking questions to which the answer is anticipated (rhetorical questions are not included in this category)</p>	<p>5.a. correct without rejection: telling students who have made a mistake the correct response without using words or intonations which communicate criticism.</p> <p>6. Gives direction: giving directions, requests or commands that the students are expected to follow; directing various drills; facilitating whole class and small group activity</p> <p>7. Criticizes student behavior: rejecting the behavior of the student; trying to change the non-acceptable behavior; communicating anger, displeasure, annoyance, dissatisfaction with what students are doing. 7.a. telling the students his or her response is not correct or acceptable and communicating criticism, displeasure, annoyance, rejection by words or intonations.</p>
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The influence types listed above reveal the great extent to which the teacher determines the effectiveness of the whole learning process.

In order to create an interactive classroom environment, the teacher needs to take into account a number of important factors, always keeping in mind that authentic communication derives from her positive interaction with the students and consisting in mutual sharing of ideas, knowledge or other valuable aspects of people's experience (Rivers, 1987). Gebhard (1998) speaks of five major conditions underlying effective classroom interaction.

- (2) Conditions for good classroom interaction
- Reduction of the central position of the teacher
  - Appreciation of the uniqueness of individuals
  - Chances for students to express themselves in meaningful ways
  - Opportunities for students to negotiate meaning with each other and the teacher
  - Choices for students as to what they want to say, to whom they want to say it, and how they want to say it

Teachers should also implement a number of useful strategies that will result in building positive interaction patterns (Jia 2013). The first significant problem here is the way students are asked questions as the situation when one has to stand out and express themselves in front of the whole group can be very stressful or even produce a speaking barrier. Hence, the teacher should focus on building/improving their questioning strategies, making sure that the questions asked are adapted to the current level of students' abilities. Secondly, the teacher has to approach learners individually by attending to their linguistic level. In other words, both activities and material used during classes should offer different language level to different students. Learners' social skills should also be developed through the implementation of the cooperative learning strategy which guarantees that every member of the group is involved in performing the task.

Here, students working in a given group resolve the differences shown by different group members. Another strategy for creating positive classroom interaction is building positive teacher-learner rapport based on mutual respect and responsibility for the quality of learning. Teachers also need to reduce classroom anxiety by helping students boost their self-esteem and creating non-threatening learning environment.

### 3. Euphemisms and their role in human interactions

Euphemisms are effective communication devices that allow speakers to sound polite and express difficult messages by means of inoffensive language. Thanks to euphemistic expressions, speakers avoid hurting other peoples' feelings, show respect for their different worldviews, remain tactful and diplomatic. Euphemisms belong to figurative language. They replace words with negative connotations with those that are either positive or at least neutral. The use of euphemistic language is culture-specific, reflecting the norms adopted in a given country. Euphemisms are usually employed in human conversations or in texts for three main purposes: rhetoric, mitigation and avoidance. The first one appears when the expression used shifts the valence of the description, the second when we want to diminish the severity of the message and the last one to avoid words that directly denote a given object or action such as vulgarisms, names of sexual organs, etc. For instance, we achieve the purpose of mitigation when instead of talking about some drastic crime or accident openly and directly, we use milder language forms (e.g. *get rid of* instead of *kill*). When we want to avoid embarrassment or hurting people's feelings, a word such as *garden of sleep* will replace *cemetery*.

Chamizo Dominguez and Sánchez Benedito (2005: 8) specify five major functions of euphemisms. By using euphemistic expressions, speakers carry out the process of associative or conceptual engineering through which they mask the undesirable aspects of the message by exposing those that are either positive or neutral. Secondly, the authors indicate the politeness or respect function which is essential in building and sustaining positive social relations. The other functions mentioned are the dignifying function; the function of attenuating a painful evocation; and the function of naming a taboo object. Lexical items or phrases related to certain intimate parts of the human body or illnesses, either physical or mental, call for the use of euphemisms in their dignifying function. To attenuate a painful evocation, people use euphemisms which conceal such problematic and unpleasant aspects as defects in appearance, disability or death. The notion of a taboo seems to be culture-specific. Additionally, we can find taboos that are time and situation-specific and which are replaced by euphemisms at a very specific moment only and later disappear from language use (Del Teso 1988: 200). Still, across different cultures, and definitely in our western culture, sex and sexual activity seem to be one of the greatest taboos.

The discussion presented above might suggest that the role of euphemisms in human life is unquestionably positive. However, the use of such expressions can also have its downsides. Zaid et al (2018) stress the danger of confusion on the part of non-native speakers when they are exposed to euphemistic language. Such effects are likely to occur in the educational environment, for example in the case of language learners. Students, when acquiring a foreign

language, expect the meaning of the message to be as precise as possible, whereas euphemisms offer something that is beyond the obvious. In their study, the authors prove that the non-transparent nature of words, typical of euphemisms, can often lead to misunderstanding and confusion. In this sense, euphemistic language might constitute a challenge to teachers in the process of building positive classroom interaction patterns.

#### **4. Teacher's and students' creativity in classroom interaction**

Education should place creativity at the very heart of its activity (OECD, 2018). The model of education promoted by the European Union treats innovation and creativity as fundamental issues (European Union, 2010; Griffiths, 2014). Creativity is associated with such concepts as originality, diversity, breaking patterns, imagination and the ability to look at the world from different perspectives (Fazlagić, 2019). Creativity helps people recognize and produce new opportunities, ideas and alternatives which can be used in every day communication, for problem-solving, entertainment, or for many other purposes. According to Fazlagić (2019), creativity can be understood as a combination of creative skills, motivation and knowledge.

All educators will probably agree with the statement that one of the major aims of education is the creative development of pupils. Hence, whenever a teacher establishes herself as a dominant and controlling party in the teachers-student interaction domain, her influence can often be restrictive and inhibiting. Classroom interaction will benefit, on the other hand, from teacher's actions aimed at enabling the development of pupils' creative activity and promoting self-learning. Optimally, the teacher should create conditions in which students' creativity will arise spontaneously. Therefore, the style of teacher-student interaction should be characterized by subjectivity, i.e. it should take into consideration both the development of the students and the teacher, assuming that needs of both parties are significant (Brzezińska 1994). As noted by Ciechanowska (2007), the amount of teacher control should be minimized and her endeavors focused on encouraging students' activity, ranging from experimenting, through undertaking various tasks to solving problems.

The importance of creativity was also recognized in psychological literature. Torrance (1972) defined a number of principles that teachers should comply with in order to support students' creativity. Above all, they should appreciate and praise all signs of pupils' creative thinking and teach them to be open to novel experiences. Their actions should be directed towards developing in their pupils tolerance towards novelty, new ideas and concepts. Teachers should reject rigid schemes and, instead, teach students to seek and apply a variety of different solutions. They should also appreciate individual styles of work. Good educators are able to produce a creative atmosphere in the classroom whose main features are lack of fear, lack of embarrassment or total control and pupils' sense of security when doing tasks. Further, students should be encouraged to engage themselves in actions originating from their own initiative. Teachers should also develop in their students the quality of constructive criticism.

Having said that, we need to remember that the prerequisite for the development of creativity in students is that the teacher herself is creative (Eggert 1996). As Sobańska-Jędrych (2013) argues, a creative teacher demonstrates originality of thinking which manifests itself not only in the variety and diversity of tasks offered to students but also in seeing to it that each task

will increase learners' motivation, develop their language skills and make them look for new solutions to problems. Being creative also means being fully aware that not only lexical or grammatical content has to be taught but also the situational and functional use of language (Albert and Kormos 2004). In the context of language learning, creativity means not only linguistic production but also originality of thinking, fluency and flexibility.

## 5. Methodology

This study constitutes the second stage of a larger research project, whose first part has presented students' perspective on the problem of euphemism use both inside and outside the classroom context (Bloch-Rozmej 2023, in press). In this part, the teachers' views have been explored and analyzed. The research aims to find answers to three main questions:

1. Do teachers recognize the significance of euphemisms in teacher-student interactions?
2. What exact functions does euphemistic language play in classroom talk?
3. Do teachers perceive euphemisms as a manifestation of language creativity?

The research tool chosen for this study is an online questionnaire available under the link [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd70LxhZrYSaNnsnGpjiWz\\_vYEUz0UZ74IrmztzUHmimBb4Mw/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd70LxhZrYSaNnsnGpjiWz_vYEUz0UZ74IrmztzUHmimBb4Mw/viewform?usp=sf_link)

Overall, 25 university teachers from the Institute of Linguistics (English Studies) of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin agreed to complete the questionnaire. The respondents filled in the survey anonymously in June 2023. The research participants are in the overwhelming majority experienced teachers specializing in various fields of English Philology – linguistics, English and American literature, culture and language teaching. All of them have frequent contact with students during classes and office hours.

The 24 questions of the survey can be grouped into four major categories:

- I. Introductory questions concerning age, seniority, etc.
- II. Teachers' contact with euphemistic language and personal usage
- III. Euphemism use in the context of language creativity
- IV. The role of euphemisms in teacher-student interactions

The rationale behind including questions of the above types was the need to see the teachers' attitude to the use of euphemisms in a wider context of human contacts, their perception of the teachers' role in the classroom and understanding of the teacher's talk influence on teacher-student interactions. The questions were formulated in English only, despite the fact that the majority of the teachers are of Polish origin. The reason for the choice of the language was the fact that English is the language of classroom interaction the teachers are involved in.

## 6. Research results

In the forthcoming pages we are going to report on the results of the questionnaire described in Section 5 which was the research tool chosen for this study. Thus, the first two questions collected general information concerning the respondents' gender, and age. 40 per cent of the participants are men and 60 % declared to be women. 68% of the teachers turn out to be between 30 and 50 years of age. Only 8% are under 30 and 20% are between 51 and 60. Question 3 enquired about the kinds of words that the respondents most frequently replace with euphemisms. They were allowed to choose more than one answer. The results were as follows:

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| a. vulgarisms  | 32% |
| b. sexual organs and sexual acts                         | 24% |
| c. expressions likely to offend your interlocutors       | 48% |
| d. words evoking fear or disgust                         | 20% |
| e. expressions that are politically incorrect            | 16% |
| f. expressions that are socially unacceptable            | 20% |
| g. each of the above-mentioned, depending on a situation | 64% |
| h. other (which?)  | 1%  |

In Question 4, the respondents were asked to give examples of unacceptable/problematic words and euphemisms that they use to replace them with. The teachers provided both English and Polish examples. The results are depicted in the table below:

**Table 2:** *Offensive words and corresponding euphemisms*

Offensive word(s)	Euphemism(s)
idiot	slow on the uptake
black, homosexual, heterosexual	no replacement suggested
pieprzyć się 'fuck'	odbywać stosunek 'have a sexual intercourse'
kurwa 'whore'	panienka lekkiego prowadzenia 'bawd'
pedał, ciota 'faggot'	gej 'gay'
swear words, sexual vocabulary	
dupa, gówno 'ass, shit'	no replacement suggested

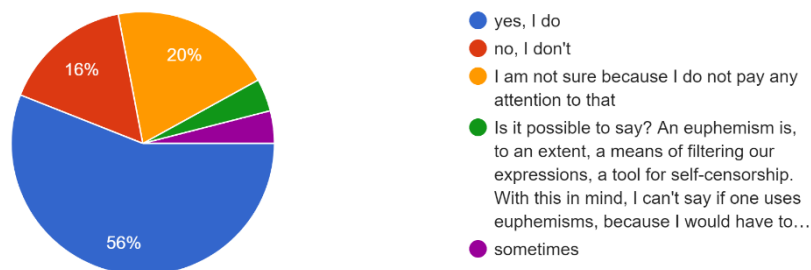
Question 5 enquired about the reasons for using euphemistic expressions. The results are as follows:

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| a. not to sound vulgar                                   | 48%    |
| b. to avoid hurting someone's feelings                   | 68%    |
| c. to impress my interlocutor                            | 0%     |
| d. to avoid being censored                               | 12%    |
| e. because of political correctness                      | 28%    |
| f. to hide something from some listeners (e.g. children) | 44%    |
| g. to identify with /adapt myself to other people        | 24%    |
| h. other (what?)   | 4% (1) |

In Question 6 we asked the respondents whether they heard any euphemisms in everyday language contacts. The results are depicted in Figure 1 below

Do you hear people using euphemisms in everyday situations?

25 odpowiedzi



**Figure 1:** Contact with euphemistic language

As can be seen in the above picture, the majority of the teachers (56%) have everyday contact with euphemisms and only 16% declare that they do not hear any euphemisms in everyday situations. Interestingly, the same percentage of the respondents (56%) admit to having noticed euphemisms on TV, in the Internet, movies, magazines and journals, as revealed in the answers to Question 7. The number of negative responses, however, has diminished to only 8%. When asked to specify the place where they had heard euphemisms (Question 8), the teachers indicated: television (48%), internet (40%), radio (44%), newspapers/magazines (32%), movies (44%) and everyday conversations (60%).

In Question 9, the respondents were asked to indicate social groups that in their opinion would be most likely to use euphemisms. The results are as follows.

a. parents	68%
b. politicians	32%
c. <b>teachers</b>	<b>84%</b>
d. bloggers	0%
e. people with impeccable manner	44%
f. intelligent people	36%
g. priests and monks	12%
h. women	20%
i. men	12%
j. other (which?)	4% (strangers, students)

When asked to explain how they perceive the use of euphemisms (Question 10), the teachers responded as follows.

a. as a lack of courage	4%
b. as a necessity in some situations	68%
c. as a sign of creativity	36%
d. as a manifestation of impeccable manner	20%



e. as a sign of fashion	4%
f. as a way of avoiding awkward situations (or consequences)	72%
g. as sign of empathy	44%
h. as a manifestation of responsibility	16%
i. other (which?)	4%

Questions 11 and 12 asked the teachers to provide specific examples of euphemisms that reflect people's being up-to-date and the need to avoid unpleasant consequences. The results are not immediately significant here. Questions 13-15 concerned the idea of creativity and its manifestation in language. The respondents, when asked to define this concept, provided the following responses:

- unexpected but easily understandable expression for the people addressed, but not necessarily for the people being talked about
- being able to create new words, phrases, sentences, being able to express new meaning in uncommon ways, being able to understand those new words and new meanings
- using new constructions, word-making. It shows when one can create new words off the cuff
- it manifests itself in the invention of new lexical items, which get your ideas across in an intelligent way
- language creativity is an intentional non-standard use of language that is universally understandable yet surprising and possibly evoking other emotions as a consequence of a mixture of these two features. Art seems to me, at least at the moment, to be the only platform for this. A good marker of language being used creatively is also that these new coinages or formulations seep to everyday language of individuals or to public discourse.
- it concerns intellectual abstract non-obvious constructions and concepts. Not euphemisms...
- finding some other way to communicate a message
- using new words for new concepts
- seeking to express new meaning, finding more expressive ways for existing forms of expressions, express words in a more polite way
- language creativity is an ability to use language responsibly and flexibly in order to communicate all sorts of information; an ability to talk about delicate topics without offending sexual, religious, etc. minorities.
- linking obvious language chunks in a non-obvious way.
- being able to manipulate language to one's benefit
- there is no single definition as there is a number of variables to consider. Likewise, creativity may manifest itself in a number of different ways and may be understood and perceived differently by different users.
- there are many aspects of language creativity but the one that is most impressive is the ability to spontaneously come up with clever and convincing metaphors and comparisons which allow to express complicated concepts in simpler, more understandable terms.
- creativity – forming new words, forms, using different languages at the same time, being open to change

- language creativity is creating new expressions at the word and sentence level.
- expressing something in a novel way
- innovative use of the already existing or newly created vocabulary items, hybrid forms or syntactic structures which allows them to refer to/denote meanings they do not carry with them in their conventional uses
- the ability to produce new, adequate, intelligent and even brilliant expressions; manifests itself in the creation of new and original phrases, new combinations of words, neologisms, euphemisms and poetry
- it is primarily the activity of making a new meaning by a speaker and the re-interpretation of meaning(s) by a receiver.
- creating neologisms
- I don't suppose there is need for everyday language creativity, unless you are a poet or newspaper columnist. Using language that's appropriate for the situation is not creativity.

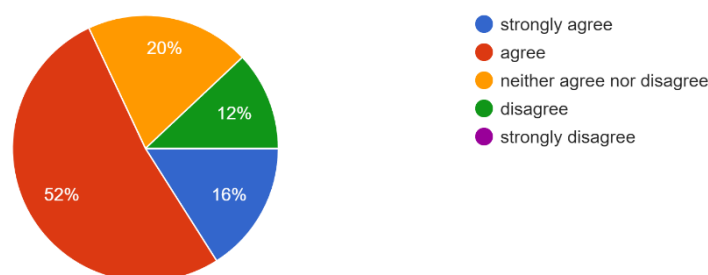
20% of the respondents claim that the Covid-19 pandemic fostered the creation of new euphemisms, 12% gave the negative answer and 68% are not sure whether any link between the pandemic and euphemism creation does indeed exist.

The remaining questions of the survey (16-24) are related to the problem of teacher-student interaction and its connection with euphemistic language and language creativity. First, the teachers were asked to indicate which factors have the greatest impact on teacher-learner interactions.

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| a. <b>Teacher personality</b>   | <b>96%</b>               |
| b. Teacher pedagogical qualifications   | 28%                      |
| c. Teacher knowledge of the subject   | 68%                      |
| d. Classroom language (e.g. forms of address, expressing criticism, commenting on learner's mistakes, etc.) | 48%                      |
| e. Learners' attitude to the subject  | 48%                      |
| f. Other (which?)...  | 4% (student personality) |

In Question 17 we wanted to find out whether teachers considered euphemisms a necessary component of teacher talk. The answers are depicted in Figure 2 below.

17. Do you agree that euphemisms are a necessary component of teacher talk?  
25 odpowiedzi



**Figure 2:** *Euphemisms and teacher talk*

In Question 18, we asked when the teachers would use euphemisms when talking to students. Consider the answers below.

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| a. when expressing my negative emotions   | 32% |
| b. when expressing my criticism about students' lack of knowledge or misbehavior    | 84% |
| c. when expressing my worldview   | 36% |
| d. when talking about controversial issues to show respect for other people's views | 64% |
| e. to inform students about my decisions which are difficult for them to accept     | 32% |
| f. Other (which?)   | 4%  |

Question 19 provides us with examples of euphemisms which the teachers would use in the classroom.

Unacceptable word(s)	Euphemism(s)
plagiat 'plagiarism'	opinie z second-handu 'second-hand opinions'
Murzyn 'Negro'	czarnoskóry 'blackskin'
gej 'gay'	członek LGBT 'LGBT member'
Musisz lepiej się postarać 'you have to try harder'	Musisz jeszcze raz spróbować 'you have to try once again'
źle 'wrong'	prawie dobrze ale. 'almost OK. but..'
faggot	gay
poor students	underperforming/partially proficient students
	There is still some studying ahead of you
fail	not to get enough points
You have no idea or understanding of the topic	I think you should read the text assigned
Wrong/bad	this is not ideal

68% of the teachers haven't noticed any use of euphemisms in their students' talk, whereas 28% indicated the answer 'sometimes'. Only a few examples of these appeared in the respondents' answers to Question 21. These were:

1. The text was difficult for "the text was boring and I did not care to read it"
2. He's not a liar for "he's creative with the truth."

In Question 22 we asked whether linguistic creativity helps in building positive teacher-student interactions. 72 % of the respondents either agree or strongly agree and not even a single negative answer was provided. Further, we enquired what functions euphemisms perform in the classroom language. The responses here are as follows.

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| a. Diminishing the existing tensions          | 12%                        |
| b. Supporting mutual respect and sensitivity  | 28%                        |
| c. A guarantee of teachers' neutrality        | 12%                        |
| d. A way of avoiding conflict and controversy | 40%                        |
| e. Other (what?)                              | 8% (all of the above, fun) |

In Question 24 we wanted the respondents to specify three prerequisites for good teacher-student interactions. The answers are listed below.

- pasja i wiedza nauczyciela, szacunek, ciekawość ludzi i rzeczy ‘passion and teacher’s knowledge, respect, curiosity for people and things’
- Empatia, profesjonalizm, bezstronność ‘empathy, professionalism, objectivity’
- 1) openness to communication 2) mutual respect 3) patience
- sense of humor, mutual respect, cooperation
- respect, empathy, openness
- mutual respect despite difference of outlook, adequate distance (no fraternizing with students), friendly attitude
- All parties should (1) respect one another, (2) respect what they themselves do as a part of a course and (3) try to fulfill their obligations to the best of their ability at least just for the sake of it. This survey made me think of what it means that we need to use euphemisms in certain situations. Is our default language inappropriate or disrespectful? Maybe one should speak and write so that they do not need to use euphemisms at all? (Krzysztof Zanussi seems to be a good role model for this.) Thank you for this food for thought.
- when students pay attention and divert from telephones, not into telephones bidirectional respect no fears
- positive attitude, sense of humour, flexibility
- Mutual respect
- clear rules, mutual respect, creativity
- showing respect – being sensitive to other people – showing support for minorities
- empathy, treating students as partners, involving students in the process of teaching and learning
- I know one: both sides need to stay open-minded
- mutual respect, overlapping goals (to teach/learn the material)
- Healthy boundaries, integrity, generosity
- good-manners, common interests, age
- give them good grades
- mutual respect; no preconceived opinions; ability to listen
- Mutual respect, clarity about requirements, fair play of both parties
- deep knowledge of the classroom environment, responsiveness to student need and effectiveness of communication
- mutual respect, collaborative learning, supportive mutual feedback (cf. socioconstructivism by Kiraly)
- clarity, precision, sense of humour
- Treat your students fairly, keep them engaged, don't make them doubt your ability as a teacher

## 7. Discussion

In this part of the article an attempt will be made to find answers to the main research questions of the study. More specifically, we will try to describe the nature of the teachers’ contact with euphemistic language in their everyday life situations and inside the university context. Further,

important facts concerning the role of euphemisms in teacher-student interactions will be determined and, finally, we will consider the relationship between creativity and euphemism use, as perceived by the participants of our study.

While interpreting the data obtained through our questionnaire-based investigation, it is worth remembering that almost all of the research participants are experienced teachers of English, with 92% of them being above 30 years of age. They represent the elite of the society, all of them being highly educated. We believe this fact is of significant importance for the interpretation of the research results. As many psychological studies indicate, there is some correlation between people's IQ scores and the years of education. For example, Ritchie and Tucker-Drob (2018) in their meta-analysis based on the investigation of more than 600 000 participants, discovered that an added year of education lifted participants' IQ scores, on average: between 1 and 5 points. Some other studies show an association between low level of education and psychological distress and low sense of mastery (Dalgard et al 2007). Hence, it might be deduced that a high level of education will be correlated with less distress and higher sense of mastery. These facts might help us understand the teachers' perceptions of creativity.

Starting with the first issue indicated above, namely the teachers' contact with euphemisms, we need to observe that

- Teachers use euphemisms to replace words which are likely to offend their interlocutors
- The main reasons for using euphemisms are 1. To avoid hurting other people's feelings 2. not to sound vulgar 3. to hide something from some listeners, e.g. children
- Teachers have most frequently heard euphemisms in everyday conversation and on TV
- Teachers expect that the groups that are most likely to use euphemisms are teachers (84%), parents and people with impeccable manner.
- Teachers perceive the use of euphemisms mostly as a way of avoiding unpleasant consequences and awkward situations as well as as a necessity in some situations.

In trying to interpret the facts listed above, we believe one should confront them with the qualities of a *good teacher*. Southern New Hampshire University education faculty conducted research including university students who specified ten most significant qualities of a good teacher. These are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- Good teachers are strong communicators
- Good teachers listen well
- Good teachers focus on collaboration
- Good teachers are adaptable
- Good teachers are engaging
- Good teachers show empathy
- Good teachers have patience
- Good teachers value real-world learning
- Good teachers share best practices
- Good teachers are life-long learners

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<sup>1</sup> The source of the information is [10 Qualities of a Good Teacher \(snhu.edu\)](https://www.snhu.edu/education/faculty-research/10-qualities-of-a-good-teacher) (accessed July, 12 2023)

In the light of the features defined above, it becomes clear why teachers use euphemisms to avoid hurting people and show sensitivity and respect for interlocutors. These qualities characterize people with a high level of empathy. Since good teachers are adaptable, they will know how to behave in different types of situations, including those that seem embarrassing and awkward. They will simply resort to the use of euphemistic expressions to cope with potential difficulties. Good teachers listen well and hence 'hear' the message that is communicated between the lines. Thus, they quickly recognize the kind of situation and the kind of person they are confronted with. To avoid offensive language, they resort to euphemisms. As people who feel the burden of responsibility for their students, they find it necessary sometimes to use milder language forms when talking about delicate issues. Teachers also perceive themselves as models of behavior. This, in fact is a common social expectation. It is no surprise therefore, that they ascribe the use of euphemisms to people with impeccable manner.

Let us now turn to the second research question concerning the relationship between euphemisms and language creativity. When we analyze the respondents' definitions of creativity, what strikes us is their deep multi-aspectual understanding of the concept. The dictionary definition of the term provided by Cambridge Dictionary is as follows.<sup>2</sup>

(3) Creativity – the ability to produce or use original and unusual ideas

The teachers' definitions focus mainly on such issues as

- Creation of new words, constructing new meanings
- Innovative use of existing words and structures
- Creation of neologisms, euphemisms and poetry
- Brilliant metaphors and comparisons
- Intentional, non-standard use of language
- Flexibility and sophistication of using language to one's benefit

As can be seen, all the definitions provided by the respondents fit in neatly into the dictionary formulation. It is also noteworthy that the teachers underline not only the theoretical but also practical aspects of creativity. We can also notice that euphemisms, at least by some of the respondents, are perceived as manifestations of language creativity.

The last and most important aspect of this study is the role of euphemistic language in teacher-student interactions. When asked to indicate factors which have the greatest impact on the relations between teachers and students, the respondents chose

- teacher's personality
- teacher's expertise in a given field
- classroom language/learners' attitude to the subject

This hierarchy of factors seems to reflect the nature of the educational process, involving people and their cooperation and aimed at achieving the desired level of knowledge and skill in a given

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [CREATIVITY | English meaning – Cambridge Dictionary](#) (accessed July 12, 2023)

domain. Thus, the quality of human relations is crucial and it considerably depends on the personalities of people involved. From the psychological perspective, it is easier to open up to what another person is trying to convey when we respect and trust her. Yet, as the respondents correctly observe, our interlocutor needs to have something to convey. Hence, the importance of teachers' knowledge of the subject. Now, when we have a positive attitude to our interlocutor who is an expert with the knowledge we need, there comes the time for the medium through which this knowledge will be transferred. As can be seen, the teachers indicated the third crucial factor influencing teacher-student relations, namely, classroom language. Interestingly, 68% of the research participants are convinced that euphemisms are a necessary component of teacher talk. This high number harmonizes nicely with the teachers' conviction concerning the importance of classroom language and the major reasons for using euphemistic language in general, and in human interactions in particular. 84% of the respondents, when talking to students, would use euphemisms to express their criticism concerning students' lack of knowledge or misbehavior. Further, 64% of them would resort to euphemisms when talking about controversial issues with the purpose of showing respect for students' views. These results are compatible with what we have already discovered, namely, the teachers' high level of empathy and the way they understand the essence of their profession. Also the examples of euphemisms, the respondents are likely to use in teacher-student interactions are connected with expressing critical remarks on the learners' lack of knowledge and worldviews, gender-related issues in particular. This last fact is not surprising both in the light of what has been said so far about teachers' use of euphemisms and reasons for doing so but also because the respondents indicated television as the second most frequent source of their contact with euphemisms. The most recent ideologies and changes affecting present-day societies are promoted in TV programs and movies. Hence, LGBT-related issues are constantly present in contemporary debate.

The teachers who took part in the research project appear to be focused on creating positive and fruitful relations with their students. This conclusion is supported by the answers they gave to Question 23 concerning the functions performed by euphemisms in the classroom language. 40% of the respondents indicated the function of avoiding conflict and controversy. 28% selected supporting mutual respect and sensitivity and another 12% a guarantee of teachers' neutrality. These results suggest that the teachers are focused on teaching the material in a student-friendly atmosphere which is conducive to effective learning.

The last question, 24th, was meant as a kind of summary of the teachers' views on the nature of teacher-student interactions. We enquired about the prerequisites of positive T-S relations. All of the respondents expressed their opinions about this issue. The most beneficial factors that shape positive interactions indicated by the largest number of the respondents were

- Mutual respect
- Openness to communication/ Effective communication
- Empathy
- Cooperation and collaborative learning

As can be seen, the quality of interpersonal communication is pretty high in this hierarchy of prerequisites. Effective communication has to be full of mutual respect and support. It can thus be inferred that euphemistic language also has its role to play in good teacher-student communication.

## 8. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine teachers' attitude to the phenomenon of euphemism and its role in teacher-student interactions. The findings of the questionnaire-based research indicate that the respondents' perception of euphemistic language is definitely positive. We have seen the link the teachers establish between euphemism and creativity, both these phenomena being able to affect the quality and effectiveness of classroom interaction. The major purpose for including euphemistic expressions in teacher-student verbal exchanges is, according to the respondents, showing mutual respect for each other's worldviews and values. The participants' use of euphemisms seems to be in harmony with the most desirable features of a good teacher, as defined by university students. Based on the research findings presented in this study, it can be maintained that euphemisms have a considerable potential of positively affecting teacher-student relations.

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