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EUPHEMISMS  
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT  
IN THE TIMES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:  
THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

Even without any closer investigation, one can observe a rapid flood of social and political changes that in important respects affect the world we live in. Language is definitely not free from that influence but rather it reflects the current cultural and political trends, ideologies and attitudes towards the reality. The recent COVID-19 pandemic seems to have greatly impinged on our lives, including interpersonal communication, or even the way we use language as such. During the two years of pandemic restrictions, people had to reorganize many practical matters related to work, education and even leisure activity. We also had to adapt to the limitations imposed by governments, including the necessity to wear face masks or keep social distance. All that considerably affected our communication with others, both physically and mentally. The latter aspect was reflected by frequent fear of talking to people and new ways of expressing our attitudes towards the disease itself and possible forms of struggling with it. Difficult and dangerous situations are often likely to trigger social conflict and that was the case in the years 2020-2021. People felt endangered both by the virus and official restrictions

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that frequently turned their lives upside down, bringing about economic problems, loss of jobs and drastically changing their work conditions. Fear, isolation and rapid changes led to social divisions, as a result of which two parties emerged—the supporters of the government’s anti-pandemic policy and the opponents who challenged the imposed limitations and the vaccination campaign. Television programmes and internet forums became the sites of language battles. Unfortunately, however, many participants of the COVID-related debate suffered from censorship. Many bloggers saw their channels blocked by YouTube because of the use of the politically incorrect vocabulary. Hence, to survive in the virtual reality, they had to turn to euphemisms.

In this paper we are going to address the problem of euphemisms as employed in the speech of Polish students, both inside and outside the university context, with a view to answering the following research questions.

1. How extensively and for what purposes do students use euphemisms (a) inside and (b) outside the university context?
2. Do students know and/or use pandemic-related euphemisms?

The practical aim of this study is to determine the role of euphemistic language in the classroom interactions between teachers and students as well as its potential to develop teacher-student relations based on mutual respect for worldview diversity and sensitivity in the times of the pandemic.

The research tool that we chose for this study is an online questionnaire, the results of which will be reported on and analysed in the forthcoming sections. The discussion of the research experiment—its procedure and results—will be preceded by a brief outline of the major issues connected with the phenomenon of euphemisms in language.

## 1. EUPHEMISMS: THEORETICAL ASPECTS AND USAGE

### 1.1 DEFINITION, PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term ‘euphemism’ as “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant. Also: the expression so substituted” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

As pointed out by Chamizo Dominguez and Sánchez Benedito (2005), euphemisms enable objects to be named not by words that they directly denote but by ones that are more socially acceptable. Thus, euphemisms allow us to sound more sensitive or diplomatic in otherwise awkward or difficult situations. We avoid ag-

gressive terms in politics, business as well as everyday life uncomfortable circumstances. Euphemisms are resorted to when we talk about topics such as death, sex, termination of employment or disability as they make us feel more comfortable and help avoid hurting others' feelings as well as because of political correctness. Hence, instead of using the word 'die', one would be more likely to employ the expression 'pass away', especially when talking to a relative of a deceased person. Euphemistic language is expected to appear in public-facing situations such as press conferences or interviews or in the corporate world. Euphemisms can also be used when the speaker wants to sound funny. Adhering to the example just given, the word 'die' could be replaced with 'give up the oxygen habit'. Rude or offensive words can be replaced with technical and rare items, e.g. 'egurgitate' instead of 'vomit'.

Euphemisms represent figurative language. The notion that is strictly bound up with the term *euphemism* is that of *connotation*. The use of euphemistic language means substituting words which have positive connotations for those with negative connotation. It is noteworthy, however, that the positive connotation of a given euphemism will eventually wear away once it is overused, thus turning into some sort of cliché. Take the example of the word 'unemployed'. If we replace it with the euphemism 'between jobs' too frequently, its unpleasant connotation will become clear to the listeners and the process of creating another, more refined euphemism will continue, giving rise to such expressions as 'making a career transition' for instance.

What has been indicated above might suggest that euphemisms are an unquestionably positive phenomenon. Yet, there are two sides to the euphemism choir. Beyond doubt, they are a convenient tool to talk about uncomfortable issues easily and without losing face or hurting others. However, such expressions can also be used to confuse interlocutors by masking the truth. Still, there is common agreement that the primary purpose of using euphemisms is to maintain positive face.

Chamizo Dominguez and Sánchez Benedito (2005, p. 7) indicate that the term euphemism is related closely to another form of figurative language called dysphemism. The former, the authors argue, applies to language forms used to refer to phenomena or objects that cause our fear, disgust, dread or revulsion, whereas the latter "highlight the humorous and grotesque aspects of those and other objects". In fact, a dysphemism can be a negative-sounding word for some reality that is not that bad, an emotive misnomer, not matching reality. What is important here is the fact that both notions represent the same language mechanism. In some contexts, it is pretty easy to determine whether we are dealing with either the euphemistic or dysphemistic usage of some language form but, in many cases, the

dividing line between the two is blurred. Then, the identity of the expression will depend on both the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation.

People resort to language forms such as euphemisms and dysphemisms instead of words that directly denote the actual objects, facts or phenomena in a culture-specific manner. The usage of these figurative forms varies not only from one culture to another but also from one stage of a given culture's history to another and from one social group or class to another. What is more, the usage of euphemisms can also be a feature of a given individual, stemming from this person's convictions and worldviews.

To round up the above discussion, three major purposes of using euphemistic language need to be pointed out. More specifically, these are avoidance, mitigation and rhetoric. Starting with the last one, they can serve as rhetoric devices in situations when the speaker wants to shift the valence of a description. The purpose of mitigation is clear when instead of direct harsh statements of the fact, we employ milder, less direct expressions in order to minimize the severity of discussing certain phenomena such as outrageous crimes or injustice, e.g. concerning the extermination of people in concentration camps during World War II. When the topic discussed is considered bad or embarrassing for people, they readily resort to the use of euphemisms for avoidance purposes, i.e. in order to avoid naming things explicitly. These topics could be death or sexual activity for instance. The intentions driving the employment of euphemistic expressions in such situations can be either good or cynical and sinister when their user wants to either confuse or directly deceive their interlocutor.

As noted by Chamizo Dominguez and Sánchez Benedito (2005, p. 8), "what a speaker does when he uses a euphemism is to carry out a process of associative or conceptual engineering in which certain unpleasant aspects are concealed and an attempt is made to stress other pleasant, or at least emotionally neutral, aspects." To illustrate this function of euphemism use, the authors discuss the example of the word 'cemetery' which, for the majority of people, carries definitely unpleasant connotations. Since, for obvious reasons, the total eradication of the place the 'cemetery' denotes is impossible, people have created language forms that are ambiguous and carry other semantic and emotional associations. These euphemistic expressions include 'churchyard', 'God's acre', 'garden of sleep', or 'necropolis'. The remaining four functions indicated by the authors include 1) the politeness or respect function, 2) the dignifying function, 3) the function of attenuating a painful evocation, and 4) the function of naming a taboo object (2005, p. 8).

As Kröll (1984, p. 29) argues, "the sense of politeness, civility, decorum, respect is one of the main causes of euphemism. At every turn, life requires us to

respect others and compels us to have recourse to modes of expression that the language places at our disposal to enable us to camouflage the truth, making it more amenable through kindness or deference. Euphemisms of refinement, courtesy, are very common nowadays and their number increases apace.” Thus, the respect function is performed when a speaker substitutes a word or phrase that is either personally or socially considered more dignified for the linguistic form that literally denotes the object or other reality that is being talked about. Examples of euphemisms fulfilling this function are polite forms of address such as ‘His Excellency’ or ‘Her Majesty’. A euphemism can also be created by having recourse to terms in some other language in which these words have no euphemistic character but gain it once adopted in the recipient language (Allan & Burrige, 1991, pp. 103–104), e.g. ‘barman’ used instead of the Spanish ‘camarero’ to mean the head waiter. Further, names of professions or studies can be officially referred to by euphemistic language forms, thus performing the respect-raising function, e.g. ‘associate professors’ used instead of ‘probationary lecturers/untenured professors’.

The dignifying function of the euphemism derives from the need to express the technically correct terms in words that in some way dignify the referents of these names. They are often connected with the so-called in-house jargon typical of certain professions. An example here can be the word ‘mongol’ which is replaced with the phrase ‘trisomic of the par 21’ not because of the inaccuracy of the former but in order to dignify patients suffering from this kind of syndrome. The word ‘mongol’ has acquired pejorative connotations and is frequently a synonym for moron. Interestingly, when we compare words of Latin or French origin with those that are typically English, the former appear to be more dignifying, scientific and neutral than the latter which often become taboo, at least as far as medical vocabulary is concerned. For example, ‘micturition’ sounds socially acceptable and neutral, whereas ‘urinating’ will be avoided by speakers. Euphemisms with the dignifying function will be very likely to replace vocabulary items related to human mind or body, illness, whether physical or mental, and certain parts of the human anatomy. Apart from the positive effects their use can bring about, we should also be aware of certain downsides, the obscurity of language being one of them. Another danger connected with the excessive use of such euphemisms is progressive distancing of technical jargon from everyday speech, making it unintelligible for people outside the professional field.

The function of attenuating a painful evocation is performed when a euphemism is employed in order to conceal some hurtful or unpleasant aspect, either for the speaker or the listener. These problematic aspects include issues relating to personal appearance, disability, financial status, disease or death. For example, in-

stead of describing a person as ‘ugly’, we shall use the phrase ‘rather plain’ or call ‘old’ people ‘citizens’. The notion of death is often approached with the use of dysphemisms as these help people sublimate the fear they feel. Hence, the employment of such expressions as ‘kick the bucket’ or ‘turn up your toes’.

Each society has its taboo words the use of which is normally avoided. In the countries of our western civilization, sex seems to be one of the greatest taboos. That is the reason why languages have the largest number of both euphemisms and dysphemisms replacing words expressing sexual activity and sexual organs.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as Del Teso (1988, p. 200) argues, “there are transitory taboo elements linked to ephemeral situations which give rise to a series of euphemistic expressions that are unlikely to leave any trace in the language.” This might be the case with the COVID-19 pandemic which, as will be seen below, fostered the creation and use of numerous euphemisms.

## 1.2 TYPES OF EUPHEMISMS

Different conversation topics and different goals of conversation participants call for the use of different types of euphemisms. The major categories of euphemism include

- politeness,
- diplomacy,
- abstraction,
- litotes,
- spin euphemism.

Politeness is one of the significant social norms regulating human relations. That’s why being impolite is regarded as a social taboo. Hence, people avoid awkward situations and try to mitigate their severity by using expressions that sound softer, more acceptable and less offensive. These expressions are euphemisms that in such circumstances serve to build the conversational construct of politeness, thus supporting a more smooth and spontaneous flow of language exchange.

Diplomatic debate constitutes the art in its own right involving negotiation skills, strategic thinking and the necessary use of euphemistic language. In the pursuit of reaching mutual agreement or achieving specific political goals, people need to eliminate language that builds walls and divides parties. Euphemistic expressions are thus convenient devices to replace inappropriate vocabulary. To this

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<sup>1</sup> For the studies of euphemisms related to sex, see Crespo Fernández (2008).

end words are given new meanings or used in new ways in the context of international politics.

The abstraction type of euphemism involves the use of the so-called white-lies or expressing unpleasant or difficult facts in a veiled indirect manner. In this way, we want to disguise some unpleasant realities and avoid emotional reactions that would destabilize the situation or make us lose control over it. Such euphemistic devices are very common in regular everyday conversations and in literary language. A good example here illustrating this type of euphemism could be the expression ‘pregnancy termination’ which is a substitute for ‘abortion’. We can also abstract a well-known fact that during war people simply get killed by using the euphemistic phrase ‘casualties of war’.

Litotes represents another special figure of speech whereby by using understatements, we express the exact opposite of the actual situation. Very frequently, the purpose that the user of litotes wants to achieve is that of irony. For example, when instead of saying ‘dumb’, the speaker or writer uses the phrase ‘not particularly brilliant’, the personal characteristic that is exactly opposite to being brilliant is communicated. Likewise, when substituting ‘not bad at all’ for ‘fantastic’, we are actually exposing the greatness of the object characterized in this way by employing the understatement.

The domain of public relations or advertising is full of spin-euphemisms. These language forms are used to deliberately create confusion or sway public opinion in order to achieve particular aims, often connected with financial or political profit. Thus, advertisers downplay the negative features of products just as politicians downplay the negative aspects of particular initiatives, ideas or events. Companies, for example, would be likely to use the spin term ‘rationalization’ in the context of firing people even though such actions are in no way connected to economics. An author might try to persuade a publisher to accept his book for publication by saying that the work ‘covers issues that no other book covers’, which is as true as meaningless.

### 1.3 EUPHEMISM AS A SEMANTIC OBJECT

Euphemisms are linguistic objects that are used in a figurative sense but they do not differ from other linguistic units in terms of morphology, syntax or phonology. All of them have their unique lexical meanings but in order to fulfil their euphemistic functions, they have acquired some extra sense or meaning and are used as substitutes for words whose literal meaning is for some reason unacceptable. Bolinger (1980, p. 149) speaks of “euphemistic and dysphemistic metaphors”, thus treating the two notions as two subcases of the figure of speech of

metaphor. The figurative use of a term is the linguistic mechanism that is common to both euphemism and metaphor and what distinguishes them is the speaker's or hearer's intention.

From the linguistic perspective, Chamizo Dominguez and Sánchez Benedito (2005, p. 13) indicate three major features of a euphemism: 1) what enables the unnameable to be named; 2) ambiguity; and 3) untranslatability. Thus, euphemisms differ from other figures of speech in that they are used to name objects or phenomena that cannot be named with words that literally mean them as these are regarded as offensive and hence socially unacceptable. In other words, euphemisms name the unnameable. Notice that when we use a metaphor such as 'sparkling stars' for 'eyes', it is no problem for us to express the intended meaning in either of these ways. The metaphor is just a different way of conceptualizing something that can just as well be expressed with words that literally mean it. In the case of euphemisms, however, their use appears to be an inevitable necessity as otherwise some deterioration in the courtesy towards others would occur.

Nerlich and Chamizo Domínguez (in press) maintain that ambiguity is an essential property of a euphemism to the extent that once a given euphemism ceases to be ambiguous, it automatically loses its identity as a euphemism. Chamizo Dominguez and Sánchez Benedito (2005, p. 14) further assert that when "the originally euphemistic meaning is lexicalized and is understood by speakers as just another literal meaning of the term in question, then the euphemism ceases to fulfil its functions and speakers find they have to resort to other euphemistic terms because the first one is no longer valid."

As for the property of untranslatability, it is noteworthy that the translation or interpretation of the actual meaning conveyed by a given euphemism is always accompanied by a great degree of uncertainty on the part of the hearer, often depending on their contextual knowledge. In some opaque contexts, this uncertainty might never be resolved. The problem is even greater when we want to translate one language's euphemism to another because of the different euphemistic conceptual networks occurring in the two systems.

## 2. CLASSROOM LANGUAGE AND EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

Hativa (2001, p. 11) defines effective teaching as one that "brings about effective and successful student learning that is deep and meaningful". It includes actions taken by teachers that turn student learning into a relatively easy and suc-



cessful process, involving the use of well-chosen technical and didactic skills. Stronge (2018, p. 252) further observes that the effectiveness of instruction, and thus learning, depends on the teacher's background, dispositions, instructional practices implemented, and interaction with pupils, their parents and other pedagogues. Professional knowledge should be well-interwoven with instructional planning, effective delivery of knowledge, reliable assessment practices or friendly learning environment (Stronge, 2018, p. 12). Effective instruction can be performed only by a teacher able to create clear communication conditions, showing deep caring, and involved in diligent work (Stronge, 2018, pp. 253–258). By contrast, the notion of 'ineffectiveness' is perceived as "poor performance, failure to meet expectations, and underutilization of potential" (Merki et al., 2017, p. 3). Astleitner (2020, p. 40) associates ineffectiveness in instructional terms with "teaching malfunctions, teaching problems, teaching errors, teaching mistakes, teaching failures and bad teaching, which are broadly understood as activities involved in teaching that are not supportive or even obstructing in reaching desired educational goals and standards in the classroom". Lupia (2016, pp. 9–11) identifies the sources of educational ineffectiveness as the teachers' misconceptions about ways in which students acquire knowledge and skills and take decisions, and how they value various kinds of input and information. Overall, poor instruction is characterized by low learner involvement in learning and classroom work and low expectations of the teaching staff for students.

As can be seen from the above considerations, teacher-student interaction appears to be one of the crucial conditions of educational success. Teacher conduct constitutes a very significant element of this interaction. As noted by Creemers (2003, p. 117), there are a number of prerequisites for it to contribute to effective teaching. The ones that are relevant to the current discussion involve

- management, and orderly and quiet atmosphere,
- clarity of presentation,
- high expectations.

The above factors are clearly connected with the language of instruction used by the teacher. The rules of conduct established for classroom work, forms of address, delivery of new material, the formulation of learning goals as well as any language exchange taking place in the classroom all depend on specific language forms used by the teacher. High communication standards become even more urgent in difficult learning circumstances such as those created by the COVID-19 pandemic with all the limitations and changes of the learning conditions that accompanied it. The often drastic personal experiences of both teachers and learners connected with the death of close relatives or personal suffering from the disease

called for more sensitive and tactful forms of linguistic expression during classes. Hence, it is to be expected that there should appear considerable rise in the use of euphemistic/dysphemistic expressions in classroom interaction. In this context, the awareness of other people's opinions, habits and preferences as well as prior experiences seems to greatly influence the achievement of interaction goals. Similarly, the ability to interpret other people's intentions constitutes a necessary skill leading to efficient communication and the fulfilment of conversation aims (Knapp & Daly, 2002). Hence, a teacher possessing these skills, sensitive to her students' worldviews and personal experiences will be more successful in building a positive type of in-class interaction, also involving the use of euphemistic language.

### 3. STUDY AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The major aims of the present study are twofold. Firstly, we intend to explore the students' perspective on the use of euphemistic expressions inside and outside the university context in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic with a view to determining the potential of the pandemic to release human linguistic creativity and affect their everyday personal interactions and perception of the surrounding reality. Secondly, we want to find out what significance young people ascribe to the influence of the euphemistic language on human relations in general and teacher-student interaction in particular. The results of the research are meant to help university teachers create successful interaction patterns with their students based on mutual understanding, respect and sensitivity in the difficult times of the pandemic. This study is, to our knowledge, the first attempt to explore the use of pandemic-related euphemisms in the context of education at the university level and is likely to shed new light on the process of teacher-student interactions. We would like to determine whether there is in fact any growing need to include more euphemistic language in teacher-student interaction caused by the new conditions connected with the pandemic. Thus, there are two major queries that we would like to respond to in the present study.

- Research question 1: What is the students' perspective on the use of euphemisms, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Research question 2: Can euphemistic language affect teacher-student interactions?

The research tool used in the present study was an online questionnaire addressed at university students of English at the John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin, Poland. The survey was prepared by means of Google forms and made

available in December 2022.<sup>2</sup> Overall, 57 respondents completed the questionnaire. Our study predicted the inclusion of every second-year student enrolled in the classes despite their heterogeneity. However, out of 80 people, 57 decided to complete the survey. The survey was anonymous to guarantee the most honest answers. It opened with a dictionary definition of a euphemism to make sure that the respondents did not confuse this notion with any other term as we were interested in their attitude to the very phenomenon and not their linguistic knowledge. The questionnaire consisted of 32 questions, 10 of which were of the open type allowing students to give free answers. Thematically, the questions can be arranged into the following groups:

- Enquiring about general information about the respondents (gender, age, education profession)
- Collecting information about the respondents' general knowledge and use of euphemisms, i.e. words they replace and reasons for such replacements
- Asking about the respondents' awareness of euphemism use in their closest environment, mass media and social groups likely to resort to euphemistic language
- Checking the respondents' choices of euphemisms/dysphemisms for frequently occurring 'offensive' or unacceptable words in Polish
- Examining the respondents' attitude towards the use of euphemisms and its relation to the concept of language creativity
- Determining reasons for the use of euphemisms
- Exploring the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the creation of euphemisms and the respondents' knowledge of them.

The questions were formulated both in Polish and English for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of the students were of Polish origin and we assumed that the most honest answers can be given when the respondent knows precisely what they are asked about. However, the classes were attended also by a number of people from Ukraine, Belorussia and some were Erasmus students. The Ukrainian students, in particular, were an interesting case as almost all of them know Polish and use this language in their everyday conversations but to make sure that all the questions were well-understood by them, we also included their English versions.

Ten of the survey questions asked the respondents to provide euphemistic expressions that they use instead of some suggested unacceptable Polish words. The lexical items that we chose for the study here were selected on the basis of the

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<sup>2</sup> Available at [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1RLjPzJFS8qSxby31K\\_EuVkv6gAI\\_voIbZSExklZKdf8/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1RLjPzJFS8qSxby31K_EuVkv6gAI_voIbZSExklZKdf8/edit).

prior set of brief interviews with native speakers of Polish who indicated the problematic vocabulary. These coincided with the author's personal observations concerning the use of euphemisms. Another set of four questions contained examples of euphemistic phrases, two being popular substitutes for the anti-COVID-19 vaccine/vaccination. The choice of these expressions was preceded by the author's investigation of three internet blogs: *#ToSieSamoKomentuje* (owned by Grzegorz Płaczek, with 84.5 thousand subscribers), *Dawid Mysior TV* (owned by Dawid Mysior, with 80.7 thousand subscribers) and *BNB Bądź na bieżąco* (owned by Maciej Podstawka, with 362 thousand subscribers) for the period of three months of 2021—the year of the pandemic. The videos of the first two vloggers were published twice a week, whereas Podstawka's news and commentaries were delivered every day. The result of our investigation, focused on the language content of the videos, enabled us to determine two most frequent substitutes for the words *vaccine* and *vaccinate*, namely—*eliksir* 'elixir' and *zakeczupować się* 'get ketchupped'. Hence, the survey questions addressed the respondents' knowledge of these two euphemisms. In the subsequent sections, the results of the study are presented and discussed.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The unfolding discussion will be based on the results of the questionnaire described above. As already indicated, the survey consisted of 32 questions that were answered by 50 research participants in December 2022. The first four questions collected general data concerning gender, age, education and profession of the respondents. 66.7% of the research participants identified themselves as women and 33.3% as men. As for the age category, 50% of the respondents were between 20 and 30, 41.7 % between 15 and 20, 6.3% between 30 and 40 and 2.1% above 50.<sup>3</sup> As for education, 62.5% have graduated from some secondary school, whereas, the remaining 37.5 have higher education. Since also students of part-time studies completed the questionnaire, apart from identifying themselves as students, the respondents also indicated some other professions, such as architect, mathematician, IT worker or paramedic.

The second group of questions was focused on the participants' perspective on the general use of euphemisms, more specifically, words they replace and reasons for such substitutions. Question 5, a multiple choice one, enquiring about the kinds of words that are normally replaced by euphemisms, contained seven possi-

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<sup>3</sup> Note that also students of part-time studies took part in the survey.

ble options to choose from plus the ‘Other’ category. The percentage scores for the suggested answers were as follows:

1. vulgarisms—45.8
2. sexual organs and sexual acts—35.4
3. expressions likely to offend your interlocutors—27.1
4. words evoking fear or disgust—16.7
5. expressions that are politically incorrect—10.4
6. expressions that are socially unacceptable—20.8
7. each of the above-mentioned, depending on a situation—45.8.

One person added that she avoids vulgar language when talking to her mom.

Question 6 required the respondents to specify examples of the most frequent unacceptable words they replace in conversations with euphemisms. 48 people answered it, giving numerous instances of offensive language and their corresponding euphemisms. The COVID-19 pandemic-related vocabulary included words such as *szczepionka* ‘vaccine’ (replaced with *szczypawka* ‘earwig’, *eliksir* ‘elixir’ and *keczupowanie* ‘getting ketchupped’), as well as *zaszczepić (się)* ‘get vaccinated’ (*zakeczupować (się)* ‘get ketchupped’). The remaining examples are listed in the table below.

**Table 1**

*Offensive Words and Their Euphemistic Substitutes*

UNACCEPTABLE WORD	GLOSS	EUPHEMISMS	GLOSS
<i>syf</i>	‘pigsty place’	<i>bałagan</i>	‘mess’
<i>umrzeć</i>	‘die’	<i>odejść, zasnąć w Panu</i>	‘pass away, fall asleep in the Lord’
<i>gruby</i>	‘fat’	<i>puszysty, przy kości</i>	‘plump’
<i>Kurwa!</i>	‘Fuck!’	<i>Kurde! Kurcze! Karwa! Kurka!</i>	‘Blimey!’
<i>Cholera jasna!</i>	‘Shit!’	<i>Holibka! Szlag!</i>	‘Damn!’
<i>kurwa</i>	‘whore’	<i>dziwka, szon, kurtyzana, kobieta lekkich obyczajów, kurnia</i>	‘prostitute, woman of loose morals’
<i>dupa</i>	‘ass’	<i>tyłek, cztery litery, pupa</i>	‘butt, four letters, bottom’
<i>miesiączka</i>	‘get a period, menses’	<i>te dni</i>	‘these days’
<i>Murzyn</i>	‘Negro’	<i>czarnoskóry, Afroamerykanin</i>	

UNACCEPTABLE WORD	GLOSS	EUPHEMISMS	GLOSS
<i>czarny</i>	'black'	<i>ciemnoskóry</i>	'black, Afro-American' 'darkskin'
<i>nieinteligentny</i>	'unintelligent'	<i>mądry inaczej, wybitna jednostka</i>	'wise differently, eminent person'
<i>osoba samotna</i>	'single'	<i>singiel</i>	'single'
<i>Nie kłam!</i>	'don't lie!'	<i>Nie cygań!</i>	'don't cheat!'
<i>kłamać</i>	'to lie'	<i>mijać się z prawdą</i>	'miss the truth'
<i>iść do toalety</i>	'go to the toilet'	<i>iść przypudrować nos</i>	'powder one's nose, go to the little girls' room'
<i>debil</i>	'moron'	<i>pajac</i>	'clown'

Question 7 was asked to obtain information concerning the reasons for the use of euphemisms. The suggested answers included the options listed below plus the option 'Other'. We quote these together with the percentages scored by each answer:

1. not to sound vulgar (84.2%)
2. to avoid hurting someone's feelings (63.2%)
3. to impress my interlocutor (8.8%)
4. to avoid being censored (15.8%)
5. because of political correctness (15.8%)
6. to hide something from some listeners (e.g. children) (40.4%)
7. to identify with /adapt myself to other people (26.3%)
8. I do not use any euphemisms (3.5%)

Apparently, the list of the options we provided was exhaustive as no additional answer was given by the respondents. As revealed by the responses indicated in Question 8, 66.7% of the participants noticed the use of euphemisms by other people, whereas 31.6% admitted that they do not pay attention to this phenomenon and hence could not indicate the 'Yes' answer. Only one respondent indicated 'No' here. Question 9 was similar to the previous one and enquired whether the participants noticed any euphemisms on TV, Internet, in movies, magazines, and journals. Again, only two people chose 'No', 14% did not pay any attention to that phenomenon, and as many as 82.5% selected the 'Yes' option. When asked to specify the contexts in which they heard or read any euphemisms (Question 10), the respondents indicated the following answers:

1. television (69.6%)
2. internet (64.3%)
3. radio (46.4%)
4. newspapers/magazines (33.9%)
5. movies (62.5%)
6. everyday conversations (71.4%)

Only one person heard euphemistic language at work. In Question 11, we wanted to find out which social group, according to the respondents, most frequently uses euphemistic expressions. The answers given were as follows:

1. parents (63.2%)
2. politicians (36.8%)
3. teachers (50.9%)
4. bloggers (17.5%)
5. people with impeccable manners (35.1%)
6. intelligent people (36.8%)
7. priests and monks (33.3%)
8. women (28.1%)
9. men (10.5%)

Questions 12–21 examined the euphemistic substitutes the respondents would use to replace the suggested unacceptable Polish words. The results are summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Offensive Words and Euphemisms Used as Substitutes*

Offensive word/phrase	Gloss	Euphemisms	Gloss		
<i>umrzeć</i>	'die'	<i>udać się na drugą stronę</i>	'go to the other side'		
		<i>odejść</i>	'pass away'		
		<i>odejść w sen wieczny</i>	'fall into eternal slumber'		
		<i>zejść</i>	'depart this life'		
		<i>kitnąć</i>	'die'		
		<i>odejść w pokoju</i>	'rest in peace'		
		<i>wąchać kwiatki od spodu</i>	'push up the daisies'		
		<i>szczepionka/zaszczepić się</i>	'vaccine/get vaccinated'	<i>zachipować (się)</i>	'get chipped'
				<i>get the needle</i>	'get the needle'
<i>lekarstwo, lek</i>	'medicine'				
<i>przyjąć dawkę</i>	'get a dose'				
<i>ukłuć</i>	'prick'				
<i>zabezpieczyć</i>	'protect'				

Offensive word/phrase	Gloss	Euphemisms	Gloss
		<i>zaszprycować się</i>	'take a shot'
		<i>ochronić się</i>	'protect oneself'
		<i>zakeczupować się</i>	'get ketchupped'
		<i>zastrzyk</i>	'injection'
		<i>zastrzyknąć się</i>	'get an injection'
		<i>keczupowanie</i>	'ketchupping'
		<i>przyjęcie preparatu</i>	'ingestion'
		<i>szczypać</i>	'sting, pinch'
		<i>dbać o siebie</i>	'care for oneself'
		<i>dostać lek</i>	'get the medicine'
		<i>eliksir</i>	'elixir'
<i>kochanek</i>	'lover'	<i>przyjaciel</i>	'friend'
		<i>partner</i>	'partner'
		<i>ktoś na boku</i>	'(have) a bit on the side'
		<i>druga miłość</i>	'second love'
		<i>sympatia</i>	'girlfriend'
		<i>partner seksualny</i>	'sex partner'
		<i>druga</i>	'the second'
		<i>inna</i>	'the other'
		<i>alternatywny partner</i>	'alternative partner'
		<i>nowa miłość</i>	'new love'
		<i>kochaś</i>	'paramour'
		<i>pani serca</i>	'Lady love'
		<i>side</i>	'side'
		<i>koleżanka</i>	'a colleague'
		<i>significant other</i>	'significant other'
		<i>adorator</i>	'adorer'
		<i>serdeczna przyjaciółka</i>	'close friend'
		<i>miłość życia</i>	'love of one's life'
		<i>druga połowa</i>	'significant other'
		<i>znajoma</i>	'acquaintance'
		<i>ukochany</i>	'beloved'
		<i>osoba towarzysząca</i>	'date, companion'
		<i>wybranek</i>	'sweetheart'
		<i>najlepszy kolega</i>	'best friend'
<i>marihuana</i>	'marihuana'	<i>trawka</i>	'grass'
		<i>odmóżdzenie</i>	'getting brainless'
		<i>boski relaks</i>	'divine relaxation'
		<i>MJ</i>	'MJ'
		<i>Maria, Mary</i>	'Mary'
		<i>Mary Jane</i>	'Mary Jane'
		<i>Marysia</i>	'Mary/dim.'



Offensive word/phrase	Gloss	Euphemisms	Gloss
		<i>siedmiolistne ziele</i>	'seven-leaf weed'
		<i>temacik 420</i>	'little 420 theme'
		<i>ziółko</i>	'weed/dim.'
		<i>kapusta</i>	'cabbage'
		<i>zielone</i>	'green stuff'
		<i>susz</i>	'dried stuff'
		<i>zielsko, zioło</i>	'weed'
		<i>green</i>	'green'
		<i>konopie</i>	'cannabis'
		<i>THC</i>	THC
		<i>Marycha</i>	'Mary'
		<i>pot</i>	'Pot'
		<i>sensi</i>	'sensi'
		<i>substancja relaksująca</i>	'relaxing substance'
		<i>to zielone coś</i>	'the green thing'
		<i>palonko</i>	'sth to smoke'
		<i>buszek</i>	—
		<i>pecynka</i>	—
<i>grubas</i>	'blimp'	<i>grubej kości</i>	'of thick bone'
		<i>dobrze jedzący</i>	'eating well'
		<i>big</i>	'big'
		<i>chubby</i>	'Chubby'
		<i>o dorodnych kształtach</i>	'full-figured'
		<i>grubokościsty</i>	'of thick bone/adj.'
		<i>okrągły</i>	'round, plump'
		<i>osoba z nadwagą</i>	'overweight'
		<i>krąglejszy</i>	'more round'
		<i>chudy inaczej</i>	'other than thin'
		<i>nieco większych rozmiarów</i>	'of slightly bigger size'
		<i>przy kości</i>	'thick'
		<i>ptyś</i>	'cream puff'
		<i>pulchniak</i>	'chubby [N]'
		<i>pulchny</i>	'chubby [Adj]'
		<i>puszysty</i>	'lush, plus-size'
		<i>pączuś</i>	'dumpling, donut girl'
		<i>tęgi</i>	'stout'
		<i>kluska</i>	'dumpling'
		<i>miś</i>	'teddy bear'
		<i>plus-size</i>	'plus-size'
		<i>pulpecik</i>	'meatball'
		<i>większy</i>	'bigger'

Offensive word/phrase	Gloss	Euphemisms	Gloss
<i>debil</i>	'moron'	<i>głupek</i>	'nitwit'
		<i>niemądry</i>	'unwise'
		<i>tluk</i>	'booby'
		<i>mało inteligentny</i>	'not very intelligent'
		<i>głupi</i>	'stupid'
		<i>specyficzny charakter</i>	'special character'
		<i>tęskniący za rozumem</i>	'longing for reason'
		<i>pajac</i>	clown, jumping jack'
		<i>pustak</i>	'empty head'
		<i>specjalny</i>	'special'
		<i>głupiutki</i>	'silly'
		<i>ćwierćinteligent</i>	'sub-mental'
		<i>z żółtymi papierami</i>	'sb certified'
		<i>niespełna rozumu</i>	'out of one's mind'
		<i>dzban</i>	'jug'
		<i>pacan</i>	'clot'
		<i>inteligentny inaczej</i>	'other than intelligent'
		<i>niegrzeszący inteligencją</i>	'non-intelligent'
		<i>mniej ogarnięty</i>	'less organized'
		<i>palant</i>	'jerk'
		<i>osoba upośledzona</i>	'retard'
		<i>niezbyt lotny</i>	'slow of wit'
		<i>niepełnosprytny</i>	'slow of wit'
<i>pijak</i>	'drunkard'	<i>alkoholik</i>	'alcoholic [N]'
		<i>alkoholowy</i>	'alcoholic [Adj]'
		<i>nadużywający alkoholu</i>	'misusing alcohol'
		<i>drinker</i>	'drinker'
		<i>koneser trunków</i>	'liquor connoisseur'
		<i>lubiący wypić</i>	'sb who likes drinking'
		<i>nie wylewający za kołnierz</i>	'holding one's liquor'
		<i>nietrzeźwy</i>	'intoxicated'
		<i>trunkowy</i>	'a drinking guy'
		<i>z problemami</i>	'with problems'
		<i>pan żul</i>	'Mr tramp'
		<i>pod wpływem</i>	'under the influence'
		<i>smakosz</i>	'gourmet'
		<i>uzależniony</i>	'addicted'
		<i>amator</i>	'amateur, lover'
		<i>balowicz</i>	'party animal'
		<i>wielbiciel wysokoprocentowych napojów alkoholowych</i>	'admirer of spirits'
<i>kurwa</i>	'whore'	<i>dziwka</i>	'slut'

Offensive word/phrase	Gloss	Euphemisms	Gloss
		<i>dająca usługi płatnego seksu</i>	'paid sex services provider'
		<i>pani lekkich obyczajów</i>	'woman of easy virtue'
		<i>kurnia</i>	'chick'
		<i>kurtyzana</i>	'courtesan'
		<i>nieszanująca się</i>	'with no self-respect'
		<i>nocna mucha</i>	'night fly'
		<i>pani do towarzystwa</i>	'escort'
		<i>pani spod latarni</i>	'working girl'
		<i> prostytutka</i>	'prostitute'
		<i>Rwa</i>	2nd syllable of <i>kurwa</i> 'whore'
		<i>suczka</i>	'little bitch'
		<i>ladacznica</i>	'harlot'
stara	'squaw'	<i>w kwiecie wieku</i>	'in one's prime'
		<i>dojrzała</i>	'mature, ripe'
		<i>w podeszłym wieku</i>	'advanced in age'
		<i>ze śladami mijającego czasu</i>	'with traces of passing time'
		<i>mama</i>	mom
		<i>mamusia</i>	'mommy'
		<i>mamuta</i>	'she mammoth'
		<i>matka</i>	'mother'
		<i>nie pierwszej młodości</i>	'not the first youth'
		<i>z wysokim peselem</i>	'with high PESEL'
		<i>wiekowa</i>	'aged'
		<i>w zaawansowanym wieku</i>	'at an advanced age'
		<i>poważna</i>	'serious'
		<i>rodzicielka</i>	'Mater'
		<i>z bagażem doświadczeń</i>	'with a lifetime of experience'
		<i>znająca życie</i>	'knowing life'
		<i>babka</i>	'granny'
		<i>Indianka</i>	'Indian woman'
		<i>w starszym wieku</i>	'at an elderly age'
		<i>starsza</i>	'elderly'
		<i>emerytka</i>	'retired'
		<i>wcześniej urodzona</i>	'born earlier'
penis	'penis'	<i>siusiak</i>	'willy'
		<i>członek</i>	'penis'
		<i>fujarka</i>	'pipes, wee-wee'
		<i>kabel</i>	'cable'

Offensive word/phrase	Gloss	Euphemisms	Gloss
		<i>kielbasa</i>	'sausage'
		<i>gentleman</i>	gentleman
		<i>kielki</i>	'sprouts'
		<i>kuśka</i>	'cock'
		<i>member</i>	'member'
		<i>męski narząd płciowy</i>	'male sex organ'
		<i>męski organ rozrodczy</i>	'male reproductive organ'
		<i>parówka</i>	'wiener'
		<i>penio</i>	'penis-let'
		<i>przyrodzenie</i>	'male genital organ'
		<i>ptaszek</i>	'dicky-bird'
		<i>ptak</i>	'bird'
		<i>siurdak/siurek</i>	'pee-pee'
		<i>krocze</i>	'crotch'
		<i>miejsce pod</i>	'the place below'
		<i>męskie genitalia</i>	'male genitals'
		<i>PP</i>	PP
		<i>prącie</i>	'phallus'
		<i>fiutek</i>	'jako, little dick'

Question 22 addressed the respondents' perception of the use of euphemisms. The answers were assigned to the following categories:

1. as a lack of courage (12.3%)
2. as a necessity in some situations (77.2%)
3. as a sign of creativity (35.1%)
4. as a manifestation of impeccable manner (57.9%)
5. as a sign of fashion (8.8%)
6. as a way of avoiding awkward situations (or consequences) (57.9%)
7. as a sign of empathy (14%)

Questions 23 and 30 were related to the notion of language creativity. The latter asked the participants to define this concept, whereas the former enquired about concrete examples of euphemisms which demonstrate the creative aspect of language. Below a number of most interesting definitions of language creativity are provided.<sup>4</sup>

1. Using appropriate words in concrete situations.
2. Original use of words to convey new sense or meaning.

<sup>4</sup> The definitions were formulated in Polish. The translations are mine.

3. Ability to veil the speaker's intention through a specific choice of words.
4. Creation of sophisticated euphemisms.
5. Enrichment of the language's stock of words to avoid using blunt expressions and express meanings in a more acceptable way.
6. Creation of new words.
7. Appropriate selection of words to convey meanings.
8. Novel usage of language to impress people or carry out one's intention without offending others or sounding vulgar.
9. Polite way of expressing yourself, speaking in an interesting and intelligent way.
10. Expressing oneself in an amusing and interesting way.
11. Creation and learning of many new words.
12. Original ways of using language.
13. Creation of euphemisms.
14. Usage of low frequency words.
15. Ability to play with words.

In their answers to Question 23, the respondents gave examples of euphemisms which, in their opinion, manifest language creativity. This set includes forms such as: *wysoki pesel* 'high PESEL', *radiowa uroda* 'radio beauty', *zakeczupować się* 'get ketchupped', *eliksir* 'elixir', *kopnąć w kalendarz* 'kick the bucket', *tam gdzie król chodzi piechotą* 'go pay a visit to the captain's chair', *zaszczypany* 'stung', *parówka* 'wiener', *Ponglish* 'Polish English', *węchać kwiatki od spodu* 'push up the daisies', *cztery litery* 'the four letters (i.e. ass)', *puścić pawia* 'vomit'. The use of certain language forms can be a sign of being up-to-date. In Question 24, the participants indicated that this group can comprise: *dzban* 'fool', *stara* 'mother', *Marysia* 'Mary (for marihuana)', *zióło* 'weed', *zapodać* 'give, play', *essa* 'joy, relaxation', *ogarniać* 'understand', *przypał* 'embarrassing situation', *kurwizja* 'Kurski's television', *420* 'marihuana', *eliksir* 'elixir', or *szlug* 'a cigarette'. To avoid experiencing unpleasant consequences, e.g. connected with censorship (Question 25), the survey participants would advise the usage of such euphemisms as *kurka wodna* 'damn!', *pomidor* 'tomato' (instead of 'vaccine'), *zielone* 'green (for marihuana)', *puszysty* instead of *gruby* 'plump' as well as various euphemistic expressions replacing vulgarisms.

In Questions 27 and 28 we asked the respondents about the meaning of the euphemisms *przekręcić się* and *podjechać fetę* respectively. In both cases, the vast majority of the responses contained the correct definitions, i.e. 'to die' and 'to take amphetamine' respectively.

Questions 26 and 29 checked the respondents' familiarity with two pandemic-related euphemisms which were in frequent use in internet blogs. These were *przyjąć eliksir* 'get the elixir' meaning 'get the anti-COVID 19 vaccine' and *zakeczupować się* meaning 'getting vaccinated'. The suggested meanings of the two items are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Meanings of przyjąć eliksir and zakeczupować się*

<b>Przyjąć eliksir</b>		<b>Zakeczupować się</b>	
<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Gloss</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
<i>wypić alkohol</i> (23)	'drink alcohol'	<i>ubrudzić się keczupem</i>	'get dirty with ketchup'
<i>zaszczepić się</i> (7)	'get vaccinated'	<i>zaadaptować</i>	'adapt'
<i>przyjąć narkotyk</i> (4)	'take some drug'	<i>zamknąć się</i>	'shut up'
<i>wziąć leki</i>	'take medicine'	<i>zaszczepić się</i> (12)	'get vaccinated'
<i>wypić truciznę</i>	'drink poison'	<i>zalać się krwią</i>	'be covered with blood'
		<i>skaleczyć się</i>	'get hurt'
		<i>krwawić</i>	'be bleeding'
		<i>popętnić samobójstwo</i>	'commit suicide'
		<i>być cicho</i>	'be quiet'
		<i>oblać się rumieńcem</i>	'blush'
		<i>mieć okres</i>	'menstruate'

In Question 31 we asked whether the COVID-19 pandemic fostered the creation and use of any new euphemisms. 38.6% of the respondents think it did, whereas 17.5% believe it did not. 45.6% are not sure whether any new euphemisms appeared due to the pandemic. The examples of such euphemistic expressions supplied in response to Question 32 include *Dawid-19* 'David-19', *kolanowirus* 'knee-virus', *antyszczepionkowiec* 'vaccination opponent', *szur* 'lunatic', *foliarz* 'tin foil hat', *covidowcy* 'vaccination supporters', *eliksir* 'elixir, vaccine', *zakeczupować się* 'get ketchupped, vaccinated', *szczypawka* 'earwig, pinch', *koronka* 'coronavirus', *Rona* '[co]rona', *pomidor* 'tomato, vaccine', and *zaczepować się* 'get vaccinated'.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this section an attempt will be made to formulate answers to the two major research questions of the study. More specifically, we will try to determine whether euphemistic language can affect teacher–student interactions and examine the students' perspective on the use of euphemisms, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, before we proceed to the very analysis of the survey results, an important observation needs to be made. As regards the age profile of the research participants, the majority of them were young people between 15–30 years of age (84.2%). The other respondents (15.8%) belonged to older age groups as also part-time studies students participated in the research. It is noteworthy that most of these people, apart from being students, are also teachers. Thus, their perspective on the phenomenon of euphemisms can differ from that of the younger participants. We believe, however, that the impact of the opinions expressed by part-time studies students does not blur the overall picture and hence should not be overestimated.

It also has to be noted that 70.2% of the research participants were women, compared to 29.8% of men. This fact is likely to influence the results of the study as the problems upon which the present study focuses are related to the use of language in the context of interpersonal contacts. Numerous studies, e.g. Freed and Greenwood (2009), Tannen (2010) or Annis and Gray (2013), reveal that the language of women and that of men differ considerably, both in terms of communication aims and their styles. Women use language to build intimate relations, mutual understanding, provide support and sympathy for the interlocutors. Men's language, in turn, reflects status and independence. Topics raised in conversations in groups of male participants are often sport, work, common activities, whereas women are more likely to talk about personal issues. Women appear to be privileged in terms of having richer vocabulary and the ease to name complicated emotional states and feelings. Women use language to tighten interpersonal bonds, negotiate relations, while men build and confirm their social position. Men will more readily speak in public and avoid creating more personal relationships with the audience. Their way of naming things is definitely more precise, concrete and emotionally detached. In the light of the abovementioned observations, we conclude that also in the context of euphemisms, the attitudes of men and women will be different.

It is significant that all the research participants have either secondary or higher education, thus representing the upper social classes. We predict that the way language is used, including the issue of euphemisms, will be more important for them than for members of lower classes as they are aware of the role of language in revealing a person's social status, education and manners.

Turning now to the results of the questionnaire, we begin with the kind of vocabulary that is most often replaced with euphemisms. The student respondents indicated three major categories of words—vulgarisms, names of sexual organs and acts and words likely to hurt or offend the interlocutors. The first category scored as many as 50.9% votes, which calls for a somewhat closer analysis. Psychologists maintain that vulgarisms are used to strengthen one's proposition, no matter what it expresses, be it admiration, disapproval, fear or disgust. The use of swear words helps us cope with the excess of emotions and release inner tensions. It constitutes an outlet for fear, shame, anger, sadness and many other frustrating emotions. Interestingly, some experiments have proved that vulgarisms help people do physically hard work and diminish the intensity of pain. Byrne (2017) argues that vulgarisms also have the potential to establish and strengthen social bonds. However, simultaneously, women experience a lot of pressure from the deeply-rooted social stereotypes classifying ways of expressing emotions as either typically male or female. Swear words and vulgar language are associated with men's talk. Hence, probably, women avoid such expressions in order to fit into their roles and gain social acceptance. This intuition is apparently supported by our research findings. At the same time, such a conclusion seems to be in opposition to the prevailing conversation trends that we can observe nowadays. More precisely, both men and women, especially young ones, use a lot of vulgarisms and swear words in their everyday speech. Thus, in this respect, our experiment group seems to deviate, at least at the level of declaration, from the current norm. Part of the explanation to this state of affairs might be sought in the fact that the women who took part in the study are either teachers or intend to become ones. The role of the teacher, in turn, is normally associated with high standards and the necessity to constitute a positive example for future pupils. Women's focus on interpersonal relations and empathy account for the other two lexical areas liable to be most frequently replaced with euphemisms. Sexual activity and the domain of human feelings are treated by women as intimate matters calling for more subtle forms of linguistic expression. It can be argued that also the top three reasons for the use of euphemisms selected in Question 7, i.e. the need to avoid sounding vulgar or hurting other people and the need to hide something from interlocutors, e.g. children, can be attributed to the fact that the majority of the respondents were women.

The answers to Questions 8 and 9 clearly indicate that euphemisms are a noticeable element of both the respondents' life (66.7%) and mass media (82.5%). Since the participants indicated the Yes answer to Question 8, we can infer that they observe the use of euphemistic language both inside and outside the university context. Television, internet and everyday conversations are perceived as demon-



strating the most frequent use of euphemisms. Interestingly, the two social groups that, according to the respondents, most often employ euphemistic expressions in their speech are parents (63.2%) and teachers (50.9%). This implies that because of their specific social functions as role models and educators, parents and teachers are expected to use language with particular care and caution, showing sensitivity and respect for their interlocutors. As revealed by their answers to Question 11, the respondents seem to be well aware of that. Also the results indicate that three times as many women as men were expected to use euphemisms, which harmonizes neatly with our observations formulated above concerning differences between men's and women's language. When asked how they perceived the use of euphemisms, the survey participants indicated that the occurrence of such expressions in speech is in some situations necessary and inevitable (77.2%). The other two most frequently selected answers were 'manifestation of impeccable manner' and 'way of avoiding awkward situations or consequences'. Notice that both these reasons match teachers and parents. Simultaneously, the respondents appear to resort to euphemisms consciously and for significant reasons since motivations such as fashion or lack of courage scored the smallest number of votes.

To sum up the above discussion, the following conclusions can be formulated.

- Women more often than men resort to euphemistic language.
- People holding positions connected with interpersonal relations, e.g. teachers, are expected to use euphemisms.
- Students are well familiar with the phenomenon of euphemisms and use them consciously.

Thus, it has to be concluded that euphemisms are an important factor in teacher-student relations, supporting mutual respect and understanding.

The survey was also intended to reveal students' perceptions of the creative aspect of euphemistic language, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. 35.1% of the respondents treat the use of euphemisms as a manifestation of language creativity. In fact the participants gave 35 examples of euphemistic expressions illustrating the phenomenon of creativity. Our research findings indicate that students define the concept of language creativity in various ways but all these definitions pertain to some important aspect of creativity. It is noteworthy that the ability to create new forms of language, for example euphemisms, recurred in 5 out of 15 definitions of creativity. The respondents also stressed the link between creativity and intelligence. 36.8% of the survey participants admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic did foster the creation and use of new euphemisms, whereas only 17.5% took up the contrary position. These results need to be contrasted with the students' answers to Question 7 concerning the reasons for

using euphemisms where the options such as ‘avoiding being censored’ and ‘because of political correctness’ scored only 15.8% of the votes. This might imply that students were not afraid to speak openly about the pandemic-related matters and their use of euphemisms replacing words such as ‘vaccination’ or ‘vaccine’ was more an output of language creativity than some sort of under-the-radar behavior. They were also able to provide numerous examples of pandemic-related euphemisms but the ones that we asked about, i.e. *zakeczupować się* and *przyjąć eliksir* were not defined with equal precision. More specifically, the former was correctly linked with the process of vaccination by 12 people, whereas, the other by 7 survey respondents only. Hence, it has to be concluded that these euphemisms are not as popular in face-to-face contacts as in the Internet. Recall that the two expressions were regularly used by the bloggers, Dawid Mysior and Maciej Podstawka, who insisted on resorting to them in order to avoid censorship. Thus, we can also predict that the students would not expect these language forms to appear in the classroom language in their interactions with teachers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to explore the students’ perspective on the perception and use of euphemistic expressions inside and outside the university context and a possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their perceptions of this language phenomenon. It has been determined that students are well familiar with the process of replacing offensive language with more acceptable forms, they can correctly define the concept of euphemism and consciously resort to these language means in everyday life situations. The majority of the research participants were women and this fact had a considerable influence on the results of the questionnaire. The gender profile of the respondents accounts for the three major reasons given for using euphemisms: avoiding vulgar language, unacceptable ways of speaking about sexual organs and activity and trying not to hurt other people’s feelings. These reasons are in harmony with the general characteristics of women’s speech. Our finding also suggest that teachers are more likely to use euphemisms because of the social functions they perform, i.e. those of role models and educators. Thus, we argue that euphemistic language plays an important role in teacher-student interactions.

The research participants also see the creative potential of language manifesting itself in euphemistic expressions. They are capable of providing the relevant examples of COVID-19 related euphemisms but their instances only partly overlap

with the euphemisms used by bloggers in the Internet. Also euphemisms connected with the pandemic appear in the students' language for different reasons than in the language of the bloggers who claim to use such forms to avoid censorship.

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EUPHEMISMS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT  
IN THE TIMES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:  
THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

S u m m a r y

The aim of this paper is to explore the phenomenon of euphemisms as perceived by Polish university students in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The article presents an overview of the major theoretical issues related to the linguistic concept of euphemisms and their use in everyday situations during the years of the pandemic. The data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire administered in December 2022. This stage of the research was preceded by a close examination of three internet blogs in terms of COVID-related euphemistic vocabulary. The discussion of the findings is intended to reveal the students' perspective on the use of euphemisms, including the reasons for their use and the types of situations where such language forms are employed. The results are expected to shed some light on the possible impact that euphemistic language might have on student-teacher interactions. Another significant aspect addressed in this paper is the relationship between euphemisms and language creativity.

**Keywords:** euphemism; creativity; COVID-19 pandemic; interaction; offensive language

EUFEMIZMY W ŚRODOWISKU UNIWERSYTECKIM  
ORAZ ZEWNĘTRZNYM W DOBIE PANDEMII COVID-19.  
PERSPEKTYWA STUDENTÓW

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Głównym celem artykułu jest zbadanie zjawiska eufemizmów oraz ich postrzegania przez studentów uczelni wyższych w dobie pandemii COVID-19. Artykuł omawia podstawowe aspekty teoretyczne zjawiska eufemizmów – ich definicje, typy oraz funkcje, jakie pełnią w języku oraz specyfikę ich stosowania w latach naznaczonych zmaganiem się świata z pandemią koronawirusa. Dane językowe będące przedmiotem analizy zostały zebrane przy użyciu ankiety w grudniu 2022 roku oraz w wyniku analizy trzech kanałów internetowych zawierających liczne przykłady użycia wyrażeń eufemistycznych związanych z pandemią. Analiza materiału badawczego pozwala sformułować ciekawe wnioski dotyczące użycia eufemizmów w mowie studentów oraz celów, dla których są one stosowane. Ustalenia te rzucają nowe światło na rolę eufemizmów w relacjach uczeń–nauczyciel oraz zjawisko kreatywności językowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** eufemizm; kreatywność; pandemia COVID-19; interakcja; obraźliwy język