

Conversational Topic Preferences, Taboo Words and Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Teachers of Pangasinan State University-Sta.Maria Campus

Marlon L. Perado
Pangasinan State University
Philippines
E-mail: marlonperado10@gmail.com

Abstract

Though teachers have the noblest profession, they are not exempted of using taboos and euphemisms. They also use a language they prefer to express themselves. This paper investigates the conversational topic preferences, use of taboo words, euphemisms and cathartic words of teachers. Results of the study revealed that (1) sex is the most preferred topic by male teachers while work related matters are for females; (2) in terms of topics which should be kept private, both groups dealt on personal lives; (3) both male and female teachers spill improper words as cathartic expressions to show anger or fright; (4) when provoked, both respondents tend to utter harsh words to inflict insult or hurt on other people; (5) male utter more varied and more degrading expressions while females avoided the more insulting and derogatory cuss word; and (6) friends prove to be the most influential where they learn cuss words followed by media and neighborhood..

Keywords: *taboo word, euphemism, cathartic expressions, cuss word*

1. Introduction

Language is an essential part of our existence as human beings. Language is a way in which people communicate with each other in different situations and contexts in which that language represents the culture and inheritance of the society. Gao (2013) claims that in every society there are things which are believed to be not appropriate if spoken on public occasions.

Hudson (2000) contends that the way people communicate with each other varies from one culture to another. Such varieties are the result of many norms which are stipulated by speakers of certain cultures. One communication strategy used by speakers is called euphemism which is the extension of ordinary words and phrases to express unpleasant and embarrassing ideas. Euphemizing generally exists in almost every nation all over the world, no matter how civilized it is. In all natural languages both large families of languages and languages of minorities using euphemism is a common phenomenon (Samoskaeti, 2011).

People often use euphemistic utterances or expressions to avoid offensive or tabooed topics, to make them more implicit and considerate (Al-Khasawneh, 2018). Language speakers attempt to avoid and cover up certain words or expressions prohibited by individuals, societies, or religions. In addition, people tend to replace certain words of negative meanings with more favorable ones that have a better influence on the hearers (Rabab'ah & Al-Qarni, 2012). The negative meanings involve taboo expressions which speakers try to avoid. Therefore, language users have long attempted to enrich their languages with novel linguistic expressions such as concepts, collocations, idioms, and euphemisms.

Daluma (2017) mentioned in the study of Allan and Burrige (1991) that a euphemistic construct is deployed as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face with one's face or, through giving offense, that of the audience, or of some third party. To Allan and Burrige's perspective, the crux of euphemism serves as substitution for the other.

Euphemism is a universal phenomenon which implies substituting an insulting word or phrase in indirect way. More specifically, euphemism is a courteous way in which a harsh, inappropriate, or offensive word is replaced by a more polite one. Euphemism is used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offense, that of the audience, or of some third party (Allan & Burrige, 1991).

Euphemisms are words with meanings or sounds thought somehow to be nicer, cleaner, or more elevated and so used as substitutes for words deemed unpleasant, crude, or ugly in sound or sense. They are sugar coatings, and sometimes they try to hide things that ought not to be hidden (Wilson: 1993). They are powerful linguistic tools that are embedded so deeply in our language that few of us, even those who pride themselves on being plainspoken, never through a day without using them (Almayoadi, 2018).

Euphemisms are frequently used by speakers of different languages to soften the impact of concepts with the potential to cause offense and social disapproval. Today, the use of euphemisms has increased by the media and new and controversial euphemism have also been born (Hojati, 2012).

Face theory claims that people are required to make concessions during communication (Hudson as cited by Ham 2001:13). If the face value of one party is threatened, the aim may not be fulfilled and the communicative act will be a failure. The use of euphemism can help to avoid offense through softening of language to avoid embarrassment. Grice's Co-operative Principle explains why speakers are able to implicate more from expressions than is explicitly stated. Grice postulates that this communicative ability is aided by both participants' unspoken adherence to certain conversational rules, or maxims: quantity, quality, relation and manner. Unlike rules, these maxims are often broken and it is here that implicature, i.e. what is meant, but not expressly stated and euphemism become prominent. As Hudson (1980:115) states that as hearers, "we try hard to make sense of what other people say, even when this

means reading far more between the lines that is in them.” When a speaker/writer appears to have broken one of the maxims, their interlocutor searches for the motivation and implicature (Widdowson, 1990). This is a helpful tool in the use and understanding of euphemism. Sperber and Wilson (1986) expounded Grice’s maxim of relation and they claim that “relevance” is the most fundamental principle in interaction. When using euphemism, a speaker, often breaks that maxim of relation in failing to be relevant to the current topic. An example of this is “score” (have sexual intercourse). In the context, in which this word may be used, it is unlikely that the participants would have in any manner relate it to sports, making the word irrelevant. However, by using implicating strategies, the meaning will be clear. While relevance is not strictly a motivation behind euphemism, it may be related to tactics for euphemism comprehension. Politeness aims to avoid offense and be respectful to the audience. Perspectives on politeness vary between people, speech communities, societies and cultures. For this reason, politeness is defined pragmatically, with reference to “some contextual norm of appropriateness” (Ham, 2001:15). Euphemisms are encouraged in a society where politeness is highly valued, where indirect reference is considered a sign of good taste, and where direct reference can be embarrassing.

In this regard, communicators utilize euphemism as an intentional facility in all facets of life to lubricate their social engagements. The code replacement could operate in professional conducts, cultural norms, religious issues, ceremonial activities, etc. As euphemistic expressions might activate as a concealment of altruism in certain quarters; they could also help in eliminating social taboos in society. In all these, interactants might deploy language nuances or expound communication practices (McDonald, 1988).

Thus, the researcher prompted to investigate the conversational topic preferences, taboo words and euphemisms use by male and female faculty members of Pangasinan State University. The present study replicated Tajalosa’s study with little modifications. This time, the data were taken from teachers as compared to previous studies where data were purely taken from the students. In addition, this research is interested in determining the description and analysis of conversational topic preferences, use taboo words, euphemism and cathartic words use by the respondents.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions: 1) Do male and female teachers differ in the following: topic preferences, use of taboo words, use of euphemisms, and use of cathartic words? 2) Which among the following are the sources of respondents’ cathartic words? a) Parents; b) Colleagues/friends; c) Neighbors; d) Media (e.g. newspaper, TV, movies, radio)?

2. Methodology

Descriptive survey method was utilized in this research in order to obtain relevant and reliable information to give light to questions that this study sought to answer. A total of 34 faculty members composed of 14 male and 18 female faculty members from the different College namely Teacher Education, Engineering, Agribusiness Management, Agriculture, Technology and Livelihood Education and Information Technology) of Pangasinan State University aged 21 to 61 were randomly selected served as respondents of the study. All respondents' first language is 'Iloko' but the researcher opted to state the questions in Filipino language (tagalog) to capture the exact meaning of the statements of the respondents since he is not well versed in 'Iloko' language.

The instrument used in this study was adopted from the study of Tajolosa (2012) and was also used by some researchers on Euphemisms study. However, there was a little modification made by a researcher since his respondents were all teachers. The interview consisted of eliciting answers to several questions which were administered orally through face to face interview and a phone call in order to elicit spontaneous responses and not to give respondents time to think twice or to change their first response. It is important that the responses be spontaneous since what is being studied is supposed to be the respondents' actual language (e.g. use of cuss words, euphemisms, etc.). Another reason for administering the questions orally was for the researcher to provide explanations while administering the questions.

The questions consisted of the following:

1. *Pag kakuwentuhan mo ang friends mo/colleagues mo, ano ba usually ang mga topics na pinagkukuwentuhan ninyo?* (When you are exchanging stories with your friends, what topics do you usually talk about?)
2. *Anong topic sa palagay mo ang hindi in good taste na pagusapan ng mga magkakakilala lamang?* (What topics do you think should be spoken about only with those whom one is intimate with?)
3. *Pag ikaw ay galit na galit sa isang tao o sa pangyayari, ano ang una mong nasasabi sa pagkainis o pagkagalit?* For example, *bumababa ka ng jeep, tapos biglang umandar, tapos nadapa ka.* (When you are very angry with someone or at something that has just happened, what is the first thing you say in irritation or in anger? For example, you're getting off a tricycle then suddenly it moves.)
4. *Anong bagay/mga bagay ang hindi mo masabi ng tuwiran o matawag sa tunay nitong pangalan, halimbawa-magjingle? Ilista mo at ibigay mo ang mga terms na ginagamit mo para dito.* (What are the things you cannot say directly or call by their real names, for example: to urinate-mag-jingle? List these and give the terms you use for them.)

5. *Kailan ka nagmumura? ano ang pinakamasakit na murang nasabi mo o masasabi mo sa isang tao? Bakit?* (When do you cuss? What is the worst thing you have used or you can use with a person, Why?)
6. *Kanino mo natutuhan ang pagmumura? sa magulang mo ba, sa kaibigan/colleague, kapitbahay, pagbabasa, T.V., pelikula o radio? Pumili ng tatlo.* (From whom did you learn to cuss- from your parents, your colleague/peers, neighbors, from your reading, TV. movies or radio? Choose three.)

The researcher took the following steps in pursuing this study:

1. The researcher sought permission from the respondents for a face-to-face interview following the standard health protocol. Though, there were instances that respondents were in one room, the researcher had the chance for a group interview tossing same questions at a time to the respondents. Some respondents were interviewed through a phone call.
2. The researcher used ‘Tagalog’ language though the respondents’ first language is ‘Iloku’ in order to encourage the respondents answer in ‘Tagalog’ and for the researcher to capture the exact answers of the respondents.
3. The researcher wrote down each respondents’ answer.

The data were analyzed and interpreted using the following statistical measure. This was used to describe the profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age and to determine the sources of cathartic words among the respondents.

3. Findings and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents according to gender.

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	14	43.75
Female	18	56.26
Total	32	100%

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As indicated in the table, 14 or 43.75% are male and 18 or 56.26% are female with a total of 32 respondents randomly selected from the College of Teacher Education, Agribusiness Management, Agriculture, Technology and Livelihood Education, and Information Technology.

3.1 Conversational Topic Preference of Male and Female Teachers

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the conversational topic preference of male and female teachers. The table below shows that sex (28.57%) tops among the list of favorite topics in conversations with friends of male respondents while work related or school matters rank first (38.88%) among the list of most favorite topics by the female respondents. Gala/Travel matters (14.28%) ranked second in the topic preferences of male teachers while personal life ranked second in the topic preferences of female with 22.22%.

Table 2
Conversational Topic Preference of Male and Female Teachers

Topic	Male		Female		
	<i>f</i>	Percentage	<i>f</i>	Percentage	
Career	1	7.14	sex	2	11.11
Gala/Travel	2	14.28	Business/ investments	1	5.55
Buhaybuhay/personal life	1	7.14	Work related/school matters	7	38.88
Sex	4	28.57	Personal life/Buhaybuhay	4	22.22
Chismis	1	7.14	Family	2	11.11
Jowa	1	7.14	Chismis	2	11.11
Ghost	1	7.14			
Motorcycle parts	1	7.14			
Food	1	7.14			
Past days	1	7.14			

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3.2 Male and Female Use of Taboo and Euphemisms

Tables 3 and 4 present the taboo words and their corresponding euphemisms which are employed by male and female respondents to soften them. As shown in the tables below, taboo words which are common to both groups involve excretory processes – to defecate and to urinate. Euphemisms to cover defecating have the greatest number in both males and females with 9 and 16 respectively. Defecating is the most tabooed word mentioned by the respondents.

Table 3

Taboo words and the Corresponding Euphemisms Employed by Male Teachers

Male Taboo word	Euphemisms used	f	Percentage
To defecate	Magdedeposit, uupo sa trono, carlos	9	64.28
To Urinate	MagcCR, carlos romulo	2	14.28
Sex	Change oil/dyug-dyug	1	7.14
Masturbate	mariang palad, all by myself	2	7.14

Table 4

Taboo words and the Corresponding Euphemisms Employed by Female Teachers

female Taboo word	Euphemisms used	f	Percentage
To defecate	Ebak, magCR,mag poops,jebis, tachi	16	88.88
To Urinate	jingle	1	5.55
Mestruation	Meron ako	1	5.55

As shown in the tables 3 and 4, it can be noted that the euphemisms mentioned by the female respondents are not vulgar and offensive in nature as compared to male recognized taboo words and the euphemisms.

Topics Considered Not in Good Taste by Teachers

For topics that should be discussed with intimates only, both respondents ranked personal life first with (28.57%) for male and (50%) for their counterparts followed by romantic relationship and pinag-uusapan ang ibang tao as shown in table 5 below.

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Table 5
 Topics Considered Not in Good Taste by Teachers

Topic					
Male	<i>f</i>	Percentage	Female	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Personal life	4	28.57	Pinag-uusapan ang buhay ibang tao	7	38.88
Sex	1	7.14	Personal life	9	50.00
Romantic Relationship	3	21.42	Chismis	2	11.11
Career	1	7.14	Achievement	1	5.55
Family	1	7.14	Work-related	1	5.55
Secrets	1	7.14	Common Experiences	1 2	5.55 11.11

Male and Female Use of Cathartic Expressions

According to Montenegro (1982) as cited by Tajolosa, cathartic expressions include a whole range of obscenity, blasphemy, profanity and invectives. These expressions are usually said within a level of awareness and spontaneity caused by strong emotions (Tajolosa, 2012).

Table 6 shows the respondents' favorite cathartic expressions. It is interesting to note that there are numerous cathartic expressions use by the respondents. Both groups ranked buwisit with 21.42% for the males and 33.33% for the females. Ang kapal ng mukha is ranked second by the males while the females have shit, buwenas and walang hiya as the second.

Similar to Tajalosa's and Montenegro's findings, males tend to be more explicit and intense in their use of cathartic expressions and while there is a tendency for few females to be more expressive as well. It can be noted that female is less explicit, more repressed in their use of cathartic expressions.

Table 6
 Male and Female Use of Cathartic Expression

Topic					
Male	<i>f</i>	Percentage	Female	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Ang kapal ng mukha	2	14.28	Ti obet nan	1	5.55
Buwisit	3	21.42	Buwisit/nkakabwisit	6	33.33
Ano ba yan	1	14.28	Grabe met	1	5.55
Fuck	1	7.14	Shit	2	11.11
Puta	1	7.14	Kaiinis	1	5.55
Bobo	1	7.14	Anyamet ten	1	5.55
shit	1	7.14	Kaasar	1	5.55

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Putik	1	7.14	Sira	1	5.55
Punyeta	1	7.14	Buwenas	2	11.11
Bwenas	1	7.14	Walang hiya	2	11.11
Okitnam	1	7.14			

Use of Cuss Words

As cited by Tajolosa (2021) in the study of Montenegro (1982,p.189), cuss words, unlike cathartic expressions, are deliberately meant to hurt or insult (Montenegro, 1982,p.189 as cited by Tajoloso, 2021). Table presents the harshest words men and women respondents can utter to anyone.

Male and Female Use of Cuss Words

Table 7 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the harshest/worst cuss words that male and female teachers can utter to anyone. It can be gleaned below that both respondents rated ‘Putang ina’ as the harshest word they can utter to anyone. Most of the respondents make use of Putang ina without mo which may be considered less harsh. This findings is also similar with Tajalosa’s (2012) study. It can be noted in the table that female use cathartic words which sound not derogatory as expressed in Iluko like okis saba and tae na which are less harsh as compared to their counter parts.

Table 7
 Harshest Cuss Words One Can Utter to Anyone

Male Cuss Word	<i>f</i>	Percentage	Female Cuss Word	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Buwisit	2	14.28	Putang ina/Putang ina mo	6	33.33
Putang ina	5	35.71	Buwenas	2	11.11
mo/Putang ina mo					
Mangibabaing ka ti	1	7.14	shit	5	27.77
pamilya					
Okitnam	1	7.14	Tae na	1	5.55
Punyeta	1	7.14	tanga	2	11.11
Gago	1	7.14	Okis saba	1	5.55
Tanga	2	14.28	Kin na yu	1	5.55
shit	1	7.14			

Sources of Cuss Words

Table 8 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the sources of cuss words used by the respondents.

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Table 8
 Teachers' Sources of Cuss Words

Sources of Cuss Words	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Friends	27	84.37
Kapit-bahay	13	40.62
Mass media	19	59.37
Magulang	7	21.87
kakilala	4	12.5
ML game (mobile legend)	1	3.12
Colleague	6	18.75
Asawa	1	3.12

As indicated in table 8, friends are the first source for learning cuss words with 84.37%. These data are in congruence with the findings of Montenegro (1982), Tajalosa (2012) and Medriano et al.,(2018) who conducted studies in the same line. Mass media (59.37%) is second. Undeniably, exposure to movies, TV and other printed materials can be the sources of learning cuss words. Moreover, the direct and indirect influence of neighborhood cannot be underestimated with 40.62% which ranked third. All other sources of learning cuss words may come from magulang (21.87%), colleague (18.75%), kakilala (12.5%), asawa (3.12%), and ML (mobile legend) (3.12%).

4. Conclusion

Though teachers have the noblest profession, they are not exempted of using taboos and euphemisms. They also use a language they prefer to express themselves. People's language, their taboos and use of euphemisms have always been linked to their culture. It is the fact that learning a language varies from the kind of environment one has. Peers and media will always be a strong influence to teach them something, like the use of obscene words. With language contact and the existence of many culture of internet and media, it is not surprising that one speaks and act differently from the way previous generations of Filipinos do.

Based on the data revealed, (1) males are tend to be vulgar and fond of discussing sexual intercourse than females who are modest and prefer to talk more on life thing and work related matters; (2) when provoked, both respondents tend to utter harsh words to inflict insult or hurt on other people. Male utter more varied and more degrading expressions while females avoided the more insulting and derogatory cuss word; (3) friends prove to be the most influential where one learns a language and behavior, followed by media and neighborhood.

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