

Vaginal Code: The Euphemistic Trend In Filipino Family Gathering

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Abstract

This study explores the euphemistic phenomenon within the referential state of the female genitalia through the lens of identifying the vaginal euphemisms used by no more than 20 participants, specifically generations Z and X of Filipinos, in a family gathering setting. This investigation utilizes qualitative methods, as the goal of this research is to document the reasons and insights as potential factors of the participants. The word formation of these gathered euphemisms is analyzed using Warren's Model of Euphemism's devices. The overall findings showed that most generations Z and X participants reasoned that they use vaginal euphemisms because of cultural and environmental motivations and conditions. Furthermore, aside from refining people's knowledge of the propriety of words and leaving no room for misunderstanding, using explicit vocabulary referring to female genitalia is considered a vulgar and profane terminology as well as can be used as basis of personality. In addition, the majority of the vaginal euphemisms gathered have gone through either implication under semantic innovation or phonemic replacement under phonemic modification based on Warren's Model of Euphemism's method of formation.

Keywords: Euphemisms, Female Genitalia, Filipino family Gathering, Vaginal Code

Introduction

“An organ that must not be named” equates to the ideology of conservatism, which restricts the utterance of some words in a particular language, as this cultivates vulgarity and also neglects the established speech etiquette in some cultural societies. Thus, the need to use an alternative manner to refer to such words encourages the exertion of euphemism in various settings. The euphemisms as alternatives, such as “it” or “down there,” to replace the explicit word “vulva,” is a vocabulary choice that assimilates a folk conception of knowledge on the female's body in general. However, this euphemistic utilization can be a symptom of a stigma against the unfiltered speech — once naming “vulva” using the word itself is considered unpleasant. This notion argues that the act in question, mainly moderating the use of explicit words for female genitalia in a specific language, is the same as not only depowering the named object but also the “namer” of the object, and the organ's legitimacy [1].

In other words, the absence of knowledge about the proper way of using vaginal vocabulary — this mirrors the potential ignorance of the users not only on the female genital anatomy but also in its function [2].

However, various studies recognize situations regarding the utilization of euphemisms as substitute terms, as a euphemistic trend that links language use and what is culturally accepted in a particular society. In such cases, some individuals condemn the use of explicit terms as it contravenes their cultural values [3].

Thereupon, this adaptive response prevents them from being labeled as socially inappropriate or seen as vulgar, indicating a context that defines the utilization of euphemism as a form of conformity in communication [4].

The identified euphemistic phenomenon also visibly exists in Filipino culture. The existence of Filipino conservatism expresses how Filipinos address their body parts, wherein Filipinos are used in calling, mainly their private parts using other existing words. In such instances, instead of using the explicit term to refer to people's genitals, they often use the word “flower” to point out the genital area of their daughter and “bird” for their son's, which is clearly a representation of speech dependent on culture [5].

Moreover, digging into the identified phenomenon within the referential state of the female genitalia suggests a subjective understanding and interpretation for us to explore the case

unboundedly. This approach would help determine the vaginal euphemisms used in family gathering settings and will also validly document the participants' reasons and insights as potential factors, regarding one's narrative behind such speech preferences toward our bodies, which vary according to the conditions of the participants' different generational timelines, about the instances of using vaginal euphemisms and explicit terms to refer to female genitalia in their respective languages [6].

In addition, this study's choice of focusing on more than one generation is neither to compare nor to clash ideas or beliefs, but to respectfully acknowledge both differences — to generate an additional fresh profound understanding in another new different context that simultaneously promotes a subjective slash unbiased interpretation of the said occurrence.

Over and above that, women's rights are at stake, as this phenomenon disregards women's power over the unfiltered naming of their bodies. Additionally, this occurrence creates lapses in language use, such as confusion in most people's current knowledge regarding the purposeful concept of using vaginal euphemisms as alternatives and the importance of knowing how to properly address our genital areas explicitly [7].

Methodology

This investigation utilizes qualitative methods, as the goal of this research is to ascertain what vaginal euphemisms are used in Filipino family gathering settings and document the reasons and insights of the participants toward the usage as potential factors. This inspires the researchers to categorize the selection of participants based on demographic characteristics, including generational identity, nationality, and educational background. The participants of this study are the Filipino students enrolled in the University of Mindanao Tagum College from 2021 to 2022, as well as their families, classified via generational differences, specifically generations Z and X, and also vary in the languages or dialects they use.

The data gathered were analyzed through thematic analysis, and the word-formation of these gathered euphemisms is methodically dissected by the following four categories outlined by the Warren's Model of Euphemism as methods of forming potential euphemisms:

Word formation devices are various techniques for crafting new words or expressions to utilize in specific contexts that value sensitivity. This category includes compounding, a method that combines contradictory words with opposing meanings and can figuratively refer to sensitive topics. For instance, 'hand job' for 'masturbation.' Derivation is a process of creating new words out of an existing vocabulary by adding affixes to roots. 'Fellatio' means 'oral sex,' and it is derived from the Latin word 'fellare,' which means 'to suck' as an example. Blends, such as 'brunch' means 'breakfast and lunch,' 'smog' for 'smoke and fog,' motel, Interpol, and many more, are a few of the word creations processed by merging two distinctive elements into a single linguistic unit or a blended word. Finally, acronyms create words through their initial letters (e.g., AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Onomatopoeia, on the other hand, are words created through phonetic imitation; these are from the sounds that the object or action produces (e.g., 'boink' from the sound people produce whenever they are demonstrating sexual intercourse, is now a word used to refer to the said activity).

Phonemic modification is a process of altering sounds creatively in order to create euphemistic words or expressions. This category involves various ways of alteration, such as black slang, which reverses sounds within words as a form of modification to avoid explicit references (e.g., 'mosob' for 'bosom' means a woman's chest). Rhyming slang, originated from London's East End in the mid-nineteenth century, refers to a playful way of substituting words with rhymed alternatives; it creates rhyme codes and is used when modifying certain words that give direct expressions. Moreover, euphemisms made out of mispronounced words are processed via phonemic replacement, and terms like 'eff,' which is an acronym for 'fuck' and used for the phrase 'fuck off,' underwent a state of shortening of words called abbreviation. This formation method creates indirect expressions for words considered sensual in some specific contexts, for example.

The model also highlights the *loan words* as one of the devices used for forming euphemisms. These are borrowed foreign vocabularies that are used to incorporate in specific languages, especially when in need of employing indirect expressions to convey sensitive concepts in a particular language.

Semantic innovation is also a category that addresses multiple processes of creating euphemisms by generating new meanings for existing words. This method of formation

includes particularization, which refers to the utilization of terms that will only make sense when the listener has to infer its meaning based on the context to fully grasp what the users intend to convey (e.g., the terms 'innocent' indicates 'virginal,' or 'satisfaction' for 'orgasm'). Implication, the same as logical inferences, this method tends to imply a different context toward the words they wish to interpret. It is a process of entwining meanings for a euphemistic effect (e.g., illustrating that 'loose' implies 'sexually easy/available'). Metaphor utilizes a process of creating euphemisms by using descriptive remarks that do not literally fit the subject, such as 'brown eyes, globes, or melons' for breasts. Metonymy replaces a word with another closely associated word to create a euphemistic result. Reversal constructs words or phrases through the use of inversed meanings to achieve a communication that promotes a euphemistic manner (e.g., 'She is incredibly charming,' and the user's intended connotation is that 'she is not at all charming'). In addition, understatement and overstatement or 'hyperbole' are methods that process words through diminishment or exaggeration to achieve that euphemistic effect. The expression 'not very intelligent' for the term 'dumb' is an example of an understatement, and for overstatement; on the other hand, 'fight to glory' literally means 'die for glory' [8].

Results And Discussion

The table presents the fifteen (15) identified vaginal euphemisms often used by the eleven (11) Filipino families, with a total of seventeen (17) participants: these are *ubos, mani, giti, tunga, sisi, butchi, tahong, lalat, pukak or pukek, bisong, pempem, puking, pepe, and pussy*.

Moreover, respective methods of formation and brief descriptions on how these vaginal euphemisms are formed based on Warren's Model of Euphemism's devices are well-distributed on the table.

Table 1. Vaginal Euphemisms Used in a Family Gathering Setting

Vaginal Euphemisms	Warren's Model Category/Method of Formation	Description of Formation
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Lalat	<i>Phonemic replacement</i> under Phonemic modification	More of a euphemistic mispronunciation, by playfully mispronouncing the explicit Bisaya term for vulva which is the word "Bilat" through uttering some part of the word in repetition as a Binisaya euphemism.
Ubos	<i>Implication</i> under Semantic Innovation	"Ubos," in English translation "down there" which implies a direction pointing under. In context based, when used to refer to a body part that is placed under, leads to the interpretation pointing toward the body part where the female genital resides.
Mani	<i>Implication</i> under Semantic Innovation	"Mani," in English translation "peanut" which implies an appearance of a food that has a cut at the center of it. In context based, it looks like a clit, a part of a female genitalia, and leads to the interpretation that it has somehow the resemblance of what a vulva actually looked like.
Giti	<i>Implication</i> under Semantic Innovation	"Giti," in English translation "Clitoris," is used by the informant to imply a "small vulva" and leads to the interpretation of an appearance of the female genitalia that is tiny.
Pukak or pukek	<i>Phonemic replacement</i> under Phonemic modification	More of a euphemistic mispronunciation, by playfully mispronouncing the explicit Tagalog term for vulva which is the word "Puke" through uttering the word with different ending syllables "kak or kek" which both have contrasting meanings as "big and small," as Ilonggo euphemisms.

Tunga	<i>Implication</i> under Semantic Innovation	“Tunga,” in English translation “Center” which implies a middle part of something, and in context based, when used to refer to a body part that is placed at the middle, leads to the interpretation pointing toward the middle body part where the female genital resides.
Bisong	<i>Phonemic replacement</i> under Phonemic modification	More of a euphemistic mispronunciation, by playfully mispronouncing the explicit Bisaya term for vulva which is the word “Bilat” through uttering the word with a replaced syllable from “-lat” to “-song,” for a lighter form of the term as a Binisaya euphemism.
Sisi	<i>Implication</i> under Semantic Innovation	“Sisi,” in English translation “Oyster” which implies a type of shellfish or seafood, which is large and rough on the outside. In context based, they are called as the genitalia or vagina of the sea, and leads to the interpretation that it has somehow the resemblance of how a vulva or the female genitalia itself actually looked like.
Pempem	<i>Phonemic replacement</i> under Phonemic modification	More of a euphemistic mispronunciation, by playfully mispronouncing the explicit Tagalog term for vulva which is the word “Pekpek” through uttering the word with a replaced consonant from “k” to “m,” as a Binisaya euphemism.
Butchi	<i>Implication</i> under Semantic Innovation	“Butchi,” in English translation “Buchi” which implies an appearance and texture of a food that is small and squishy. In context based, It somehow shows the characteristics of the face of the genitalia – vulva and leads to the interpretation that it has somehow the resemblance of how a vulva actually physically structured and looked like.

Puking	<i>Phonemic replacement</i> under Phonemic modification	More of a euphemistic mispronunciation, by playfully mispronouncing the explicit Tagalog term for vulva which is the word “Puke” through uttering the word with an additional and replaced morpheme at the end [suffix] “-ing” of the term, as an Ilonggo euphemism.
Tahong	<i>Implication</i> under Semantic Innovation	<p>“Tahong” in English translation means “mussel” which implies a type of sea creature that has a black hard and smoother outer shell, and also yellow or orange gills inside that can be eaten.</p> <p>In context based, a sea creature that has an edible meat inside shaped like a female genitalia of different forms, and leads to the interpretation that it has somehow the resemblance of how a vulva or the female genitalia itself actually looked like.</p>
Pepe	<i>Phonemic replacement</i> under Phonemic modification	More of a euphemistic mispronunciation, by playfully mispronouncing the explicit Tagalog term for vulva which is the word “Pekpek” through uttering the word with a removed consonant “k” as a Tagalog euphemism.
Pussy	<i>Derivation</i> under Word formation devices	<p>The term “Pussy” obtained or developed ultimately from a Dutch term ‘poesje’ in which is ‘poes’ that means an extremely small either “cat; a kitty, or for vulva,” a low German term ‘puus’ for cat, or Old Norse ‘pūss’ means pouch or pocket, and old English ‘pusa’ for bag, by adding a suffix</p> <p>“-y” at the end of the word, a way of developing it into a new form of word that could refer to the women’s genital as a whole (<i>Online Etymology Dictionary</i>).</p>

The majority of the identified vaginal euphemisms have undergone *implication under semantic innovation*, such as

"ubos" a Cebuano term that literally means the direction pointing under is contextually used by the participant to refer to a body part that is placed under, leads to the interpretation pointing toward the body part where the female genitalia resides [9]. The Tagalog word "mani" in English translates to "peanut," which means a tiny nut that can be eaten and possesses a clitoris similar to how the entrance of the internal part of the vulva actually looked [10]. The Ilonggo and Cebuano word "giti" refers to a tiny vulva which is Ilonggo and Cebuano's way of making the women's genital area lighter to utter. The Cebuano word "tunga" in English is "center" and is used as an indirect term to point out the middle body part of a woman where the private part is placed [11]. The Cebuano word "sisi" in English, "oyster," is used to indirectly refer to the genitalia, known as the vagina of the sea, because of its appearance [12]. Similarly, the Tagalog term "tahong" in English, "mussel," is used to indirectly describe women's genital area, as this also has the appearance of the female genitalia [13]. Lastly, the misspelled English word "butchi" as "buchu," a fried Chinese pastry that is crispy and chewy, shows the squishy characteristic of the lady area [14].

The second device was *the phonemic replacement under phonemic modification*, as the word "lalat" is created by playfully mispronouncing the Cebuano or Binisaya term "bilat" through uttering some part of the word in repetition, and this gives a lighter effect upon mentioning the female's genital area. "Pukak and Pukek" from the mispronounced forms of the explicit Tagalog term for vulva, the word "Puke," processed by uttering the word with different ending syllables "kak or kek" which both have contrasting meanings as "big and small" in Ilonggo's euphemistic vocabulary. The lighter Cebuano or Binisaya term for "bilat" which is "bisong," is formed through mispronouncing the utterance of the word with a replaced syllable from "-lat" to "-song." The same goes with the word "puking," as its end vowel "-e" is replaced and added with the suffix "-ing." Moreover, the words "pempem" and "pepe," are both mispronounced forms of the exact Tagalog word "pekpek" for vulva, either by replacing the consonant "k" with the consonant "m" or removing the end consonant of the word [8].

Derivation under word-formation devices is the last device used for the identified vaginal euphemisms, specifically in the English word "pussy." As it is obtained aside from the Dutch term 'poesje,' which means a tiny, either a "kitty or vulva," and the low German term 'puus' for cat, or Old Norse 'pūss,' which means pouch or pocket. The euphemism "pussy" also comes

from an old English word 'pusa' which refers to a bag. This process is a way of developing a new form of a word that could refer to another object, and in this case, is to the women's genital area [15].

Furthermore, some gen Z and X informants prefer to use explicit terms such as the Cebuano or Binisaya word "*bilat*" and the word "*putay*" in Ilonggo as they see the terms mentioned above as euphemistic. Some even *barely use euphemisms* as they perceive this terminology as unusual to discuss, based on a male's perspective.

Reasons of Using Vaginal Euphemisms in Family Gatherings

The reasons of generations Z and X Filipinos in using vaginal euphemisms in family gatherings emerged as follows: Gen Z asserted that utilizing euphemisms, aside from these are *culturally and environmentally motivated*. They claimed that environment and culture-based factors, including upbringing, inherent qualities, people's set of practices, influences and learning coming from family or even in people's surroundings play significant roles in the force of utilizing euphemisms, mainly when referring to people's private body parts, women's genital area as example.

These words equate to *a language where improper remark is not part of its vocabulary*, a vocabulary that dismisses any language that promotes vulgarity, malicious, and indecent expressions regarding the female's genital area.

Another reason of the Gen Zs is that, using euphemisms *acknowledges people's feelings and opinions*. This would allow people to feel safe from judgment and comfort from any possible form of discomfort, and to feel valid whenever such a topic is out of people's capacity to take based on their level of sensitivity. Moreover, using euphemisms is the same as *securing children's welfare*. In other words, this usage prevents children from hearing and imitating the explicit terms for female genitalia as these are perceived inappropriate for them. This can also cause these youngsters to feel uneasy and, at the same time, have difficulty understanding words that are out of their age range's league of comprehension.

Finally, the Gen Z participants affirm that the utilization of euphemisms is intended for *communicative refinement*, such as working as a form of keeping any sense of object which has characteristics of being private – private and minimizing the explicitness within words that are directly stating the female genitalia. In addition, euphemistic vocabularies are also *useful*

for specific purposes in communication, such as in confidential conversations and for literary usage.

On the other hand, Gen X affirmed that the utilization of vaginal euphemisms is *environmentally conditioned*. They claimed that culture-based factors, such as the older generation of family members' vocabulary choice during children's pace of growth as well as people's choice of comfort with the words they prefer to use, can all stand as potential influences that enforce the utilization of euphemisms, especially in family gatherings.

Additionally, the use of euphemisms for Gen X, besides being a communicative strategy that apart from it eludes any possible conflict within a family conversation, encourages comfort and humorous impact and discourages displeasing expressions within conversations, during family gatherings. Gen X also stated that using these words as alternatives is the same as respecting women and lowkey looking out for children's wellness through communication. In simpler terms, it is *helpful in securing women's and children's well-being*.

Insights as per the Use of Explicit Vocabulary to refer to Female Genitalia in their Language

Apart from imposing a way to *refine people's knowledge about the propriety of words*, as Gen Z perceived that the early introduction of literal terminologies of any body part, especially contexts concerning female genitalia, can be a word knowledge refinery that will lead to an early understanding of the accurate concept and proper usage of these explicit terms. In addition, adults, particularly parents, normalizing the use of explicit words opens the opportunity for learning and relearning since such vocabulary generally exists in many fields, such as science, specifically on human anatomy as example.

They added that there could be *no more room for misunderstanding* when people prefer explicit terminology over euphemisms, this usage encourages an environment with non-existing confusions, misinterpretations, or possible barriers. These words also *have the capability to identify people's characteristics*. People's choice of vocabulary can be an indicator of what kind of character they possess.

Furthermore, Gen Z believed that it is better to use the actual terminologies instead of euphemisms and introduce them early to children, as it *helps address children's bodies adequately, especially in times of crisis*. Teaching children the proper way of addressing people's bodies, specifically genitals

and the original terms can be beneficial and advantageous in case of unfortunate situations, such as potential sexual assaults.

On the other hand, Gen X deemed explicit terminology as equivalent to a language *neither free nor safe from vulgarity and obscenity*. Another reason, using explicit terminology can be used as the basis of personality. They recognize this word preference as an indication of a person who is a blatherskite and disrespectful, who physically possesses a large mouth. However, other generation X participants have taken a different perspective, as they view these individuals' speech preferences as either the outcome of an upbringing or usual behavior.

Moreover, Gen X affirmed that the utilization of explicit vocabulary in referring to female genitalia can be an asset in communication. Besides being serviceable in emphasizing its purpose of education about women's bodies, where this terminology cannot only be used for entertainment but also helpful in preventing any possible form of sexual harassment toward women, especially young girls. They also shared their concern about the use of explicit terms referring to female genitalia, that it can be used as a subject of embarrassment. The utilization of such vocabulary in unfitting situations can either make people feel embarrassed or give people the opportunity to use these to humiliate others.

Finally, the Gen X also perceived that the use of explicit terms referring to female genitalia as a vocabulary should be strictly prohibited around children, as these young individuals can imitate it. In addition, people who dare not to abide should be reprimanded or corrected for its usage is inappropriate to children.

Implications for Knowledge of Human Sexual Anatomy

The implications for knowledge of human sexual anatomy revealed a vast array of vocabularies, either borrowed or newly formed, mainly used for addressing people's bodies, specifically private parts and, in this case, the female genitalia. Moreover, these identified words have corresponding reasons for their utilization, which highlight a concerning lack of general knowledge about the female genital anatomy and its functions, the appropriate use of terminologies in accordance with the purpose of its usage, or even mistakenly address *vulva* as '*vagina*' were also included [2]. However, upon further exploration, this study uplifted two varying realizations regarding the utilization of explicit vocabulary in addressing

people's private body parts. Initially, the emphasis on how important it is to know how to adequately address people's bodies, especially the human sexual anatomy, where sometimes people tend to use or refrain from using these words for specific reasons, either cultural factors or the benefits this usage can give to people in times of crisis. Ultimately, the dynamic influence of time on how people deal with the current conditions of their surroundings and changes in language use and features.

Implications for Language Teaching

In terms of language teaching, the euphemistic formations' tabular presentation and analysis of how the identified euphemisms are formed and learning people's reasons for using euphemisms over explicitly addressing the female genitalia as the results of this study can be used to broaden and enhance language instruction. Moreover, the insights provided in this study highlight the adaptability and creativity of users within language use, especially when they need to exhibit conformity in certain social contexts. Additionally, educators can also make use of these findings as a reference to understand further how languages continue to evolve to adapt to the needs of their users.

Implications for Future Research

For future research, the overall result of the study underscores the compelling role of euphemisms as alternatives in particular situations requiring conformity or maintaining positive communication. The diversity within these words reflects distinctive responses which stand as 'languages' capabilities' to meet users' attempts to form or borrow words for specific purposes, especially users residing in the Philippines, and acknowledging Filipinos' creative way of borrowing words and forming euphemisms to conform to cultural settings. This study suggests that future research should broaden the scope by including several languages from indigenous communities and upgrading to both sexual organs for its subject matter. Furthermore, for a clearer outlook and to promote an unbiased and illimitable understanding of people's language choices and manners, consider the approach of 'looking both ways' as also used in this study; it might help prevent linguistic issues from being addressed with limited perspectives.

Conclusion

Euphemistic Language is indeed a testament to how creative and adaptive a human mind is, and so is language itself, to

meet its users' needs. Euphemisms have proved helpful in cases that might cause emotional harm, cultural discomfort, or overall negative communication with others. However, there is a downside: this language expression somewhat satisfies and tolerates the societal stigma attached to human anatomy, specifically organs that are deemed private in people's eyes.

Despite these benefits of using euphemisms, there is a potential risk in normalizing these euphemistic expressions; this usage might put people's bodies, especially women's bodies, as the focus of this investigation in line with the lack of proficient knowledge regarding female sexual anatomy as this became evident in this study.

Moreover, knowing how to name people's body parts explicitly not only destigmatizes talking easefully about commonly perceived sensitive topics, especially people's organs, either private or not, in everyday situations. This can also condition people of all ages to comfortably think of our private parts, sexual organs, as merely private and not as taboo.

However, hearing people's preferences in communication, particularly their choices in vocabulary to use in specific settings, whether unfitting or suitable, sheds light on the idea of not judging these language choices and manners based solely on one context. Acknowledging possible circumstances and fostering an understanding that does not clash or compare people's dissimilar ideas may lead to wide-ranging realizations.

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