She Is Up the Duff – Hon Har en Bulle i Ugnen

A comparative study of euphemisms in English and Swedish

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Abstract

There has seemingly never been a study conducted on Swedish euphemisms in comparison to English euphemisms. This study seeks to contribute to the insights regarding euphemisms in everyday situations. After reviewing existing literature and relevant theoretical texts on this issue, research was undertaken to garner primary data on this topic. This was effected by distributing a self-administered questionnaire in Swedish to fifteen Swedish-speakers and one in English to fifteen English-speakers. In both samples, eight individuals were female and seven were male while age and education varied greatly. They were posed questions featuring different terms for which they were asked to assign euphemisms in their mother tongue. A number of findings were made which distinguished between the usage of euphemisms by speakers in terms of their respective languages, i.e. English and Swedish, but also within these language communities in terms of gender and age differences. The study seemingly accorded with the general view that males are more direct and do not tend to utilize euphemisms as much as females. A further conclusion was that native English speakers are more comfortable discussing alcohol, in terms of the drinking-cultures, as compared to native Swedish speakers and a possible explanation for this difference was the state alcohol monopoly in Sweden. It may also be concluded that, while many euphemisms appeared that were particular to the language, it was possible to identify many cases in which there are closely corresponding euphemisms in both languages.
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1. Introduction

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, euphemism is: “a figure of speech in which an offensive, harsh or blunt word or expression is avoided and replaced with one that is milder but less precise instead.” In a more liberal view, a euphemism is a gateway for the speaker to refer to a taboo subject in a playful and personal way. If the listener is, for example, an avid fan of sports, the explanation would then appear even more comprehensible with a sports metaphor or sports-related term. The title of the dissertation consists of an English euphemism and a Swedish euphemism concerning pregnancy: “she is up the duff - hon har en bulle i ugnen” (meaning, she has a bun in the oven). They refer to the target being pregnant, in this case, by using a metaphor that draws on a parallel between the process of pregnancy and the process of cooking. Another example is to refer to sex as “making love”, which is also a metaphor. The reason behind it may lie in social taboo or the desire to be gentle about an awkward or offensive subject. Furthermore, Lyons (1981, p.151) argues that euphemisms are a much favored device when speakers are confronted with the necessity to speak about difficult subjects. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.5) is a definition not of euphemisms, but of metaphors. Euphemisms may address subjects of taboo in a metaphorical way, or via other expressions to diminish the risk of causing offence and the potential for hurting feelings which may be associated with the matter being mentioned.

This study is produced for the primary purpose of achieving an understanding of the similarities and differences between Swedish and English euphemisms and how they are used. The aim of this dissertation will be to answer the following questions:
1. To what extent do the two language communities, native English and Swedish speakers, utilize euphemisms for sensitive, potentially offensive and taboo topics?

2. To what extent are the English and Swedish euphemisms similar in terms of their literal and figurative meanings?

3. What other demographic factors influence euphemism usage?

The results will also indicate what is considered culturally acceptable for each language culture to address explicitly.

The theoretical background will review relevant studies and texts by scholars concerning figurative language. In other words, earlier work on metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche, other expressions such as hyperbole, the difference between literal and figurative language, and how implicature is central in recovering speaker meaning will all be examined in the theoretical background as a basis for this study. The methodology will consist of an explanation as to how primary data will be collected from both native English, and native Swedish, speakers. The results will report which euphemisms were suggested the most and by how many of the participants. The Swedish euphemisms will be translated into English. The results, which may include not only euphemisms but also other expressions, will be analyzed in order to identify which specific euphemisms are most used in both speech communities and where there are variations, and what trends and patterns are manifest. In the discussion, the findings in relation to trends and patterns will be discussed in more detail, together with any sociolinguistic or philological implications which have become evident. Finally, the conclusion will review the findings relative to the original thesis question while reminding the reader of the goal of the study. Also, the research approach will be evaluated while suggesting other paths for future studies and how a similar, related study in the future might develop my findings.
2. Theoretical Background

In the following sub-chapters, studies made on other expressions will be referenced. This begins with chapter 2.1 in which the boundary between literal and figurative language comes into question.

2.1 Literal and Non-Literal Language

In “The Literal and Non-literal in Language and Thought”, Coulson (2005, p.9) ponders the depth of poetry and the manner in which the words may hold two meanings: a literal and a figurative one. However, to decipher the hidden meaning of works such as poetic texts, one needs to possess certain linguistic devices (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.9). Furthermore, the complexity of this task might vary from language to language, depending on how easily interpretable they are (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.9). Coulson (2005, p.9) also identifies the language of philosophy, political science and physics to be ones that carry a figurative significance other than the literal meaning. This means that, like metaphors found in poetry, euphemisms possess a secondary meaning and specific skill sets are needed in order to interpret them. However, through the work of such as Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1987), Recanati (1987) and Carston (1988), it has been shown that, instead of simply being a part of literary language, figurative language is generally explained through lexical semantics. Furthermore, Coulson (2005, p.9) refers to more scholars while arguing that figurative language needs contextual elements in order to function. Vicente (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.179), in separating semantics and pragmatics, defines semantics as: “Descriptive content of linguistic expressions (language in relation to states of affairs)” Pragmatics, on the other hand, is defined as: “Speaker-related content of utterances (language in relation to its
Referring back to the point made by Coulson (2005), it can be understood that, while semantics is important for the literal meaning to appear clearly, pragmatic approaches are vital in order to discover the non-coded yet intended meanings. As was mentioned above, the “skill set” needed to unlock the hidden meaning is to be found in pragmatics. It allows us to take into consideration the perspective of the speaker, as is highlighted in the definition, in order to uncover the figurative meaning which would not be possible through lexical semantics.

Turner (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.25) has indicated in earlier works that “literal” and “figurative” meanings are divided by factors connected to psychological aspects. “There is no doubt that some products of thought and language feel literal while others feel figurative” (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.25). This would be a different theory to the one of Coulson (2005), who considers semantics and pragmatics to be the key to recovering literal and non-literal meaning rather then psychology. However, Turner deems it a psychological phenomenon rather than a part of semantics or pragmatics. Turner (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.25) even labels the terms “literal” and “non-literal” as being “efficient short-hand announcements of our integrated reactions to the products of thought and language”. Turner (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.25) states that literal and non-literal meanings are different because they are wired to our reactions towards products of thought and language, and are based in our psyche as opposed to being natural.

Kövecses (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005) draws the correlation between literal-figurative and concrete-abstract. One could assign this image to Coulson's theory about languages in certain domains possessing a deeper non-literal meaning beyond the direct and literal significance of the words utilized. The concrete and literal aspects would be represented by the words in this case and what one can literally read and understand from the primary significance of the words. The abstract and figurative, however, would be attributed to the secondary significance of the words because, as with
abstract phenomena, they cannot be physically seen. It is the implicit meaning of the words which is to be recovered, as opposed to the literal meaning, which is explicit. Kövecses (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.201) explains it in a similar fashion stating that, when we talk about ships, which are literal and concrete, we refer to them as ships and nothing further about the ships that are not visible to the naked eye. However, if we were to mention them as being plows of the sea, that would be metaphorical and thereby figurative since a plow operates on land, therefore to call ships plows instead would also be associated with abstract-figurative because there are no actual plows on the sea. It is a creative depiction of a mighty ship that is non-literal and, therefore, non-concrete. Kövecses (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, pp.201-202) portrays the relationship between figurative and abstract meaning: “Literal meaning can constitute abstract meaning”; “certain figurative and abstract meanings are understood in a literal way under certain circumstances” and “figurative abstract meaning in one language can be expressed by means of literal meaning in another language.” Searle (Coulson and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005, p.202) argues that people need two sentences where one represents the metaphorical meaning and the other the literal one. This because Searle (ibid) recognizes that there is a great difference between what the speaker says in a literal manner and what the speaker says figuratively. Kövecses (ibid) featured examples demonstrating the theory by Searle: “Sally is a block of ice (metaphorical) – Sally is an extremely unemotional and unresponsive person (paraphrase).

2.2 Overview of Figurative Speech
Alm-Arvius (2003, p.9) mentions tropes as being the term utilized for referring to any utterance that carries a secondary meaning. Initially, similes will be considered (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p.125): these resemble metaphors by virtue of the comparative nature of both concepts. However, one may effectively make a distinction by identifying whether or not the phrase features the words like, as or as in which Alm-Arvius (2003, p.125) calls an overt indicator of comparison. Alm-Arvius (2003, p.9) gives us some examples of similes such as: “She was as sweet as honey” and “... Gary dancing like a polar bear with its paw in a splint”. It is possible to transform these to metaphors by rephrasing and removing the overt indicator.

An oxymoron is a direct combination of antonyms which also have a paradoxical effect (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p.134). A clear perspective of oxymoron is demonstrated in these examples: “She is the only man around here”, “We chastise those whom we love” (ibid), and a typical utterance, which seeks to answer a question honestly as opposed to being quiet: “Your silence says it all”. According to Alm-Arvius (ibid), oxymorons may be divided into a couple of categories: word formations mostly compounds, recurring or novel collocations and syntactic phrases or clauses. Alm-Arvius (ibid) notices that, despite their seemingly confusing properties, the oxymoron's manner of describing the object permits us to somehow obtain a different and deeper view into the personality of the object.

To continue with the antonymous theme, hyperbole and litotes (understatement) will be featured. In accordance with Alm-Arvius (2003, p.135) comparing metaphors with various tropes in her work, she highlights the absolute necessity of treating some overstatements as metaphors since a literal reading is impossible. She provides such examples: “Yours till the stars lose their glory”, “we are all ears” and “I've been working my fingers to the bone”. Conversely, Alm-Arvius (ibid, p. 136) mentions formations of exaggeration where the metaphor has been replaced by a simile because, as has been shown above, an overt indicator has been added. However, it is noteworthy that not all utilization of
hyperbole is necessarily either simile or metaphor as Alm-Arvius (ibid) provides examples of: “All he wants to do is chase women”, “women are always at a disadvantage” and “the whole of England reacted with disgust and anger”. The latter of the examples featured is, however, a metonym since the author opted to use “whole of England” as a substitution for the British people.

Litotes, commonly known as “understatement”, is the opposite of hyperbole. Alm-Arvius (2003, p.137) suggests that culture is a factor for understating because it may be a social norm not to boast and to diminish certain qualities, which may be interpreted as gloating in one's own glory. The following phrases display elements of litotes and support Alm-Arvius's theory: “She is no fool”, “It's nothing, just a scratch” and “not at all (instead of: you're welcome)” (ibid). As could be observed, the middle phrase possesses a literal meaning as whereas the other two are undoubtedly examples of understatement. Lastly, Alm-Arvius (ibid) suggests that there are exceptions in which it is difficult to categorize the phrase as either understatement or exaggeration. For example: “I wasn't born yesterday”.

This dissertation focuses mainly on euphemism; however, before that, dysphemism will be considered as it is the antonymous concept to euphemism. Allan and Burridge (1991, p.26) define dysphemism to be: “an expression with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum or to the audience, or both, and it is substituted for a neutral or euphemistic expression for just that reason.” In other words, dysphemism is potentially offensive towards either party, as opposed to euphemism, and intentionally so in order to convey a certain message. Allan and Burridge (ibid) appropriately named their work: “euphemism and dysphemism, language as a shield and weapon.” As we will examine further below, euphemism is meant to remove taboo thereby “shielding” the involved parties from any shame or negative backlash that follows the usage of taboo. Dysphemism, however, may be “the weapon of choice” in harnessing the power of a taboo term in order to achieve an impactful utterance. Such may be noticed in the example by Allan and Burridge (ibid): “Abu Nidal is a freedom fighter” and “Abu Nidal is a terrorist.” The latter of these is dysphemistic because the word 'terrorist'
carries an unsettling association but is still used to communicate a message (Allan and Burridge, 1991, p.26).

2.3 Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson observe that, for the majority of people, metaphors are associated with literary texts such as poetry. In addition, figures of speech are judged as only being a concept of language or a rhetorical device. In other words, metaphors are supposedly being used in a calculated way instead of aiding us in our thought-process. This false perception would deem that metaphors are only words, but they are actually perfectly integrated into our everyday conceptualization. “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.3). Lakoff and Johnson offer a perspective which challenges the common understanding of the role and extent of metaphorical language. For example, combining the act of discussion with the concept of warfare, as will be examined below, is the standard view of argumentation in some cultures. Because of this overall approach by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.3), it would be wrong to assume that people do not use metaphors in their ordinary language. Furthermore, metaphors are not exclusively abstract; they are used for expressing oneself in general and they present a useful tool in order to diversify the language. “If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.3). It has been suggested that using figures of speech is always a conscious act. However, our way of using them is not always deliberate: the concepts and metaphorical expressions that we use are automated parts of our daily register.
Lakoff and Johnson offer evidence-based arguments against the beliefs that metaphors occur under deliberate circumstances in order for the speaker to express themselves in a poetic manner: “Primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. And we have found a way to begin to identify in detail just what the metaphors are that structure how we perceive, how we think, and what we do” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.4).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 4) offer some examples of metaphors based on the idea that argument is war such as: “Your claims are indefensible”, “he attacked every weak point in my argument”, “his criticism were right on target” and “I've never won an argument with him”. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.4) bolster their argument that metaphors are integrated into our way of thinking by applying argument is war to our way of regarding the other party of the discussion as an opponent. We win or lose and we do such things as setting up strategies and regroup or counter when we are on the losing end. If we look at the workdays of lawyers, we see this reasoning come to life. The following words in italics are cited as examples in Lakoff and Johnson's work (1980, p.4). Their mission is to defend their clients by attacking the flaws of the opponents, countering when the opponent attacks and if their strategy fails, they retreat by requesting a pause to regroup in order to gain back ground.

Furthermore, it is suggested that the metaphors shape the experience and therefore one culture which views argument as war would have a completely different perspective than a culture that views it as a dance going back and forth in an esthetically pleasing way (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.5).

These are the first of many examples that will support the proposition that metaphors direct the way we think. Another concept is time is money. “Time in our culture is a valuable commodity. It is a limited resource that we use to accomplish our goals. Because of the way that the concept of work has developed in modern western culture, where work is typically associated with the time it takes and time is precisely quantified...” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.8). “That flat tire cost me an hour”, “I've
invested a lot of time in her” and “is that worth your while?” are clear-cut illustrations of the above assertion of Lakoff and Johnson. They go on to explain that the extent of the concept time is money is great in certain cultures. Wages are determined by the time put into the work, prices for services such as rentals are time-based and the harshest crimes are punished through the deprivation of time (prison, community service and death sentence).

“In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (for example the battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.10). This very much supports the earlier contention that different cultures could view the same concept in an entirely different way. “A far more subtle case of how a metaphorical concept can hide an aspect of our experience can be seen in what Michael Reddy has called the conduit metaphor.” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.10). Examples of conduit metaphors are: “I gave you that idea”, “your reasons came through to us” and “his words carry little meaning”. These display the common theme of these metaphors in the following order: “Ideas (or meanings) are objects”, “linguistic expressions are containers” and “communication is sending”.

Finally, we have the different categories of metaphors as are presented by Lakoff and Johnson: “orientational metaphors”, “ontological metaphors” and “personification”. In terms of “orientational metaphors”, the expressions are made up of directional references and in the majority of cases (with some exceptions) we refer to up and high being positive but anything negative is down and low. For example: “I'm feeling up”, “I'm depressed”, “he dropped dead”, etc (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.15).

Ontological metaphors, on the other hand, treat the abstract like actual concrete objects such as: “Inflation is lowering our standard of living”(inflation is an entity), “that was a beautiful catch”(referring) and “there is so much hatred in the world”(quantifying) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.26). Inflation, catch and hatred are intangible but, in these three ways, they are treated as concrete objects. Inflation is an artificial object and, although personification renders inflation living,
ontological metaphors stop at treating inflation like property or entity. A catch is a nominalization of the verb to catch. The noun itself is also abstract, although ontological metaphors treat it as though it is a simple object. Hatred cannot be quantified because it is not countable: one does not know if there is more or less hatred because one cannot physically see it, much less measure it. These metaphors can, however, be used to express feelings to others.

Lastly, the concept of “personification” is an extension of “ontological metaphors” in the sense that concrete items are described in human terms. This is especially apparent in metaphors like: “inflation is eating up our profits”, “cancer finally caught up with him” and “inflation has pinned us to the wall” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.33).

2.4 Metonymy and Synecdoche

Metonymy is a practice in which an object is referred to as a person or an item as part of a whole concept, as we will observe below. Metonymy is not to be confused with personification (which treats the object as human). For example, “life has cheated me” is personification since the subject life is an abstract concept and does not, according to the logic of semantic roles, have the ability to perform actions such as cheating (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.33). However, if the inanimate object is linked to a concept, such as parliament or hospital, then it achieves metonymic status. As an illustration of metonymy, the ham sandwich in the example “the ham sandwich is waiting for his check” represents the person who ordered the ham sandwich (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.35). Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.35) offer examples of metonymy that display another type of metonym, namely: “...using one entity to refer to another that is related to it” : “He likes to read the Marquis de Sade. (=the writings of the marquis)”. Metonymy may be confused with synecdoche. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980,
p.36), synecdoche is conventionally seen as a specific branch of metonymy. In both of these approaches, “the part stands for the whole” although synecdoche is concrete and metonymy is abstract (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.36). Seto (Panther and Radden, 1999, p.92) argues that the vagueness of “part” and “whole” in the definitions causes a confusion between metonymy and synecdoche, which has led to the notion that synecdoche is a sub-category of metonymy. According to Seto (Panther and Radden, 1999), however, this is false. In metonymy, we use concept, as in “Hollywood is losing revenue right now” means “the film industry is losing revenue right now”. In synecdoche the same occurs but, instead of a concept, a physical object is mentioned, as in: “We need a couple of strong bodies for our team”, whereby “bodies” is the expression for living adult people (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.36). Seto (Panther and Radden, 1999, p.91) highlights the contrasts between metonymy and closely-related concepts such as synecdoche. He attributes the lack of distinction between them to the often vague definition of metonymy which is uncomfortably close to metaphors and irony as well. According to Seto (Panther, Radden, 1999, p.91), “A stands for B with which A is closely associated”, but this definition is purportedly the same for other rhetorical and/or referential devices. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.36) compare metaphors to metonymy in terms of replacing one entity or phenomenon with another. The results and purposes of each substitution appear to be different since metaphor provides comprehension through replacement and, in metonymy, one element is assigned as a substitution for a target element that it represents, as is shown above. However: “…metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves the function of providing understanding“ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.36). This means that metonyms have a metaphorical effect and it is explained in this way: when we speak of metonyms where “the part of the whole” is the theme, the replacement points to a specific target such as in metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.36) offer the following example: “we need some good heads on this project” in which good heads means smart or intellectually capable people, and the element that renders this metaphorical is the fact that good heads means smart people
only. On the other hand, if it were pointed out that there was an entry fee for access to an amusement park, this may be expressed: “one hundred kronor per head”. This would be synecdochic because “hundred kronor per head” involves a physical object as opposed to a concept. Also, it is not metaphorical since head in this case refers to any individual.

It is suggested that tropes such as metaphors and metonyms play a major role in our daily thought and speech processes. This view is supported by Panther and Thornburg (2003, p.51) who state: “recent advances in cognitive linguistics suggest metonymic language use is but the tip of a deep conceptual iceberg”. It is defined as: “a process in which one element in a cognitive model is evoked by another element in the same cognitive model” (Panther and Thornburg, 2003, p.51).

### 2.5 Role of Implicature

The concept of implicature was pioneered by, among others, Paul Grice in 1957 when he examined utterances in which the message of the words was different from the message of the speaker (Davis, 1998, p.5). The product of this analysis was his theories of conventional and conversational implicature. Davis (1998, p.5) gives us an example of this: “Ann: Where can I get gasoline? Bob: There's a station around the corner.” The thing Bob is implying is not what he is saying, it is actually whichever understanding that one infers from his utterance that is relevant to the utterance (Davis, 1998, p.5). Bob is telling Ann the whereabouts of the closest station but what he is not saying is that she can go there to acquire gas, it is implied by Bob (Davis, 1998, p.5). This is the Gricean theory used by Davis. It relies on one of Grice's four maxims, namely relation. This means that the listener infers the figurative significance based on what is relevant to the case. However, Panther and Thornburg
(2003, p.25) refer to Blakemore in explaining that, in order to make sense of otherwise irrelevant statements, the hearer is required to provide some essential information and to draw an inference.

Blakemore (ibid) presents the example: “A: Did you enjoy your holiday? B: The beaches were crowded and the hotel was full of bugs.” In a literal and non-figurative dialogue, this would constitute a flouting of Grice’s maxim of relation and to be marked insignificant. Instead, Panther and Thornburg (2003) are stating it as a way of implying that “B” did not indeed enjoy his or her birthday. “A” is inferring this simply by assuming that B would regard mention of bugs and overcrowded beaches as an effective negation of A’s question (Panther and Thornburg, 2003). Sperber and Wilson, and Blakemore, (ibid) view the non-literal nature of tropes, such as metaphors, as one way by which implicature is generated. What this means, is that the figurative quality of metonym, synecdoche, metaphor and other expressions facilitate the use of implicature due to the impossibility of using expressions in a literal manner. Blakemore (ibid) offers an example in using the metaphor: “my neighbor is a dragon” from which we infer either that: “the speaker's neighbor is fierce” or that: “the speaker's neighbor is unfriendly”. Panther and Thornburg (2003, p.26) argue that these implications are the most prevalent ones, but one could also infer other qualities from that metaphor which resemble the neighbor, such as the appearance. Also, considering the usage of animal names among sport clubs and other organizations, the metaphor could be a method for implying that the neighbor takes part in such an organization. This versatility of an expression and implicature is purportedly the most significant reason for using them (Panther and Thornburg, 2003). If the metaphor were to be regarded in a literal fashion, it would entail that the speaker has a mythical, fire-breathing beast for a neighbor. It would be an unfathomable reality and, therefore, the implicature is decoded to recover the covert meaning behind the utterance. As one may realize, figurative expressions rely on the listener's ability to correctly infer in order to function, otherwise they do not carry more significance than what is drawn from the literal meaning from the words.
2.6 Defining Euphemisms

Allan and Burridge (1991, p.11) define euphemism 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 and Burridge (ibid, p.12) mention that one believes that these dispreferred expressions in reality are taboos. The word “taboo”, according to Allan and Burridge (ibid), originates from the Austronesian language Tongan and means “prohibited behavior”. Specific behaviors were billed as taboo due to their supposed harmful nature towards either individuals or civilization (ibid). The use of taboo terms was associated with human experiences ranging from serious injury and death to either the speaker or close ones (ibid). Allan and Burridge (ibid) state that, in their work, they display some taboo terms that do not instill fear of accident. However, they argue that one should refrain from uttering such bad language because general opinion deems it insulting to the character of the listener and, conceivably, oneself.

According to Allan and Burridge (1991, p.30), there are regular and familiar euphemisms, but other expressions may also function in a euphemistic manner. Allan and Burridge (ibid) present examples of what they deem to be euphemistic dysphemisms, such as shoot and shucks instead of shit. They argue that the words are euphemisms, but the intention behind using them is explicit which is the reason for their label of the combination.

Allan and Burridge (1991, pp.14-15), discuss euphemisms which may appear in the form of other expressions. This theory achieves clarity in the following example: “the cavalry's come” which is a metaphor for “I've got my period”, but with an euphemistic element. What makes it a metaphor is the fact that the speaker likens the event of a cavalry arriving to the appearance of the period and the
sensitive character of a woman beginning her period. Furthermore, the metaphor is rendered euphemistic by virtue of the taboo of menstruation terms being replaced by a less taboo expression.

### 2.7 Functions of Euphemisms

As was previously explained, euphemism is supposed to remove the taboo from the conversation by replacing an undesirable word with one that possesses less negative connotation and, which is also designed to erase the insult. According to Allan and Burridge (1991, p.12), it is also meant to help guide the speaker in rendering a message that is complying with the speaker's intention, even though it might not be taboo. Such is demonstrated in by their example: “Time magazine had the following to say about the U.S. House of Representatives: Bribes, graft and expenses-paid vacations are never talked about on Capitol Hill. Honorariums, campaign contributions and per diem travel reimbursements are.” This headline was featured in *Time Australia* in 1989 commenting on the state of affairs in the U.S. We may observe that the newspaper assigned euphemisms for *bribes*, *graft* and *expenses-paid vacations* in the form of *honorariums*, *campaign contributions* and *per diem travel reimbursements*. Allan and Burridge (1991) do not recognize *bribes* and *graft* as being legitimate taboo. However, they argue that replacing a seemingly negative term with a milder one is intended to achieve a communication that has elevated positive connotations. As a result, *honorariums*, *campaign contributions* and *per diem travel reimbursements* provide us with a more positive connotation and less accusatory sentiment despite the possibility that the content could be negative towards the target of the headline. The same principle is displayed in another example given by Allan and Burridge (ibid) in which an elderly widow refers to her *lodgers* as *paying guests* instead. As with the previous case, the purpose was to reduce the negative connotation as much as possible rather than replacing any taboo.
They note that social taboos within the majority of English-speakers range from bodily fluids, intercourse and genitalia to a person's income. Furthermore, they mention Asian countries, such as Singapore and the Philippines, in noting places where it is not a social taboo to ask what one is earning, in contrast to western culture. According to Allan and Burridge (ibid), there are euphemisms that exist without corresponding to actual taboos. For example, the aforementioned *paying guest, corporate apparel* instead of *company uniform* and *revenue augmentation* which normally suggests *increased earnings*, but it replaces taboo in the cases of the government and *raising taxes*. 
3. Methodology

For the primary data gathering aspect of this essay, a questionnaire will be distributed to thirty individuals whereof half will be native English speakers and the rest native Swedish speakers. The majority of the English-speaking respondents will be from north of England, although the United States and New Zealand will be represented, as well. The hope is that the sample will reflect and represent, at least to some degree, native English speakers, as the contributors vary in age, gender and education. The purpose will thereby not be to target a specific demographic, but to achieve the greatest variation of participants possible under the limitations of this essay to cover as many areas of society as possible. Following an analysis of the results, conclusions will be drawn as to degree to which the participants are able to recall alternative and milder words in common usage instead of more direct, or even taboo, terms. In order to maximize the number of euphemisms recalled, the participants will be subjected to the following briefing: “This is a survey with the purpose of finding out in what topics people tend to use euphemisms. Euphemisms are words or expressions that we use to replace other words that carry taboo. One examples of this is to refer to the toilet as the “loo” or the “john”. Ten questions are shown below. Please read these through and suggest any euphemisms, with which you are familiar, to replace the word in bold in each case. However, there is no need to ponder over these examples too deeply. I just want ones which come readily to mind in each case. Begin by stating your sex, age as of last birthday and the highest level of education you have finished”. The questions may appear as following: “You think that a family member has become too fat. Give one or more words or expressions that you would use instead of fat”. As is stated above in the short briefing, it is not necessary for participants to expound too much effort in remembering every conceivable euphemism as the primary purpose is to establish which come readily to mind. Also, since the questionnaire will be self-administered, there will
be some context provided in each question that should ease the process by directing the contributor to provide appropriate euphemisms. In addition to the aforementioned terms, the following terms will also appear: fat, pornographic movie, homosexual, fired, pregnant, old, sexual intercourse, defecate and drunk. The objective of each question will be simply to supply as many alternative and milder words as the individual can. In selecting which topics to cover, it is imperative to choose topics where there exists actual social taboos. This will be achieved, in this case, by discussion especially with individuals of other cultures since the taboos could differ in character and strength from one society to another. The results of the survey will show if either culture appears to display a substantial number of euphemisms, or a lack of euphemisms, for the topics mentioned. A limitation of the questionnaire will be the lack of qualitative data as the questions are designed to elicit as many euphemisms as possible rather than focusing on such as the reasons why the participant would not be comfortable using the direct term, or why particular euphemisms were included.

After having gathered the euphemisms used by the participants, they will be recorded electronically in the order of most to least utilized - the most used euphemisms from each language will be highlighted, and with the service of the online dictionary www.bab.la, the Swedish euphemisms will be translated into English. After the results phase, an analysis will be conducted in order to highlight trends and patterns, including correlations between the two mentioned speech communities, and any other factors which can be attributed to the specific backgrounds of the participants.
4. Results

As has been stated, the questionnaire was distributed to thirty participants, fifteen native English speakers and as many native Swedish speakers. The questions were answered in respective languages, therefore the results will be displayed in order of the questions with the Swedish ones being written in Swedish and translated to English. Initially the answers of the English survey will be revealed. Also, this section may include expressions that are not euphemisms, however, this will be detailed in chapter 5.

As a euphemism for fat, podgy turned out to be the most frequently cited one as five contributors listed it as their euphemism of choice.

Die, on the other hand, produced a clear favorite as passed away is used by eleven out of fifteen contributors.

When it came to the matter of euphemistic expressions for pornographic film, a tie occurred. Porno was mentioned by six participants, as was also dirty movie/film.

The question regarding homosexual gave a result that was close to unanimous as fourteen out of fifteen listed gay as their euphemism of choice.

The metaphor fired, meaning dismissed from employment, provided an assortment of different expressions with the most preferred one being let go.

Instead of using the word pregnant, the contributors’ most popular euphemism was up the duff since seven out of fifteen people mentioned it as an alternative.

There were several euphemisms for old, but elderly was mentioned the most as six out of fifteen opted to utilize it. Others will be discussed further in the Analysis.

There were numerous alternatives for sexual intercourse, as will also be expanded upon in the
analysis, although, the euphemism *make love* became the most used by virtue of being listed by six out of fifteen.

The question regarding *defecating* supplied a varied serving of euphemisms with not many contributors opting for the same euphemisms. This was evident as four out of fifteen preferred *poop* as a euphemism.

Lastly, alternatives suggested for *drunk* provided a wide variety of euphemisms - the most common being *tipsy*, which was listed by four out of fifteen participants.

Next, the responses from the Swedish contributors, which will be listed in the same order as the English ones and, they will include a translation from www.bab.la.

With question number one, again, the objective was to name euphemisms for the word *fet*, which is Swedish for *fat*. Eight out of fifteen Swedes submitted *rund* as an alternative, which is Swedish for *round*.

The second question concerned the word *died*, represented by the Swedish verb *dött*. The most mentioned euphemism was *gått bort*, which means *passed away*, and was preferred by ten out of fifteen.

The third question invited an alternative for *porrfilm*, or *pornographic film* and the clear favorite appeared to be vuxenfilm, or *adult movie*. This was suggested by seven out of fifteen individuals.

As a euphemism for *homosexuell*, *homosexual* in English, the most frequent word mentioned was *gay* by five out of fifteen contributors.

In responding to the question about how to convey being *sparkad*, which means *fired*, the expression that the Swedes used the most was *mellan jobb*, *between jobs*. It was listed by three out of fifteen participants.

With regard to the word *gravid*, or *pregnant*, six individuals chose *bulle i ugnen*, which in English translates to *bun in the oven*. 
Question number seven poses the question of what words to use as opposed to *gammal*, or *old* when the term is used as an adjective to describe a person. By virtue of appearing on four different questionnaires, *äldre*, *older* or *elderly*, was the most mentioned Swedish euphemism.

Question number eight asks the participants to suggest a word they might use instead of *samlag*, or *sexual intercourse*. By virtue of being mentioned by six of fifteen individuals, *ha sex*, or have sex became the most popular one.

For *bajsa*, or *defecating*, the most frequently mentioned euphemism was *gjort sina behov*, or *did its business*. It was mentioned by six out of fifteen contributors.

Finally, the participants were asked for an alternative to *full*, or *drunk*. Having been mentioned by four out of fifteen participants, *på lyset*, or *lit up* was deemed the most popular one.

5. Analysis

In order to analyze the most mentioned euphemisms, Oxford Dictionaries will provide definitions for the words and elements suggesting that they are indeed euphemisms will be highlighted. Each sub-heading will reveal both the English and Swedish euphemisms regarding the current question. The most voted and second-most suggested euphemisms will be properly analyzed. Other euphemisms that appeared at least twice will be mentioned, whereas the ones with fewer than two mentions will be excluded from this section.

**Question 1:** This question related to euphemisms for the word *fat*. The most popular of euphemisms provided by the English speakers for the word *fat* was *podgy*. In one of the questionnaires, the word appeared spelled as *pudgy*. The definition of this expression (Oxford, 2014) is as follows: “(of a person...
or part of their body) rather fat.” Rather, in this case, fills the function of lessening the effect of fat and therein podgy, which is to say that using this expression reflects the intention of the user to instill awareness of the issue as opposed to being unnecessarily harsh about it. The intent of lessening the harsh effect of the dialogue makes podgy a euphemism. The word overweight was the second-most mentioned word for fat. It was defined as [ibid] : “above a weight considered normal or desirable.” The connotation of being overweight is related to objectivity. In contrast to fat, overweight does not carry a negative connotation as fat may be associated with being unhealthy or elements of food that are unhealthy. By examining the definition of overweight it becomes evident that using it is associated with highlighting the fact that the weight has surpassed a predetermined level, one which is considered healthy and/or aesthetically acceptable. This level or benchmark is likely to be culturally determined.

Put on some weight, chubby, cuddly, curvy and rotund were the only other expressions supplied by the English-speaking participants at least twice each.

The Swedish participants, on the other hand, suggested rund (round) as the most preferred euphemism. As opposed to podgy, round is defined [ibid] in a slightly different way: “(of a person's body) plump.” Also, in addition to the definition, the dictionary [ibid] provided an example with the following sentence: he could move quickly despite his round physique. The connotation of this expression distances it from the human body, which renders any intentional insult unlikely and the expression round euphemistic. The second-most suggested Swedish euphemism was mullig (plump). The dictionary [ibid] displays the same definition as for podgy: “rather fat”. One may be certain that mullig is a euphemism because, as one mentioned above, including rather in the definition shows an intent to diminish the force of the expression using mullig. Stor (big), knubbig (chubby/rotund) and kurvig (curvy) were the only Swedish euphemisms for fat that were used at least twice.

Lastly, by looking at the analysis of question one, above, it is apparent that the English-speakers provided a greater number of euphemisms that were mentioned at least twice but, by looking at the
number of repeats regarding the most favored ones, it is obvious that *rund* (eight times) was more established in Swedish than *podgy* (five times) was in English. Also, as opposed to *podgy*, with which one may describe body parts, like *podgy* fingers, as well as the whole body, a *podgy* man, *round* does not describe the human body when being uttered by an English speaker. It is most commonly used for objects. Furthermore, not only was the second-most mentioned Swedish euphemism *mullig* (five times) more established than the second-most suggested English euphemism, it was mentioned the same number of times as the most popular English euphemism *podgy*. On the other hand, there was also a similarity in terms of the euphemisms that were used at least twice. Two Swedish euphemisms matched the translation of three of the English ones as *kurvig* means *curvy* and *knubbig*, which carries several translations, could mean both *chubby* and *rotund*.

**Question 2:** This question was meant to identify euphemisms for the word *died*. Having translated the Swedish euphemism to English, it became apparent that the most established expression, concerning both languages, for *died* was *passed away* (*gått bort*). It is defined (Oxford, 2014) as being a “euphemistic word for die”. *Pass away* is a metaphorical euphemism. It is a metaphorical expression because it relates to dying with the physical act of moving to another place. This invites the hearer to associate the death with the possibility of another life in another realm of existence by using a metaphor that does not include the concept of death as an end of existence. The second-most favored English euphemism was *snuffed it*, which carries two significant definitions [ibid] : “extinguish (a candle or flame)” and “British informal: to die.” This indicates the possibility of *snuffed it* being a metaphor since it means to put out a flame, but it may refer to *die*, as well. This provides a euphemistic metaphor since one refers to death without literally mentioning it. However, one may not view this metaphor as being particularly sympathetic. It may nevertheless be euphemistic as it leaves out the word *die*. In addition to the aforementioned expressions, *no longer with us, passed over, kicked the
bucket, deceased and departed were mentioned more than once as an alternative to die.

As one may have read above, gått bort (passed away, respectively) was the most suggested euphemism overall. The second-most suggested Swedish euphemism was avlidit (deceased), which was defined as an adjective as opposed to the verb-form in Swedish [ibid]: “dead; no longer living.” According to the definition, the euphemism is very neutral, factual and literal. It appears as though, by using avlidit, the speaker is using an expression which is clinical and non-emotive. The term in question is often used by police in talking about victims of homicide and such. This is deemed to be euphemistic since it reflects the intention of the speaker to remain neutral. Lämnat jorden (left the earth), somna in (go to sleep[die]), kilat vidare (trotted on) and lämnat oss (left us) were the Swedish euphemisms that were mentioned at least twice.

In looking for potential contrasts between the English and Swedish answers, one may initially note a similarity. The English metaphors no longer with us and departed both treat the dead person as though he or she has physically gone to a different place. The same can be said for the Swedish euphemisms lämnat oss, lämnat jorden and kilat vidare. Lämnat jorden is particular in that it verbalizes the act of leaving the physical realm of the earth but, apart from that one, there are two from each language whose meanings are particularly close when being translated: kilat vidare – departed and lämnat oss – no longer with us. Also, one should note that the second-most voted euphemism and one of the least established English euphemisms, according to the survey, is deceased, although the Swedish-speakers listed it as a verb in past tense (avlidit) while the dictionary [ibid] defines it as an adjective.

**Question 3:** Question number three, which considered euphemisms concerning the word pornographic movie, resulted in three different expressions. Porno and dirty movie/film was the result of a tie in the English-speaking respondents’ survey while vuxenfilm (adult movie) was favored unanimously in the survey of the Swedish-speaking contributors. Initially, regarding the word porno, one becomes aware
that it is no more than clipping of the word *pornographic* (Oxford, 2014). With this technique, one has effectively excluded any literal mentioning of the word *pornographic* and the fact that it is a movie as opposed to any other media. *Dirty*, as in *dirty movie*, though, is more suggestive regarding the nature of the content of the film per the definition [ibid]: “concerned with sex in a lewd or obscene way.” The connotation of a *dirty movie* is that of an *adult movie*; however, the denotation of *dirty* suggests uncleanliness and vulgarity, which could indicate that *dirty movie* is old fashioned. This expression could be associated with the dated mindset that *pornographic film* was less morally acceptable than today. If a change in mindset regarding *pornographic film* occurred, it means that *dirty movie*, which was dysphemistic initially, has seemingly changed from being dysphemistic to being euphemistic. *Blue film, adult movie* and *porn* represent the euphemisms that were submitted at least twice by the English participants.

The Swedish-speaking contributors submitted *vuxenfilm (adult movie)* the most times. *Adult*, in *adult movie*, carries more than one definition and according to one in particular, regarding sexual material [ibid], it appears clearly as a euphemism: “suitable only for adults (used euphemistically to refer to a sexually explicit film, book or magazine).” It is conceivable why one would deem this expression to be euphemistic as it does not literally mention in the phrase itself why it is not suited for children or what it contains. It simply implies that it is a movie in which adults interact in an *adult* manner. The only other Swedish euphemism for *pornographic film* was *p-rulle*. It has been abbreviated by the simple act of removing all the content of the word beyond the first letter, *p*, from *pornographic* and, as opposed to saying *film*, a Swedish colloquial word is used instead. *Rulle* is a Swedish word for *film*, which may playfully refer to old projector films since *rulle* translates to *cylinder, reel, roll, etc.*

There were some contrasts regarding euphemisms for *pornographic film*. The English-speaking contributors supplied five euphemisms that were mentioned at least twice. This was contrastive to the Swedish-speaking participants who provided two euphemisms that were submitted more than once.
This could indicate that the majority of the Swedish participants felt no need to replace *pornographic film* with a euphemism. On the other hand, *vuxenfilm (adult movie)*, which was the most popular Swedish euphemism, was one of the less frequently mentioned English euphemisms.

**Question 4:** The following question considered euphemisms for *homosexual*. The English and the Swedish participants were once again unanimous as they mentioned one word as a euphemism for *homosexual*. This was also the case for euphemisms regarding *died*. *Gay* is a synonym for *homosexual* (Oxford, 2014) but it is actually used more to refer to homosexual men than women [ibid]. It is noticeable that both the Swedish and the English contributors use the term in English, which is to say that Swedish-speakers say *gay* not having invented a Swedish equivalent or translation for it. It also became clear by talking to the participants of the survey that neither language-culture felt that *homosexual* was a derogatory or taboo term, therefore it did not warrant the need for a euphemism. *Gay* was the only English expression submitted twice or more. The only other term being *fairy*, which is deemed per definition [ibid] to be offensive and therefore not euphemistic. However, the contributors that submitted *fairy* were both in their fifties, which could indicate that *fairy* has undergone a change by originally being euphemistic but, in the modern age, this term may be more accurately regarded as a dysphemism.

The second-most mentioned Swedish euphemism was *spelar för det andra laget (playing for the other team)*. To say that someone is *playing for the other team* is a sports metaphor with the perspective that straight individuals comprise one team while *homosexual* individuals constitute the *other team*. It is considered euphemistic having regarded to how it completely eliminates any explicit mention of being *homosexual* and, instead, refers to it using a metaphor related to team sports. *Intresserade av det egna könet (interested in the same sex), svänger åt det andra hållet (leans the other direction)* and *föredrar killar/tjejer (prefers boys/girls)* were all close in number to the second-most mentioned
Lastly, having examined the euphemisms, one understands why *gay* was clearly the most suggested English euphemism. The only other English expression that was repeated was a term that is more often regarded as an insult, i.e. *“fairy”*. The Swedish contributors, on the other hand, supplied *gay*, two metaphors and two straightforward explanations, which all were almost equally established. It should also be noted that *spelar för det andra laget*, the second-most mentioned Swedish euphemism, was not the only sports-related metaphor suggested in this survey. One of the English-speaking participants mentioned *bats for the other side*, which may be related to both cricket and baseball. These findings indicate the fact that the Swedish participants displayed a more diverse manner of expressing *homosexual* in mentioning both metaphors and euphemistic explanations.

**Question 5:** This question related to being *fired* from one's job; the English participants supplied the expression *let go* while the Swedish favored *between jobs*. *Let go* is particularly obscure, it is defined (Oxford, 2014) as: “[euphemistic] dismiss an employee”. It could mean that the employee was *let go* for a reason that the former employee may not want to disclose. Another way to formulate it is to add an agent in saying: “my boss let me go”, which would imply that the boss is to blame, in the mind of the employee, for the termination of the position. As can be seen, *let go* supplies a euphemistic element to the case by being able to render it obscure and unclear as to why exactly the person was *let go*. Furthermore, it is obscure to the extent that the reason for the dismissal may be natural, the company was forced to downsize, or due to an employee's behavior justifying a dismissal. The second-most mentioned English expression was *sacked*, which means [ibid] : “[informal] dismissal from employment.” It is considered a British equivalent to *fired*, whose origin is considered American. To utter that one was *sacked* is euphemistic since it is informal, although it is thought to be synonymous with *fired*, more so than being a crystal clear euphemism as the connotation is slightly milder than
fired. Made redundant, laid off and asked to leave were the only euphemisms favored by two or more participants.

*Mellan jobb (between jobs)* is defined seemingly close to *let go* [ibid]: “a euphemistic way of referring to a person being temporarily unemployed.” In addition to being euphemistic, the expression in question is also a spatial metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) since the speaker treats two jobs, which are concepts and abstract, as though they are physical objects that one could literally stand between. In contrast to *let go*, which focuses more on hiding the reason for the termination of the employment, *between jobs* implies to the listener that the unemployment is expected to be temporary and brief. It does not mention the fact that the speaker has been *let go*. Instead, he or she has either secured, or believes they are likely to secure, another job, and that they are currently in a transition period. The only other Swedish euphemism mentioned more than twice is *mellan två jobb (between two jobs)*, which was submitted three times, and approximates to *mellan jobb (between jobs)*. The difference between these is the fact that *between two jobs* is more specific about the situation, implying that the speaker is in the process of moving from one job to another.

The contrast between the English and Swedish euphemisms in this case was the fact that the English-speaking respondents provided more euphemisms for losing one's job. The Swedish-speaking participants, however, supplied fewer euphemisms, but the ones they supplied concerned in particular the unemployment period rather than the dismissal itself. Overall, it displayed a tendency for the Swedish-speaking sample to be less reticent about revealing losing their job. These euphemisms appear to illustrate the shame of the Swedish-speaking respondents with regard to individuals in their surroundings fearing that they will remain out of work for a prolonged period of time.

**Question 6:** This question is concerned with euphemisms for the word *pregnant*. The most favored alternative ways of communicating that someone is *pregnant* both by the Swedish-speaking and
English-speaking respondents was concerned with baking. *Up the duff* was defined as simply being *pregnant* but the word *duff* carries a certain meaning, which states (Oxford, 2014): “a flour pudding boiled or steamed in a cloth bag.” Equally many English-speaking respondents voted for *bun in the oven*. It is also defined as an expression for being *pregnant* [ibid]. The expressions carry a similarity in both being metaphorical and by virtue of the fact that both metaphors mirror the process of baking. In order to reflect the maturing-process of pregnancy, both metaphors refer to baking methods that consume a considerable amount of time, albeit not nine months, but in the end one has turned a collection of ingredients into a finished product. *Expecting, eating for two, preggers, knocked up, having a baby* and *with child* were other alternative ways of communicating *pregnancy* which were also mentioned at least twice.

The Swedish-speaking contributors' most preferred alternative was *bulle i ugnen* (*bun in the oven*) as well as *ska ha barn* (*having a baby*). One may have already read the explanation on *bun in the oven* above; however, *having a baby* is entirely different. It is not a metaphor, however, it is still considered euphemistic since it does not literally mention *pregnancy* and one could adopt as opposed to procreate biologically and, therefore, *having a baby* does not invariably entail *pregnancy* either. *Äter för två* (*eating for two*), *väntar bebis* (*expecting a baby*), *väntar tillökning/tillskott* (*expecting addition*) and *på tjocken/smällen* (*knocked up*) were the ones submitted by at least two Swedish respondents.

In this question, it was discovered that two of the most established euphemisms from either language were also equivalents to one another as *bun in the oven* and *bulle i ugnen* became two of the most used euphemisms concerning *pregnancy*. *Ska ha barn* (*having a baby*), which was one of the most mentioned Swedish euphemism, is equivalent to *having a baby*, which was one of the lesser mentioned ones in English. However, *eating for two*, which is translated to *äter för två*, occurred as a less frequently suggested euphemism in respective languages. It was the same case for *knocked up*, which corresponded with both *på tjocken* and *på smällen*. 

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**Question 7:** This question relates to euphemism for *old*. Both the Swedish and English-speaking respondents preferred *äldre* and *elderly*, respectively. *Elderly* is a synonym for *old* in a similar manner that *gay* functions as a synonym for *homosexual*. Also, several participants communicated that there was no need to supply a euphemism for *old* as it did not evoke taboo or insult. However, it may be noted that *elderly* appears more gentle and euphemistic. *Old* may be utilized to comment on not only age, but also one's appearance in an insulting manner. This phenomenon may be seen in industries based on performances such as sports, dancing, etc, although it may be a cultural phenomenon. The basis of judging and referring to an athlete as *old*, is usually the fact that Athlete A has been active in the sport for a long period of time and is nearing the end of his or her career. Also, by virtue of competing with significantly younger Athlete B, the contrast between the two will become visible since Athlete B possesses the younger body and physique, has probably yet to endure any career-altering injuries and is highly motivated to reach the top. The contrast in these performances will appear visible enough to prompt the fans to utter “Athlete A looked *old* tonight”. *Elderly*, on the other hand, is bestowed upon a person that has achieved an age that is considered a benchmark. This functions in a similar way to how individuals above a certain level body fat are referred to as *overweight*. In addition to that, *old* may be used to refer to objects whereas *elderly* is primarily an adjective used to refer to people and, sometimes, animals. The second-most mentioned English euphemism was *getting on a bit*. In this expression, *a bit* minimizes the aging aspect, while *getting on* is suggestive of progressing towards the end of life. Other expressions that were mentioned at least twice were *senior, mature* and *ancient*, although one would argue that *ancient* is dysphemistic and hyperbolic (exaggeration). The Great Wall of China is ancient: a person cannot be.

The second Swedish euphemism, *lite äldre (a bit/little older)*, was as equally popular as *äldre (elderly)*. The subtle difference between these two that garner very different translations is the addition
of lite (a bit/little). It provides the same understating effect as a bit did for the expression getting on a bit. Äldre is used euphemistically by person A to refer to person B as old. Furthermore, using äldre represents the intent of the speaker to understate the comment. Äldre is the comparative form of old and it functions as an understatement because person A says that person B is older than before, as opposed to old, which is the natural way of life. Vis (wise), erfaren (experienced) and levttänge (has lived long) were all mentioned more than once.

It can be seen that there are some similarities between what the respondents of both languages answered. Mature, wise and experienced indicate the supposed benefits of growing old, which is that someone who is old possesses vital qualities such as maturity, wisdom and experience. Conversely, the expressions has lived long and ancient seem to focus on the sole fact that person B is old.

**Question 8:** This question inquired euphemisms for sexual intercourse; however, it did not provoke offense or breach any cultural or linguistic taboos, either, according to the respondents from both language communities. Despite this, the English-speaking respondents mentioned make love the most, which heightened the positive connotations of sex, such as with the case of elderly and old. Even though there are no negatives to downplay by using euphemisms for this natural human behavior, one may still elect to do so since it communicates the intended message of the speaker. Make love, as opposed to sexual intercourse, utilizes an ontological metaphor concerned with treating an abstract like an object. Furthermore, make love implies that the two parties involved engage in a tender act with love and care for one another. The connotation of sexual intercourse, however, is that of a straightforward and purely physical act in which there is no tenderness, less care and less romance. The second-most mentioned English euphemism was bonking, which was defined as (Oxford, 2014): “[British] have sexual intercourse.” Despite the apparent synonymy, one could argue that bonking carries a more playful and youthful connotation, which is more euphemistic than the aforementioned sexual
“intercourse that carries an almost biological connotation. Sex, doing it, shagging and sleeping together were mentioned at least twice by the English-speaking respondents.

The Swedish-speaking participants favored *ha sex (have sex)*, which is defined as following [ibid]: “[chiefly with reference to people] sexual activity, including specifically sexual intercourse.” As one can see even just from the word *sex* itself, it implies *sexual intercourse* but, due to the clipping of *sexual* and the omission of *intercourse*, it does not expressly mention it. The second-most favored Swedish euphemism was *ligga (to screw)*. According to the dictionary, *to screw* is considered “vulgar slang”, but *ligga* is in Swedish considered a euphemism. In contrast to its English counterpart, *ligga* does not utilize an object: it is an intransitive verb. Furthermore, the speaker does not specify with whom he or she had sex; it is the act itself which is highlighted. This in part contributes to its euphemistic nature. *Älska (make love), pippa (to screw), pöka (to screw, to hump)* and *gjort det (did it)* were all mentioned at least twice.

It may be noted that the Swedish respondents did not appear to view *sexual intercourse* to be a taboo. On the contrary, the Swedish participants provided *pöka* and *pippa* more than once and *knulla (fuck)* once, which are dysphemisms as they are considered to be far harsher than *sexual intercourse*. However, Swedish-speakers would conceivably regard *pippa* to be euphemistic and not vulgar or harsh, although the English equivalent to *pippa* is considered vulgar and therefore dysphemistic.

**Question 9:** This question investigated euphemisms for *defecate*. The English contributors favored *pooped* for *defecate*. *Poop*, besides meaning *defecate*, also functions as an extension of the metaphor, describing being overcome by fear and losing one's continence. An example is “to poop one's pants out of fright”. *Poop* is considered to possess milder, less blunt, overtones than the mechanical expression “*defecate*”. The reason being that *poop* carries a childlike and youthful connotation, which renders it more euphemistic in contrast to *defecate*. The second-most mentioned euphemism was *took a dump,*
which is defined as (Oxford, 2014): “[informal] act of defecation.” This is a metaphor since it illustrates the possibly careless and frantic nature of defecating with the metaphor of dumping an object rapidly. Also, since the context provided in the question concerns a dog defecating on a lawn, this metaphor is even more suitable considering that dogs relieve themselves where they can. *Shat, crapped, pood, left a parcel and made a mess* were other expressions mentioned more than once.

The Swedish respondents chose *gjort sina behov (did its business)*. *Did its business* offers an euphemistic concealment that not only excludes any literal references to *defecate*, but a part of it is also a metaphor that may reflect a cornucopia of bodily functions that are avoided in conversation. For example, when one is asked about a sensitive matter which one does not wishes to divulge, the response is often “mind your own *business*” or “that is not your *business*”. The second-most mentioned euphemism was *lagt en korv (planted a sausage)*. This is a euphemistic metaphor, although *planted a sausage* graphically illustrates the event of defecating, which might not be desirable, but it is nevertheless a metaphor since it describes this action using another action. *Skitit (crapped)* was the only other Swedish expression mentioned more than once.

The Swedish and English respondents mentioned *crapped* and *skitit* equally many times. Furthermore, *crapped* and *shat* were mentioned more than the actual English euphemisms. *Skitit* was the second-most voted Swedish euphemism. This appears to illustrate the thought of both language-cultures, which is that there is no apparent or underlying taboo concerning *defecate*. On the contrary, *defecate* appears to be a bit too formal, or perhaps too graphic, for the respondents. Whatever connotations are carried with *defecate*, the word seems to prompt the respondents to look for an alternative that is more informal, whether it is euphemistic or dysphemistic.

**Question 10:** The final question of the survey considered euphemisms for *drunk*. The most mentioned expression by the English-speakers was *tipsy*. *Tipsy*, according to its definition (Oxford, 2014), means
“slightly drunk”. The term *slightly* diminishes the force of the adjective, suggesting a lesser degree of intoxication and so qualifying as litotes, and the term *tipsy* becomes euphemistic in the way that its effect is lessened. The second-most mentioned English euphemism *squiffy*, which means [ibid] :

“[British informal]slightly drunk.” One may recognize that this is a euphemism for a previously mentioned reason, being that it signifies *slightly* drunk and that is not worse than *drunk* or *very drunk*. It implies drunkenness without being explicit or literally mentioning it. *Rat-arsed, tiddly, had one too many, merry, smashed* and *pissed* were all mentioned more than once. *Rat-arsed, smashed* and *pissed* are dysphemistic as they exaggerate the intoxication as opposed to minimizing it. *Merry, tiddly* and *had one too many*, however, are considered euphemistic as they replace the negative connotation of *drunk* with one that is more positive.

The Swedish participants favored *lit up*. It combines a conceptual metaphor “lit” with an orientational one “up” to generate a phrasal verb. As opposed to mentioning intoxication, *lit up* supplies the association of something radiant and feeling up. The second-most suggested Swedish euphemism was *rund under fötterna* (wobbly feet). Considering an accurate translation was lacking, a description was made in order to convey the sensation of being *rund under fötterna*. It is a euphemism for being *drunk* and a metaphor because it utilizes the experience of walking with *round* or *wobbly* feet to illustrate the effect of being slightly *drunk*. *Glad (happy) and lullig (woozy)* were the only other expressions used more than once by the Swedish-speaking respondents.

Finally, by examining the most popular answers given by the English-speaking contributors, it is clear that at least a couple regarded *drunk* to be too gentle. This was evident as two individuals mentioned *pissed* and *rat-arsed* and three mentioned *smashed*. *Fucked up, hammered, off one's face* and *out of one's skull* were only mentioned one each, but the sheer quantity of different expressions would indicate that there is seemingly no taboo around this topic. It would be conceivable to label these as dysphemisms by virtue of them possessing negative connotations that would possibly be
perceived as stronger than the most standard term, *drunk*. The reason for this is that the term “drunk” may or may not have a pejorative interpretation; while some use it negatively, another individual may proudly boast about their own degree of drunkenness on a particular occasion. *Fucked up, hammered, off one's face, pissed, rat-arsed* and *out of one's skull* in particular may, by virtue of overstating, bring negative associations.

### 6. Discussion

This section will relate to the analysis and results in exposing potential patterns and mindsets regarding each language culture’s usage of euphemisms, and it will begin with a recap of the original thesis questions:

1. To what extent do the two language communities, native English and Swedish speakers, utilize euphemisms for sensitive, potentially offensive and taboo topics?
2. To what extent are the English and Swedish euphemisms similar in terms of their literal and figurative meanings?
3. What other demographic factors influence euphemism usage?

As the analysis showed, each question elicited euphemisms in both languages. There were cases in which Swedish euphemisms carried a literal and metaphorical meaning which was identical to, or strikingly close to, the English euphemisms provided. Similarly, there were instances wherein either the Swedish or the English euphemism appeared particular to the language. However, there were cases in which respondents not only provided euphemisms, but dysphemisms and synonyms as well. *Gay* was
not only the most mentioned euphemism for *homosexual*, but it was the most suggested euphemism overall. However, one would consider it a synonym for *homosexual* considering its usage in official circumstances. By virtue of being used by campaigners for the rights of homosexuals, this word may now be perceived as carrying a neutral connotation in comparison to *homosexual* and therefore being a synonym. Examples of this are the *gay-pride parade* and *LGBT* (*lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual*). Due to the English-speaking respondents' nearly unanimous suggestion of *gay* as the most popular euphemism for *homosexual* in contrast to the equal distribution between several Swedish euphemisms, it could be interpreted that the disposition of English-speakers is to refer to *homosexuals* in a politically correct manner as opposed to the Swedish-speaking culture where several expressions are equally established. Furthermore, while the English-speakers suggested only two different metaphors once each for *homosexual*, the Swedish-speakers favored strongly the expressions and metaphors based on the notion of homosexuals and heterosexuals being two different “sides” or “teams”. This could indicate that the Swedish-speaking respondents, especially the heterosexual ones, experience a divide or disconnect towards the homosexual community in using expressions like *spelar för det andra laget* (*play/s for the other team*) and *svänger åt det andra hållet* (*swings the other direction*). The English-speaking participants, however, appear to display a sense of connection with the homosexual community and not the kind of two-teams mentality as the aforementioned metaphors would suggest. The English-speaking respondents even favored, as is explained above, the politically correct and nearly official term which in turn strengthens the assumption that English-speaking culture is accepting of homosexuals and homosexuality. Also, the English-speakers mentioned twice as many dysphemistic expressions for this particular term than the Swedish-speakers. Conversely, the majority of the respondents from each culture consisted of contributors who may be regarded as elderly or in later middle age. It may be the case that the societal changes rendering words such as *bög* (*queer*), *queer*, *pansy* and *fairy* insulting and no longer euphemistic is not exclusive to the English language. It
appears to have happened in the Swedish language as well in relation to *homosexual*, although this survey suggests that the extent of this kind of changed expressions is greater in the English language.

While talking about dysphemisms, it is worth noting the topic of *intoxication* in relation to the English-speaking respondents. They suggested a substantial number of different dysphemisms for *drunk* in contrast to the Swedish-speaking respondents who did not submit any at all. One could interpret this result as the English-speakers possessing a casual and indifferent attitude towards drinking by using words that communicate a mental image that is worse than *drunk*. The Swedish-speaking respondents, on the other hand, arguably possess a more serious perspective on drinking as they did not seemingly venture to render the expressions more offensive and graphic. It could also be argued that English-speaking culture is more comfortable with drinking as opposed to the Swedish-speaking one, where there is a state monopoly on alcohol-sales. Every day, Swedes are exposed to commercials by *Systembolaget*, the proprietor of the Swedish alcohol-monopoly, informing them about the dangers of consuming alcohol, how to properly introduce the young adults to alcohol in a responsible manner, and the dangers of consuming too much alcohol in a festive setting. This would invite the consideration of the possibility that Swedes are simply not encouraged to treat the consumption of alcohol lightly and therefore rather speak of it euphemistically or metaphorically. The UK in particular has a rather rich culture concerning alcohol especially in relation to Scotch whisky, English ales and the iconic image of the traditional British pubs, which are admired and emulated in other nations, including Sweden.

While investigating the expressions relating to *sexual intercourse*, it is striking to find that, while the English-speakers supplied substantially more euphemisms than the Swedish-speakers, the Swedish-speakers suggested slightly more dysphemistic or even colorful expressions. The expressions *shagging* and *have a quick shag* were supplied by the English-speakers while *knulla (to fuck), pippa (to screw)* and *göka (also to screw)* were supplied by the Swedish-speaking respondents. The majority of these
contributors were women, which seemingly contradicts any assumption of female sensitivity on this topic. Furthermore, many participants are were aged between nineteen and twenty-seven and, therefore, they might be verbalising a more capricious attitude towards sexual intercourse than those from an earlier generation. However, since the percentage of these dysphemisms is low in terms of the English-speakers and in relation to total expressions mentioned, it may be extrapolated that the majority of the English-speaking respondents employ euphemisms as opposed to uttering the term itself. On the other hand, the Swedish-participants not only mentioned more dysphemisms, they also suggested fewer expressions overall, and this may indicate less anxiety in discussing sexual intercourse.

Gay, gjort sina behov (did its business) and på lyset (lit up) were the most mentioned Swedish euphemisms for their respective topics (homosexual, defecate and drunk). They featured the only cases in which the most suggested Swedish euphemism was suggested by females only. This is in contrast to the English-speakers, in which this occurrence took place only once, as pooped was mentioned only by females as a euphemism for defecate. These arguably indicate that Swedish males of this sample feel no necessity in assigning euphemisms for homosexuality, defecation or drunkenness in preference to uttering the actual terms. This may also be said about the English-speaking males of this sample in terms of defecation. Furthermore, both the Swedish-speakers and English-speakers featured female majority. In other words, in the majority of cases concerning the most suggested euphemisms, there were more females than males that mentioned them. Overall, it appears as though the male sample felt that the topics were not taboo enough to warrant euphemisms. This is not to say that these males abstained from using euphemisms all together. However, the data indicated that males of neither culture were as sensitive to the supposed taboo of the terms as the females. This coincides with the traditional view that most men are more direct and less sensitive in communication while women are perceived as being indirect, abstaining from swearing and more sensitive in their language use. While this notion accords well with the intention behind utilizing euphemisms in general, it was not shown to
apply in relation to *sexual intercourse*: females accounted for the vast majority of the colorful and dysphemistic expressions suggested.
7. Conclusion

Having identified a number of sensitive, potentially offensive and taboo topics, the results of the survey indicated that both languages possess at least one euphemism for each of the topic areas covered. Some were found to have direct parallels, i.e. where the most suggested Swedish euphemism carried both a literal meaning, and a figurative meaning that corresponded with an English euphemism currently used by native speakers. There were also trends and patterns that were identified in relation to other demographics, such as the age and gender of the participants.

As illustrated in the Discussion section, the study of euphemisms offers possibilities to gain insights into cultural and psychological aspects of language use, including sensibilities, and how we seek to communicate about these issues linguistically while minimising the risk of offence. Euphemisms are interesting as semantic and pragmatic phenomena. As with metaphors and other types of trope, euphemisms necessitate double encoding and decoding yet, in spite of the apparent circuitous process of meaning recovery, the degree to which they are conventionalized readily facilitates their instant and efficient comprehension by the hearer. In addition to the intended meaning, the illocutionary effect is such that the speaker transmits an additional message, namely his or her belief that the subject or content of the utterance is such that is best handled with some delicacy. The use and interpretation of euphemisms is especially amenable to analysis by the main pragmatic theories which seek to account for the operation of implicature, such as Gricean pragmatics, Relevance Theory and speech act theory.

Further research should be considered in order to investigate regional and social differences in euphemism usage. This would add to our understanding of euphemisms as both figurative speech and rhetorical devices, and their commonalities and differences between speech communities within the
same language or language families. Such research would contribute to progress in charting social and philological changes.

8. Bibliography


Appendices

In this chapter, both questionnaires may be viewed beginning with the one designed for the Swedish-speaker.

Swedish Questionnaire

- Kän
- Ålder
- Utbildning

1. Du tycker att en familjemedlem har blivit för fet, ange ett eller flera mildare ord eller uttryck som du skulle använda istället.


6. Din bästa vän har precis meddelat dig att hon är gravid och du vill gärna säga detta till dina föräldrar men du
vill inte använda just det ordet, ange ett eller flera mildare ord eller uttryck som du skulle använda istället.


Tack för din medverkan!
English Questionnaire

- Sex
- Age
- Education

1. You think that a family member has become too fat. Give one or more words or expressions that you would use instead of “fat”.

2. A close friend has died. You want to tell this to your parents, give one or more words or expressions that you would use instead of “died” or “dead”.

3. You have reason to mention “pornographic movie” to your partner. What other term might be used instead of “pornographic movie”?

4. You want to inform an elderly relative that your new neighbor is homosexual, give one or more words or expressions that you would use instead of “homosexual”.

5. You have been fired at work and your parents, while unaware of this, inquire how your work is going. Give one or more words or expressions that you might use instead.

6. Your best friend just told you that she is pregnant. Suggest one or more words or expressions that you would use instead of “pregnant”.

7. Your child asks you why grandpa is so old but you correct it instantly saying that that isn't nice. Give one or more words or expressions that you might use instead of “old”.

8. You want to express the act of sexual intercourse – but in a way that is inoffensive. Give one or more words or expressions that you would use instead of “sexual intercourse”.

9. The neighbor's dog defecated on your lawn and you want to notify your neighbor. Give one or more words or expressions that you would use instead of “defecate”.

10. You want to describe someone as being drunk. Suggest one or more milder expressions which indicate drunkenness.

Thank you for participating!
My name is Henrik Niklas Nilsson. I am 24 and was born and raised in Åstorp, on the outskirts of Helsingborg in Scania. I am Swedish and partly German. I studied German and Spanish shortly as well as English and French for a couple of years. Furthermore, I resided in France for ...