
“Not at the dinner table”: Euphemism, dysphemism, and cross-linguistic avoidance in toilet-related expressions

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From verbal veils such as “loose stomach” to whispered jokes like “ring stinger”, scatological language offers a revealing lens on how cultures navigate the uneasy intersection of the body, propriety, and disgust—yet it remains underexamined as a systematic, cross-linguistic phenomenon. While studies have explored gender differences in perceptions of bodily fluids (Allan & Burrige 1991; Joffe 1948) and the psychology of disgust (Jay 2000), few combine these insights in comparative, data-driven analyses of everyday euphemistic and dysphemistic expressions. This paper presents an ongoing project using two original online questionnaires, one focused on non-English languages, the other on varieties of English. These gather general, polite, slang, and humorous terms for bodily effluvia, along with ratings of perceived disgust, offensiveness, and shamefulness in specific social contexts. The non-English survey examines cross-linguistic and cultural patterns, while the English survey addresses dialectal and varietal differences. By documenting such expressions across multiple languages and English varieties, the project builds a comparative framework for understanding how scatological taboos are negotiated at the intersection of culture, register, and social relationships.

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