

employees may be called 'human resources' / or to sack somebody is described as 'letting them go' /

a third and very large category is to do with the body and its functions / the physical part of human nature / so / the toilet for example is referred to as the 'bathroom' or the 'powder room' / having sex is referred to as 'sleeping with' somebody or 'going to bed with' them / being old is described as 'getting on a bit' or 'being a senior citizen' / dying / is called 'passing away' or humorously / 'pushing up the daisies' /

all these examples may seem amusing or even interesting / 'interesting' is itself a / uh a euphemism in some contexts by the way / uh but hardly perhaps of great social significance / recently however euphemism has come out of the private domain of interpersonal communication / and moved into the public domain / it has become political / so the last category that I want to mention I think is a very important category / it's one which is must... much discussed in the media / and it is what is sometimes called politically correct language / the term *political correctness* is almost the opposite of a euphemism because it has become associated with absurdity and excess / so for example we have joke politically correct expressions such as 'chronologically challenged' which is supposed to mean old / or

'follically different' which is supposed to mean bald / these are absurd but the main idea behind this kind of linguistic behaviour is surely a good one / at least in intention / that groups of people should be made to feel socially included rather than excluded and valued rather than disparaged / politically correct language / revolves around issues of race, of sexual orientation and of disability particularly / uh let me take one particular example to do with children / children with physical or mental problems may be called 'exceptional children' / children with mental impairments are described as 'having learning difficulties' / children in general are often these days not called 'children' / which may seem to imply exclusion from the adult world of rights and independence / but they're called 'young people' or 'youngsters' or informally 'kids' /

does all this MATTER? / YES / we NEED euphemisms / the LEXICOGRAPHER Robert Burchfield says 'a language WITHOUT euphemisms would be a DEFECTIVE instrument of COMMUNICATION' / we NEED them but we also need to UNDERSTAND them and WATCH them CAREFULLY / we need to make SURE / especially in the POLITICAL domain / that WE are the masters of THEM / not THEM of US /