

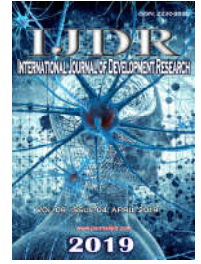


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THE NATURE, TYPES, MOTIVES, AND FUNCTIONS OF SWEAR WORDS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper discusses swearwords. It is based on the data drawn from the wide literature of swearing and taboo language. A sociolinguistic approach was adopted to discuss and analyze various aspects of swearing. This paper aims to identify the nature, types, motives, and functions of swear words. Based on the analysis, this study concluded that there are several and different classification systems of 'bad language' and 'swear words' and that is due to the fact that the value of 'badness' in all languages are constantly changing. The study has revealed many types of swear words; namely epithet, profanity, obscenity, cursing, blasphemy, taboo, vulgarity or the use of substandard vulgar terms, slang, insults, scatology, semantic derogation, ethnic/racial/ gender slurs, animal names mentioning, ancestral allusions, and propositional and non- propositional swearing which include dysphemistic, euphemistic, abusive, idiomatic, cathartic and emphatic swearing. It is also found that despite the various classification systems of swear words, however it is still difficult to reveal clear cut differences between the proposed types. It was inferred by the results of this discussion that there are many reasons, motives, and functions for swearing among both genders which include: expressing the speaker's feelings in certain situations, achieving positive or negative impact on others, producing a pain lessening (hypoalgesic) effect, venting the emotions and non-emphatic feelings such as anger, frustration, surprise, sorrow, surprise, humor, and joy. Finally, it was inferred by this study that gender and age play a powerful role in swearing among both males and females.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is defined as a special tool that is used by any group of people to communicate (Wardhaugh, 2006). It is also defined as a system of both spoken and written communication employed by people of a particular speech community (Hornby, 2000). And for the sake of having a better understanding of language structure and the function of language in communication, the field of sociolinguistics examines any phenomena that involve language and society and try to highlight the relationships between language and society through studying people's everyday life interaction whether in formal or informal occasions (Wardhaugh, 2006) and people's different ways of speaking in different social contexts and the use of language in social life to deliver social

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messages, i.e. social communication through language (Holmes, 2013). Moreover, within a society, which is defined as a community of people who are connected to each other for a certain purpose or goal (Hornby 2000), people have to interact (speak and write) to each other to reach these purposes or goals and to build a sustaining social interaction in which all aspects beyond the speech activities appear including social values, conditions, beliefs, etc. in additions, these aspects influence the communications' participants to shape the communication process and to determine the style of speech used in the interaction to meet the social needs that can be accurate and reliable for all speakers and can be also satisfied by a good communication between the communicators (Chaika, 1982). The process of communication is considered as one of the most essential needs in the human beings' life. It can be also counted as a medium of interaction among people through which they can convey messages and negotiate certain meaning of any matter which is overall seen as the main object of communication process itself (Pearson, 1985). In addition,

there are various motives why communicators interact or communicate; for instance, they interact to sustain good relationships with others, solve problems, share information, make decisions, exchange ideas or feelings, building types of contacts, such as interpersonal contacts, small group contacts, and sometimes public forum contacts, etc (Gamble, 1984). So, to reach a successful communication, Person inferred that the conveyed message should be clearly understood by both of the speaker and the hearer. Besides comprehending and catching the information conveyed in the message, the speaker and the hearer, in order to be good communicators, must be both sensitive enough, aware, and consider the red line of the communication process and following the communication flow (1985). However, the communicators sometimes fail to communicate appropriately, and thus they fail to satisfy not only their individual and social needs, but also their practical needs in general. One aspect of this failure is the use of swearing which is one form of taboo language (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). In avoiding the emergence of taboo topics and taboo words in daily conversation, people commonly learn to differentiate what is taboo and what is not through the process of being a part of a society. They also try to understand what they should speak and what they should not speak in communication by considering the norms prevailed in their own living place. This learning process is in line with Jay's idea (2009: 153) that nobody is born with the innate knowledge of taboo words and swearing etiquette. These all are achieved as people learn language in society through socialization process.

Bad language: From a sociolinguistics point of view, there are several and different classification systems of 'bad language' and that is due to the fact that the value of 'badness' in all languages are constantly changing. Additionally, the existence of the variation and differentiation of these various classifications, according to the sociolinguists, is needed to enrich language variety and add knowledge on each classification of this non-standard language. Similarly, understanding the development of classification of bad language is important to catch complete meaning of any sentences or utterances that are uttered within this 'bad language' (Andersson and Trudgill in Doyle, 2006).

Jay (1992: 2-9) proposed a classification system of the 'bad language' (also known as dirty words). The classification system includes the following:

Cursing: The purpose of cursing is to harm other people by using certain words or phrases dealing with divine power. It is also defined as the expression of a wish that misfortune, evil, doom, etc., befall a person, group, etc.

Profanity: This type of word is based on religious beliefs. However, when someone uses this word, he/she uses it as an act of disrespecting God, religion, or holy things, or more on ignorance of these matters.

Blasphemy: Someone uses this word to attack a certain religion or religious beliefs. blasphemy is also defined as the act of ridiculing the divine being. In other words, blasphemy is the act of cursing God (Montagu, 2001). It is further defined as the action or offence of speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things.

Taboo: the purpose of the taboo is to suppress the speaker's behavior and save a certain social cohesion. Or in other words, it is used to protect sensitive things like cultural group or supernatural reprisal. Taboo words mean something that is prohibited to say in certain cultures. These words may not be respectful to religions. It also means talking sexual behaviors in public, even including some insulting topics, such as mental disorders and death.

Obscenity: obscene words are considered as the most offensive words. Obscenity means using words related to sex, down to private human body parts. Battistella (2005) refers obscenity to words or phrases, which symbolizes sex differentiating anatomy or sexual and excretory functions in a rude manner. Examples of obscenity are fuck and shit. '*Fuck*' is the obscenest word (Jay, 1996, p.15).

Vulgarity: vulgar words refer to coarse words that are often related to the language of under-educated people.

Slang: slang is particular non-standard words that are often used to communicate internally among the members of particular group of people, such as teenagers, musicians, drug users, etc.

Epithets: words or phrases which are usually brief but effective to yell and express frustrated feelings, or people may utter a certain epithet when he/she hurts him/herself. Epithet could refer to race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disabilities, appearance of a person and other characteristics (Battistella, 2005). In addition, Jay (1996) defined epithet as a powerful burst of emotional language due to sudden anger or frustration. Words or phrases like '*Nazi*', '*midget*', '*retard*' and '*motherfucker*' are examples of epithet.

Insults and slurs: when someone utters insults and slurs, he/she expresses verbal attacks on others. The main cases of insults and slurs are usually about ethnic or racial groups or social in nature and may lead to stereotype or prejudice. Insults are mostly related to the speaker's inadequate respect for others. When you insult someone, you attack them by calling them '*bastard*' or '*bitch*'. It could refer to an ethnic insult when you call someone '*nigger*' or '*black*' (Jay, 1996). Jay explained that the power of insult is gained when real or imagined negative traits of the victim is highlighted. He added that the speaker has lack of respect for others. Ethnic insults are racially bound insults. Terms like '*flip*' for Filipinos and '*ape*' for a black person (ibid: 1996).

Scatology: it refers to the involvement of excrement or human waste both in product and process, in certain utterances. According to Permadi (2017), despite the fact that Jay's classification system seems comprehensive enough, however it is still difficult to reveal clear cut differences between the ten proposed categories. For example, there is a slight differentiation, but yet a confusion, that exists between taboo and obscenity. Taboo includes not only indecent terms but also other offensive matters, such as ethnic slurs, supernatural power, etc. While obscenity includes certain terms which are indecent and usually dealing with pornographic senses. In light of the previous mentioned differentiations and other possible differentiations that emerge between each category of 'bad language' or 'dirty words', this research only tries to explore swearing which is among the main subjects that belong to taboo language.

Swearing: Form ancient times till present, swear words (also known as curse words) have been existed universally in all cultures and in every country. According to Montagu, swearing is “as old as man and coeval with language” (1998: 5). Swearing, a linguistic universal, is used to express intense emotions (fear, joy, anger, excitement) (Dewaele, 2006). It has become undeniable that swear words have been a part of people everyday language and even though swear words are considered profane and offensive, many people have been accustomed to swearing in their daily life. However, the intensity of how people feel about them varies largely. Cultural, regional, and gender difference are among the factors. In fact, some swear words have changed their meaning over time. Moreover, some modern swear words were not considered so rude centuries ago (Qingqing, 2013). Linguistically, swear words (also spelled swearword) refers to the prohibited words related to sex, religion and social custom (Allan and Burridge, 2006). Swearing is also defined as an attempt to invoke harm on another person through the use of certain words or phrases (Jay, 1996, p.8). Similarly, Battistella (2005) describes swear words as an offensive language and categories taboo language such as epithets, profanity, vulgarity and obscenity. Andersson and Trudgill (1992) have also defined swearing as “a type of language use in which the expression (a) refers to something that is taboo and/or stigmatized in the culture; (b) should not be interpreted literally; (c) can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes”. The word shit can be used as a representative example; it literally refers to a tabooed item, excrement.

As stated by Jay and Janschewitz (2008: 268), swearing is the employment of taboo language in order to express the speaker’s emotional feeling and to communicate information to the listeners. It implies that the language which is employed in swearing is intended to reflect someone’s emotion. Similarly, Ljung (2011: 4) states that swearing is emotive language, in which its primary function is to express the speaker’s feelings. Thus, swearing is a tool to express the speaker’s emotion toward something, or it can also be addressed to someone. In addition, Horan (2011: 18) argues that swearing refers to a stretch of communicative activities which evokes variation on lexical resources. In this case, swearing is seen as an activity that involves lexical units to achieve the goal of communication. The lexical entities which are used in swearing are usually called as swearwords. Swearing are categorized in different major groups, i.e. 1) words which are involving religion and the supernatural, such as *God* and *h*ll*, 2) words having to do with bodily waste, including *s**t*, *f*rt*, *sp*rm*, *bl**d*, and *p*ss*, 3) words dealing with sexual act, such as *f**k* and *j*rk off*, and 4) words pointing to sexual organs, such as *d**k* and *c**k* (Ljung, 2011: 5). However, making a list of taboos and swearwords is exhaustive. The categorization may change and differ depending on many areas of society which are seen as being taboo nowadays. In addition, swearing stands at the crossroads of multiple fields of study: pragmatics, sociolinguistics, social history, descriptive linguistics, psycholinguistics, the philosophy of language, and semantics. Furthermore, swearing has naturally featured prominently in studies of dysphemism, taboo words and bad language, and it is sometimes mentioned in the context of folk pragmatics and language ideologies (Cliff, 2015). Finally, whether intended or coincidental, swear words convey a certain stylistic effect, the impact of which can be very different depending on the hearers and situation (Ljung, 1984:18). Swear words also vary in force from very

mild to very strong, their likeliness to cause offence being subject to variables such as context, levels of formality, relationships, age, culture and social class. The perceived strength of a swear word is determined by the intensity of the taboo associated with it. What is seen as taboo differs with the previous mentioned variables, and swear words are subject to inflation; overuse tends to diminish their effect, and their likeliness to cause offence tends to decrease over time as new words gradually take their place (Ljung, 1984).

Types and Characteristics of Swear Words: “The language of swearing is rich in diversity, and to a certain degree innovative in word choices and usage, and productive in derivation and compounding. A closer look at swearing from a grammatical point of view shows an aspect of language that has its own anatomy with distinctive syntactic and morphological patterns” (Schippers, 2013, p. 7). According to Permadi (2017, swearwords are considered as having bad taste in both their content and form. For instance, *s**t* is believed to have bad content, and its form is also said to be unpleasant. Therefore, the word *s**t* is admitted as a swearword in many languages. Further, swear words are words that people might say when they are angry or fooling around. Sometimes, when people hear swear words they feel insulted and will be upset. There are two categories of swearing: Propositional and non-propositional. Propositional swearing includes dysphemistic, euphemistic, abusive, idiomatic, and emphatic swearing. These kinds of swearing are often used when speakers are aware of their usage and ultimately have an objective (Pinker, 2007). Furthermore, in propositional swearing, dysphemistic swearing is used when a taboo word is chosen rather than a neutral term, such as mental institution versus loony bin, in order for the speaker to emphasize the emotions they are trying to convey to the listener. Another type of propositional swearing is euphemisms, which are indirect words used to replace unpleasantries. Euphemisms are used in place of dysphemism, which could be important for students to learn to avoid offending listeners. The warning with using euphemisms is that they may sound strange when they are misused. Hence, it is important to learn how to use euphemisms properly. For example, it would sound rather strange to tell someone that his/her wedding band was too small for their digitus quartus (i.e. ring finger). Idiomatic swearing (e.g. pain in the ass), is another possible reason as to why someone might swear. It is used to gain attention or appear macho. This can be used to express dominance or strengthen a relationship (Jay *et al.*, 2008; Pinker, 2007; Vingerhoets *et al.*, 2013).

Cathartic swearing, which is nonpropositional, is used to relieve tension, increase one’s tolerance for pain, or startle or intimidate an attacker. It is considered neither to be polite nor rude (Jay *et al.*, 2008; MacKay *et al.*, 2005; Pinker, 2007; Vingerhoets *et al.*, 2013). Abusive swearing is always considered rude when it is used to intimidate or humiliate someone. This type can be expressed in metaphors (e.g. You dress like a slut!), advice (e.g. Why don’t you go fuck yourself?!), and accusations (e.g. You are being a real bitch!). The end goal of this type of speech is to bully or gain power (Pinker, 2007; Vingerhoets *et al.*, 2013). Lastly, there is emphatic swearing (e.g. fucking cool), which is utilized to emphasize something. It is often used to promote social harmony, to express that someone is doing well, or it can be used to intensify a word used to describe an event or person in a negative or positive way (Jay *et al.*, 2008). Swear words are also divided into dissimilar classifications which include

further types such as: Abusive swearing which is used to condemn or dispraise people and call people in an impolite tone, and Semantic derogation which is commonly found in English words. Semantic derogation occurs when two words ought to represent similar concepts, but one term is derogatory while the other is not. It refers to the way which words that refer to particular groups have attained insults or sexual connotations. Examples would be words like 'nigger', 'half breed', 'bitch', 'bastard' and etc. These words carry negative meanings and can be used to insult or degrade others.

The characteristics of swearwords which also can be classified as taboo words are: a) sexual references (e.g. *f**k*, *bl*w job*), b) profane or blasphemous words (e.g. *G*dd*mn*, *Jesus Chr*st*), c) scatological or disgusting objects (e.g. *s**t*, *cr*p*), d) animal names mentioning (e.g. *p*g*, **ss*), e) ethnic/racial/gender slurs (e.g. *f*g*, *n*gger*), f) ancestral allusions (e.g. *b*st*rd*), g) substandard vulgar terms (e.g. *f*rt face*), and h) offensive slang (e.g. *cl*ster*) (Jay in Grohol,2009). Furthermore, according to Wardhaugh (2006: 239), the subjects that can be included in swearing are covering the topic of sex, death, excretion, bodily functions, religious subjects, and politics. Further, Andersson (in Karjalainen,2002: 17) claims that generally, people in western cultures take taboo words and swearwords from one or more of the following categories: a) sexual organs and sexual relations, b) religion or church, c) excrement, d) death, e) physical or mental disability, f) prostitution, and g) narcotics and crime According to Pinker, although nowadays swearwords are categorized into many subjects, indeed, the root of swearing in English and some other languages is religion. The words which are dealing with religious matters, for examples God, Jesus, h*ll, and Christ used to be the former swearwords. He also adds that the emergence of secularization has made the religious swearwords degrade their power, so that speakers replace them with other words that have the same degree of sensitivity of the day (2007). This clearly explains that the consideration of swearwords is not only on the matter of one single subject, but it develops as people measure what is sensitive enough to be talked about in society, regarding the changing values and norms in the society. As for the types of swearing, there are many types of swearing which are usually used in people's communication. Each type of swearing has its own distinctive characteristics that make it different from others. Jay (2008: 268). Propose four categorizations of swearing. They are expletive, abusive, humorous, and auxiliary swearing. Each type is described below.

Expletive swearing: Expletive swearing is not directed to other people. It is used to express personal emotions, such as anger, shock, and frustration. Some examples in expletive swearing are *H*ll!*, *S**t!*, and *G*dd*mn it!*. Expletives are sometimes used in an excited situation, which indicates that the speaker wants to release pressure. The point is in venting emotion, but with no bad intention. Expletives are also seen as obscene or profane words that are often used indiscriminately to refer to 'bad words'.

Abusive swearing: Unlike the expletive swearing, abusive swearing is directed towards others. This type of swearing includes name calling and other cursing expressions that are offensive and causing insult. Some example of swearing in this type are *Go to h*ll!*, *You b*st*rd!*, and *You *ssh*le!*.

Humorous swearing: Humorous swearing is a swearing that is directed towards others but it is not abusive. It tends to be idiomatic, playful, humorous, and not serious rather than offensive. An example from this type is *Get your *ss in gear!*.

Auxiliary swearing: Swearing can also be in a form of auxiliary. In this case, the swearwords are not addressed to other people or situations. Yet, auxiliary swearing is a way of speaking that is sometimes known as 'lazy speaking' and 'often or always non-emphatic'. Some examples from this type of swearing are *This f**king X!* and *The bl**dy Y!*. Some of the swearing types above that the function or meaning of swearing may vary depending on the condition, place, or feeling of the receiver. from some of the above types there is that abusive swearing is direct, insulting and causing irritation to the recipient. According to Lakoff (1975), swear words are divided into two groups; strong swear words and weak swear words. Lakoff explained that the difference of using swear words such as 'shit!', 'damn!', etc with 'Oh dear!', 'Goodness!', etc, depends on how people express their feelings. Strong swear words are the words used to abuse another people by the words, and these words have the rudest character. Weak swear words are also the words used to abuse but its character is not as rude as the strong ones. These are some examples:

Strong swear words:

- *Holy shit!*
- *Hell!*
- *Son of a bitch!*
- *Motherfucker!*
- *Goddamn!*
- *Fuck!*

Weak swear words:

- *Blah!*
- *Ouch!*
- *Stupid!*
- *Coward!*
- *Oh Gosh!*
- *Dummy!*

Certain swearwords can showcase its versatility. According to Leigh & Lepine (2005: 233-36) the word fuck can be used in 20 different settings. Some of them are as follows:

- Dismay: '*Fuck it!*'
- Inquiry: '*Who the fuck does she think she is?*'
- Disbelief: '*Unfuckingbelievable!*'
- Retaliation: '*Shove it up your fucking ass*'
- Surprise: '*Fuck me!*'
- Dissatisfaction: '*I don't like what the fuck is going on here*'
- Greetings: '*How the fuck are you?*'
- Hostility: '*I'm going to smash your fucking face.*'

As for the word-formation of swear words, the syntactic and morphological patterns of swearing are outlined by Andersson and Hirsch (1985:1.35-49), using the following grammatical hierarchy over the different elements in which swearing can appear: 1, As separate utterances; 2, as "adsentences"; 3, as major constituents of a sentence; 4, as part of a constituent of a

sentence; or 5, as part of a word. The first type of construction is very common, and includes for example expletives like “*shit! fuck! hell!*”, and abusives like ‘*you bastard!*’ and ‘*you motherfucker!*’. Constructions within this category can be elaborated and varied endlessly; especially when it comes to abusive swearing and name-calling, and most taboo-categories can appear here. In the second type, swearing expressions are loosely tied to a sentence, and occur as complements before or after ordinary grammatical sentences. These expressions serve several communicative functions, the primary one being to contribute to the expressive and evocative functions of the utterance. They can occur either in initial position, like in the example “*shit, I forgot my keys!*”, or final position, as in “*shut up, you bastard!*”. The third type of swearing expressions function as major constituents of a sentence; namely subject, object, or predicate. Most abusive expressions and name-calling can be used as subjects and objects, as in the two examples “*that bastard doesn’t know anything*” and “*throw that shit away!*”. Verbal functions are not common, but do occur, as in the examples “*he fucks up everything!*”. In the fourth group, swearing expressions function as modifying elements; like adjectival modification, adverbs of degree or modifying a question word.

Here we find two other functions of the word *fucking*; as adjectival modification, which can be seen in the example “*That fucking train is always late*”, and as adverb of degree in constructions such as “*We saw a fucking good film!*”. A question word can also be modified by a swearing expression to add extra emphasis as in “*Who the hell has taken my books?*” Expressions in the last level of the hierarchy include swearing elements that are combined with another word; occurring before the word as prefixes, inside the word as infixes or after the word as suffixes. Prefixing and suffixing are both common processes in productive word formation, which can be illustrated using the examples *shit* as in “*shitfaced*”, and *ass* as in *lame-ass*. Infixing a swearword is a more peculiar construction, which seems to be restricted to nouns, adjectives and adverbs, a representative example being “*abso-fucking-lutely!*”. This last group shows taboo items combined with non-taboo items creating compound swear words. Swear words can appear as solid compounds, where the different morphemes appear as one word, either morphed together or hyphenated. They can also appear as loose compounds, where the morphemes are not connected but still form a unit, either together with other swear words, or with non-taboo items where the association with taboo items create swearing expressions.

Reasons, Motives, and Functions of Swearing: People from different races, statuses, and educational backgrounds express their feelings in certain situations, such as fighting, scolding, and even in conversation. During the expression of these feelings, some people tend to say swear words although these words are inherent in somehow taboo status, but yet people use them more or less, and thus we can say that swear words indeed exist in our lives over centuries. The existence of dozens, if not scores, of swear/curse word expressions and constructions in English and their high frequency in everyday use, indicates that they carry a significant functional load in personal and interpersonal management of emotion, as well as fulfilling important social functions (Cliff, 2015). Swear words are used to achieve positive or negative impact on others. When people use swear words as jokes and humor, storytelling or sex talk, positive social outcomes can be achieved, but it

could be negative when used to harm someone like name-calling and sexual insults” (Jay, 1999, p.164).

In addition, there are plentiful reasons and motives that lie behind swearing.

- Acts of swearing can be understood as the end products of neurological, psychological, and sociocultural (NPS) processes (see Jay 2000, 2003). Each of the NPS factors takes time to develop and evolve in one’s life, as each factor depends on maturation and experience.
- The emotional arousal effects swearing and the generation of swear words increases with raised emotional arousal. Besides, swearing may represent a form of emotional expression (Stephens & Zile, 2017).
- Swearing plays a significant role in producing a pain lessening (hypoalgesic) effect for many people. The habituation to swearing occurs such that people who swear more frequently in daily life show a lesser pain tolerance effect of swearing, compared with people who swear less frequently. Swearing increased pain tolerance and heart rate compared with not swearing. Moreover, the higher the daily swearing frequency, the less was the benefit for pain tolerance when swearing, compared with when not swearing. Additionally, swearing increases pain tolerance and this is the provocation of an emotional response. For many people, swearing (cursing) provides readily available and effective relief from pain. However, the overuse of swearing in everyday situations lessens its effectiveness as a short-term intervention to reduce pain (Stephens & Umland, 2011).
- It is believed that swear words may help people to vent their emotions. If people swear fitly, they can lower the physical pain they feel as they get injured, especially for those who seldom swear (Staedter, 2011). The Psychological motives in swearing are dealing with someone’s emotions. In everyday life, people may get angry or frustrated on something unpleasant or unexpected. The reaction or strong emotion towards the frustration or anger is usually released through physical violence towards something or verbal swearing. Verbal swearing is considered to be harmless, to replace physical violence, and restore the stability of someone’s emotions or feelings (Montagu in Karjalainen, 2002: 25). In line with Montagu’s opinion, Jay states that the function of swearing is similar with the function of horn in someone’s car. Therefore, it can be used to express someone’s emotion or feeling, for instance anger, frustration, joy, and also surprise (2009: 155). Thus, the emotional feelings that are contained in the psychological motives of swearing include non-emphatic feeling, anger, frustration, surprise, sorrow, and also joy.
- Swear words are used by some people, especially teenagers as part of their daily habits as it can help ease stress. Besides, teenagers swear while talking to friends as it can show a sort of intimacy between friends (Tae-jong, 2011).
- People use swear words to declare themselves, mitigate depression and create an identity. A frustrated, angry or surprised person may utter swear words in an emotional outburst. Two thirds of the swearing information which appear to be the crucial justification for swearing, are

related to private and interpersonal expression of outrage and dissatisfaction (Jay, 1992; 2000).

- Imitation which is part of the natural process of language learning might be one of the reasons for swearing especially among children. For example, children could mimic and soon learn to say swear words and phrases if their parents swear unconsciously although children at this stage lack the judgement to decide whether these words and phrases are suitable for a given situation or not. Similarly, children are also influenced by their peers especially at school (Aubrey, 2008).
- Swear words are commonly used in everyday language by both genders and different age groups to exhibit their feelings in different situations, be it to express joy, sorrow, anger, humor or even surprise (Fanny, 2014).
- Swearing arises from a feeling of frustration. Swearing is also seen as innate as the expression of anger (Montague, 1942).
- The environment that surrounds adolescents and teenagers and the people around them who occasionally use swear words represent another strong reason that affect these youths' vocabulary choice and make them swear especially if they are given a wrong idea about using swear words such as the idea that the use of swear words show that they independent and grown-up individuals.
- As per to the cultural context, every society has a cultural context that forms our day-to-day actions, such as the differences between men and women, humor, power and relationship between speakers, what is regarded as taboo and the subsequent words that are preferred in a said situation, etc. These nuts and bolts help form our attitudes to swearing (Hagen, 2013).
- The linguistic motive is among other motives that provoke people to swear, especially as people's view on swearwords may be different. linguistic motives of swearing are not directed to others. They seem to appear as pure motives on linguistic subjects or to give emphasize on what people try to communicate. Indeed, linguistic motives can also show someone's way of speaking in daily life. Someone may think that those words are completely unacceptable and must be removed from society; other people may think they are acceptable in some occasions, and some others may argue that they are acceptable in all situations. Overall, people are free to employ any words in vocabulary as long as they are capable to convey the messages people want to communicate. Finally, there are many social motives for people to swear. People commonly swear, for instance, in order to amuse, insult, and also to shock someone. Moreover, it can also be used to indicate intimacy or friendship, strengthen a group identity, show social distance or solidarity, etc (Permadi, 2017).

Below, are the common swearing functions have been categorized by McEnery (2005:32):

- Predicative negative adjective: *'the film is shit'*.
- Adverbial booster: *'Fucking marvelous'* *'Fucking awful'*.
- Cursing expletive: *'Fuck You! /Me! /Him! /it!'*.
- Destinalional usage: *'Fuck off!'* *'He fucked off'*.

- Emphatic adverb/adjective: *'He fucking did it'* *'In the fucking car'*.
- Figurative extension of literal meaning: *'to fuck about'*.
- General expletive: *'(Oh) Fuck!'*.
- Idiomatic 'set phrase': *'fuck all'* *'give a fuck'*.
- Literal usage denoting taboo referent: *'We fucked'*.
- Imagery based on literal meaning: *'kick shit out of'*.
- Premodifying intensifying negative adjective: *'the fucking idiot'*.
- 'Pronominal' form with undefined referent: *'got shit to do'*.
- 'Reclaimed' usage – no negative intent, e.g. *Niggers/Niggaz* as used by African American rappers.
- Religious oaths used for emphasis: *'by God'*.

To sum up, swearing plays a double function. It can help speakers to reduce their anger and also influence how people perceive us. When speakers use standard language, it is instinctive that others would judge them positively. It is also an implication that the speaker is well mannered and a „good“ student. However, when the students use swear words too frequently in their interactions, they might be perceived as rude, vulgar or even ill mannered. The use of swear words as an act of taboo is powerful itself (Sohn, 2010). When the use of swear words are limited or prohibited, swear words become more attractive for people to utter them. It also shows that if one is willing to break the moral limitation of something prohibited, it shows that one is trying to emphasize something significant.

The different motives have been summarized in the following figure (Andersson & Hirsch, 1985:1.8):

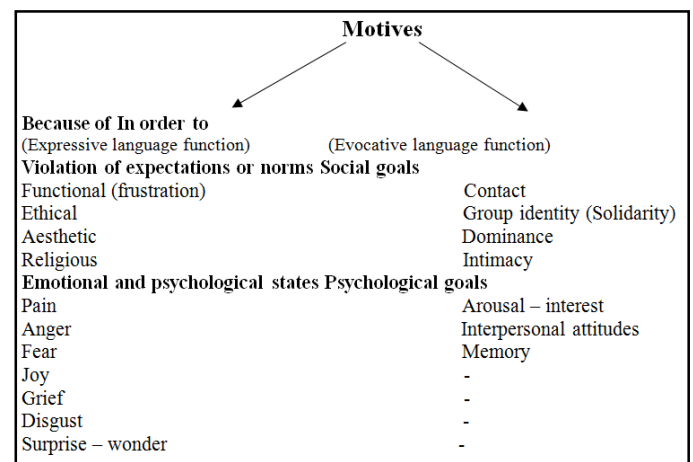


Figure 1. The different motives of swearing (Andersson & Hirsch, 1985:1.8)

Swearing and Taboo Language: Swear words belong to one of the category of taboo language. Taboo language include taboo words that refer to cultural sensitive concepts such as death. Such language is considered forbidden and inappropriate for both men and women in many cultures (Allan and Burrige, 2006). Hughes (2006: 462) said that “taboo increasingly refers to prohibitions against socially unacceptable words, expressions, and topics, especially of a sexual and racist nature. They are also governed by context and medium, being most strictly observed in the press, the printed word, and broadcasting” (ibid: 463). To illustrate, dealing with bodily effluvia might cause illness, or being impolite in social situations can risk a loss of social standing.

Apparently, the English word taboo hails from the Tongan word *tabu* imported by captain and discoverer James Cook in the latter years of the eighteenth century. James Cook wrote in his diary that everything that was regarded as forbidden was deemed *tabu*, "a word of very comprehensive meaning but in general signifies forbidden" (James Cook's diary cited in Allan & Burrige 2006: 3). Cook used the word taboo when he spoke about acts the Polynesians did 'that were not to be done, entered, seen or touched' (ibid: 4). The word taboo refers to "conduct which is regarded to be superstitiously prohibited, or viewed as immoral or unrighteous, it deals with behavior which is forbidden or restricted in as obviously senseless manner". What is considered as taboo language also varies in different cultures and society. Different cultures have their own ways of defining taboo words. In other words, something that is a taboo in a society may not be so in a different society in another country in the same time frame (Trudgill, 2000, p.18). Taboo language can be divided into swearing, obscenity, profanity, blasphemy, name calling, verbal aggression, taboo speech, ethnic-racial slurs, vulgar language, slangs, scatology and insults (Jay, 1999; Battistella, 2005). In fact, all these types of taboo language are usually interconnected and they cannot be completely separated from one another.

According to Sohn (2010), the taboo status of swear words gives themselves power. The more restriction people put on swear words, the more alluring they are for people to say, and it also shows that if we say something that we are not supposed to say, it means that we are pointing out something that is really so important that we break the moral boundary to use it. It was argued that individual swear/curse words have specifiable meanings. These meanings certainly involve expression of feelings and they are deictic or context-bound (tied to the moment, as it were), but neither of these properties makes their meanings unanalyzable: their meanings can be captured semantically. Swear words can be used as exclamations, e.g. *Shit!*, *Fuck!*, *Jesus!*, *Christ!*, *Damn!*, in abuse formulas, e.g. *Fuck you!* *Damn you!* and semi-fixed question and imperative formulas, e.g. *Who the fuck do you think you are?*, *Shut the fuck up!*, and for the expressive adjectives *fucking* and *goddamn* as used in "angry" swearing. Besides, 'swearing' involves meta-lexical awareness, i.e. speaker awareness of the particular words being used, and ethno meta-pragmatic knowledge about the status of these words in the community of discourse (Cliff, 2015). The use of these taboo words in communication collaborated with context, in this case their connotation meaning, drags people to something called as swearing. Strengthen this idea, Ljung defines swearing as the use of utterances containing taboo words that are interpreted in their non-literal meaning (2011: 4). Conversely, taboo words which are used with literal meaning cannot be regarded as swearing.

Swearing and Euphemisms: It is worth mentioning that swearing is connected with euphemisms. Euphemisms are used to avoid swear words. In fact, euphemistic words are used extensively and are used also to soften the impact. Examples of euphemisms are *shoot for shit*, *f-word* and *gosh for god*. In addition, over the centuries, sex is a taboo topic in many cultures and countries around the world. According to Jay (1999, p.144), many euphemisms have developed to describe genitals, sexual acts, sexual body parts and body products. Because verbal taboos shock with varying effects, they "attract different degrees of social sanctions", to use Crystal's (1987: 61) words. A linguistic consequence of the social sanction of

verbal taboos is the employment of euphemism in communication. The need to refer to something does not disappear just because it is unmentionable or embarrassing. The challenge of avoiding taboo without compromising the referential function of language calls for words with which the unmentionable can be referred to indirectly, less dreadfully, and more pleasantly. Such words fall into the category of euphemism. Hughes (2006: 151) defined euphemism as "the use of deliberately indirect, conventionally imprecise, or socially 'comfortable' ways of referring to taboo, embarrassing or unpleasant topics". Brain (1979: 83) regarded obscenity and euphemism as the two sides of a coin, and characterized euphemism as "an overcompensation involving a reluctance to face reality." Similarly, Hughes (2006: 463) described the relationship between taboo and euphemisms as "symbolic." This symbiosis reflects the negative potency of taboo words and the social risks it implies, and the desirability of euphemism as a means of risk avoidance. The same kind of symbiotic and over-compensatory relationship is recognized by Jing-Schmidt (2007) as key to a unitary explanation of the negativity bias in human cognition and the Pollyanna Effect, of the preference of positive qualifiers in language use, observed in Boucher and Osgood (1969). Pollyanna Effect is defined as "a tendency for people to pay more attention in their thought and speech to positive than negative aspects of their conceptual worlds and to process positive information more easily than negative information. The term was coined in 1964 by the US psychologist Charles Osgood (1916–91) to explain the greater frequency of positive than negative words in written language: good occurs almost 10 times as frequently as bad, love almost 10 times as frequently as hate, and so on" (Oxford Reference Dictionary, 2019). Jing-Schmidt contended that the verbal choice people make is shaped by the awareness of verbal risks, and that the Pollyanna Effect is not so much inspired by optimism as it is motivated by linguistic risk management.

Swearing and Emotions: Swearing can be used to show strong emotions, but it does not have to be 'emotional'. Swearing has important social functions that seem as important as the aggressive one, such as being an identity marker and to show either social distance or social solidarity. Swearing can also be used for its shock value or to create a certain stylistic effect. Emotional swearing is often instinctive, as a reaction to annoyance or stress of some sort, such as when pain is inflicted or a strong reaction of anger or disappointment is provoked. In these situations, it has actually been shown that swearing can have a stress reducing, and even pain reducing, function (Crystal, 2003:173). In other cases, where the speaker has more control over the situation and is not solely acting out of instinct, swear words can range from being emotive constructions to purely stylistic expressions (Ljung, 1984:12). Emotions arise in the confrontation of the human will with a problematic world. A healthy human will aim at maintaining a state of well-being and security. However, the world often endangers this aim, our houses and possessions are destroyed by natural catastrophes. In such situations of crisis, the will acts to become a cause. In many situations our knowledge of the causal-deterministic nature of the world help us to act on the world and secure our well-being and security. In certain situations, however, the world presents itself to us as too overwhelmingly dangerous or as suddenly lacking all causal-deterministic texture. In such situations, the human will still act to become a cause. This time, however, not by taking appropriate action based on knowledge of causal-deterministic

relationships, but rather by the utterance of words and the making of gestures, i.e., symbolic action. In this symbolic action powers that lie outside this world of causality and determinism are called upon or invoked to assist or stand by the will. This is what might be called the most prototypical or primordial case of swearing. Crying out "Oh, God!" upon seeing your wife's clothes catch fire from a candle, is an attempt to invoke the divine as an aid and comfort in our crisis. The same applies to shouting "God dam it!" upon witnessing the visiting team make the winning goal in the last seconds of play. Other types of swearing, i.e., those where we cast abuse on others or make pronouncements upon them, such as, "You, son-of-a-bitch!", or "Go to hell!" (Hirsch, 1985).

Swearing and Gender: Gender plays a powerful role in swearing. Most people swear more around listeners of the same gender than in mixed crowds. It has become a common practice to use vernacular language among young people. Male and female youths swore unreservedly in their own gender group. As society expects women to use standard language, the use of swear words were uttered to reflect their emotions. Both male and female use vernacular language either positively or negatively to express themselves without hindrance. Male youths become more conscious and considerate in their use of language with the presence of female youths. Male youths, when recognizing the presence of women, they use euphemisms or invariably do not swear in the presence of female youths. In contradiction, the presence of male youths in the midst of female speakers do not usually stop or reduce the use of swear words among female speakers. To look at language used by different genders, Lakoff's (1975) stated that women tend to use 'super polite forms' and avoid using swear words. They are presumed not to talk rough and use euphemisms in their speech. Lakoff (2004) further added on that men blurt out what they are thinking while women are experts at euphemisms. Lakoff (1973) purported that men and women use language differently, that is, women tend to use super polite forms and avoid using swear words while men tend to prefer to the use of covert language. Covert language refers to the non-standard way of language. According to Labov (1972), men use covert language to gain recognition, acceptance and solidarity with a specific group. Talbot (1998, p.26) states that men choose covert prestige because they are rated by their occupation, earning powers and abilities but not by their speech. However, the position of women in the society is strengthened by the emergence of covert prestige. Women, who want to gain acceptance and recognition by the society tend to choose forms of non-standard language, i.e. taboo language like the men.

In most societies, women are expected and taught to behave in a 'ladylike' manner, but talking like a lady is assumed to be a symbol of incompetence and lack of accuracy (Lakoff, 2004, p.185). Anyhow, when women talk in a more masculine way, they will be deemed as unfeminine or aggressive. Thus, women are not anticipated to use taboo words freely (Jay, 1999). Furthermore, men have an extended vocabulary of curse words than women and they curse more compared to women while women use more insulting curse words compared to men (Jay, 1999). According to Jay (1992), there are gender differences in reacting to swear words among male and females; females are more offended by swear words compared to males. Jay (1999) mentioned that men tell more jokes in mixed-gender conversation while women tell more jokes to women. As women tend to use super polite forms to

avoid using swear words, more women tend to use euphemisms (Lakoff, 1973). They use euphemisms which is an indirect form of expressions such as shoot, fudge and oh dear instead of swear words. The use of swear words in expressing feelings among women may be considered to be "unladylike". According to McEnery (2005), men and women do use taboo words but differently. The study suggests that men use strong swear words more frequently than women; however, women use milder swear words, if there is any. A woman uses the word 'bastard' or 'prick' to a man while a man uses 'cunt' or 'slut' to a woman and 'faggot' or 'gay' to a man (Jay, 199, p.165). Besides that, gender differences also emerge in the use of sexual and insult terms, jokes and verbal arguments, harassing speech and fighting terms. The use of taboo language among females is in current shifts (de Klerk, 1991). A reason why women would use more swear words in conversations could be due to covert prestige. Women need covert prestige to strengthen their position in the society (Talbot, 1998). When women want to gain recognition, acceptance and solidarity in certain groups, they use non-standard language, i.e. taboo language. Therefore, perhaps women felt that the use of swear words might help them in social aspects in the society i.e. using swear words as jokes.

According to Rashid (2008), men and women have different styles of using euphemisms. The topic of conversation plays an important role in determining whether or not to use euphemisms. The amount of euphemisms used and what style is being used are also by male and female speakers. However, female speakers have more knowledge in using euphemisms and their styles are more varied. Finally, studies show that there are slight differences in the categories of swear words used by male and female users. Kirk's (2013) study show that when swear words are ranked, there is a difference in choice of swear words after the top five most popular swear words. The top five most popular swear words are *shit*, *fuck*, *damn*, *bitch* and *cunt* for U. S. and Canada. Facebook interactions (Kirk, 2013). In addition, male users use sexual body parts more than female users such as 'dick', 'pussy', 'asshole' and 'cock' (Kirk, 2013).

Swearing and Age: The age of speakers is an influential factor that may contribute to different views of swearing. Jay (1992:71) argues that children begin learning and using swear words in varying degrees of offensiveness from the time they start using language, then the admonition of this behavior follows. Parents no longer are able to watch or listen to what their children say all the time. Simultaneously, the chance of using new swear words grows in the late teens and early twenties (Murray, 1990: 152). A great number of young people attempt to demonstrate their level of maturity by swearing. Therefore, children and adult somehow associate their verbal demonstration with level of maturity. Teenagers believe that they are perceived mature and presume swearing helps them to do so. Children think they would be 'older' when they use words commonly connected with adults including the use of swear words. According to Kirk (2013), as the person gets older, he/she tends to use less swear words, for example; popular sexual or gender based profanities. However, 'shit' remains adequately homogenous across all age groups. The words that decline sharply with age are the words such as 'fuck', 'dick', 'bitch' and 'fag' that are frequently used by teenagers, and which are replaced by older people with milder swear words like 'crap', 'damn' and 'darn'. However, it was uncertain as people age, their swearing habits change or

whether these patterns straightforwardly reflect cultural differences between generations (ibid).

Conclusion

This paper aimed to discuss and analyze various aspects of swearing, particularly identifying the nature, types, motives, functions of swear words. Swear words represent a universal phenomenon since they are frequently heard in our daily life. Therefore, why swear words are common nowadays gives the researchers plenty of interest to discuss it in the current research. The following findings were concluded by the current study:

It was found that there are several and different classification systems of 'bad language' and 'swear words' and that is due to the fact that the value of 'badness' in all languages are constantly changing. It was revealed by this study that there are many types of swear words; namely epithet, profanity, obscenity, cursing, blasphemy, taboo, vulgarity or the use of substandard vulgar terms, slang, insults, scatology, semantic derogation, ethnic/racial/ gender slurs, animal names mentioning, ancestral allusions, and propositional and non-propositional swearing which include dysphemistic, euphemistic, abusive, idiomatic, cathartic and emphatic swearing. In addition, expletive, auxiliary and humorous swearing are among other types of swearing. It is also found that despite the various classification systems of swear words proposed by many researchers such as (Jay, 1992; Battistella, 2005: 2-9; Jay, 2008: 268; Ljung, 2011: 5; Pinker, 2007; Lakoff, 1975), however it is still difficult to reveal clear cut differences between the proposed types. For example, there is a slight differentiation, but yet a confusion, that exists between profanity and blasphemy. Profanity tends to secularize something which is sacred and show ignorant to God or religion, while blasphemy tends to directly attack certain religion and blacken the reverence for God. It was inferred by the results of this discussion that there are many reasons and motives, and functions for swearing among both genders. The main reasons, motives, and functions can include: 1) expressing the speaker's feelings in certain situations, such as fighting and scolding, 2) achieve positive (use swear words as jokes and humor) or negative impact (use swear words to harm someone) on others, 3) produces a pain lessening (hypoalgesic) effect that increases pain tolerance, ease stress, and restore the stability of someone's emotions or feelings, 4) help people to vent their emotions, 5) non-emphatic feelings including; anger, frustration, surprise, sorrow, surprise, humor, and also joy are considered the psychological motives of swearing, 6) swearing while talking to friends can show a sort of intimacy between friends, 7) a person might use swear words to declare himself, mitigate depression and create an identity, 8) private and interpersonal expression of outrage and dissatisfaction, 9) to indicate intimacy or friendship, strengthen a group identity, and 10) show social distance or solidarity.

It is also inferred by this study that gender plays a powerful role in swearing. In addition, there are gender differences in reacting to swear words among both males and females. And although men and women use language differently, but most people swear more around listeners of the same gender than in mixed crowds. Yet, male and female swore unreservedly in their own gender group to express themselves without hindrance. However, females in particular tend to use 'super

polite forms' and avoid using swear words in most societies. But, when females tend to use swear words, they mostly use milder swear words. Females are presumed not to talk rough and use euphemisms in their speech and above all to behave in a 'ladylike' manner to strengthen their position in the society. Men, on the other hand, tend to prefer to the use of covert language (non-standard way of language) to gain recognition. They also use strong swear words more frequently than women. The age of speakers was found to be also an influential factor that may contribute to different views of swearing. For example, young people attempt to demonstrate their level of maturity by swearing. Similarly, children and adult somehow associate their verbal demonstration with level of maturity. Teens believe that they are perceived mature and presume swearing helps them to do so. Children think they would be 'older' when they use words commonly connected with adults including the use of swear words. Simultaneously, the chance of using new swear words grows in the late teens and early twenties. However, as the person gets older, he/she tends to use less swear words, for example; popular sexual or gender based profanities. Nevertheless, it was uncertain as people age, their swearing habits change or whether these patterns straightforwardly reflect cultural differences between generations.

Recommendations

Swearing phenomena deserve sustained and clear-eyed attention from sociolinguistics, semantics and pragmatics in tandem. Much remains to be done, including: expanding the coverage of swearing expressions, bringing more corpus, observational and other data to bear in order to refine and test the explications and scripts, and exploring cultural scripts that capture varying social understandings of swearing across different social groups. For future studies, it is recommended that similar research concerning the use of swear words could be carried out under different variables. First, the participants of the future studies could be selected from different races. Research on the different ethnicities will allow future researchers to see whether the use of swear words are shaped by their culture or by other factors. Besides that, similar studies could be carried out among people of different locality or areas. Would a person living in the city have the same or different use of swear words as a person who lives in rural areas? Researches on the different areas would permit future researchers to find out whether environment affects the use of swear words in the society. Perhaps a research in the comparison among people of different areas using swear words could be done in the future. Subsequently, research could be conducted across different age groups. Within realms of possibility researches on young adults, adults or even children could be carried out to discover the use of swear words in different age groups. The significance of swearing in different age groups might be an eye opener for the society.

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