

Investigation of the Effect of Linguistic, Psychological and Social Factors on the Use of Swearwords by University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study was carried out to measure the effect of linguistic, psychological and social factors on the use of swearwords by university students. The research population consisted of all students of IAU of Chaloos. 300 questionnaires were distributed through random sampling method out of which 238 completed questionnaires underwent analysis. The objectives of the study comprised the study of the effect age, gender, education level of self and parents, economic status of the family, place of residence, the formality level of the contexts, mother tongue and different types of socializations on the use of swearwords. The mentioned factors formed the research hypotheses, as well. The findings indicated a positive and meaningful relationship between mother's level of education, time spent at game net, time spent on the street, time spent at café, and friendship socialization with the use of swearwords.

KEYWORDS: swearing, religious inclinations, obscenity, blasphemy, taboo, academic milieu

1-INTRODUCTION

It is an educated guess that swearing has been with human beings as long as man has been speaking. There are no written records remaining to prove this claim; however, one can be sure that even the ancient cavemen who had just hit his head against the roof of the cave has had a few curses on hand to express his displeasure and relieve himself.

Along with the evolution of mankind, their swearing has evolved, as well. When people had more religious inclinations, their more serious obscenities were blasphemies. For example, 'Bloody' was an abbreviation of 'Blood of Mary' [1]. Afterwards, when religious phobia was replaced by mild psychiatric disorders characterized by anxiety, depression, or hypochondria "about sexuality, the swearwords of choice started to refer to sex acts and parts of the body" [1].

Today, the disgusting obscenities in our vocabulary – the real swearwords – tend to be those that belittle or deride people of alternative gender, race, nationality, geography or religion. The once terrifying swearwords are now the stuff of routine kindergarten conversation. "We swear because we are angry. If we have no truly effective swearwords left, maybe only violence will suffice." [1].

In today's world, using swearwords and foul language is "an established part of the linguistic environment, occasionally invading even the best mannered and most controlled circles." [2] There can hardly be found a domain of which 'bad language' is not a part. The utterances of Firdausi, Beowulf, Lancelot, Hafez and Guinevere have a dignified purity but the purity has subsequently been lost.

2-Statement of the problem

Language is a system consisting of visual, auditory, sensory and other modes of communication. Language is utilized for various purposes: sharing ideas, dissemination of knowledge, expression of feelings, expression of cultural differences and creation of a shared understanding out of different discourses, to name a few. Another use of language is the expression of disappointment in terms of swearwords, which is the subject of the present study. For some speakers, swearwords cause embarrassment whereas for some others they cause inter- or intra-group unity. It is under these circumstances where different semantic fields of swearwords are also reflected. Since swearwords mirror linguistic violence, the present research intended to study some factors that stimulate the use of these words.

2-1-History

The social history of using swearwords and foul language is very interesting. But a great part of the related data has been buried under years of oblivion, intentionally hidden, or deliberately left unnoticed "as unworthy of preservation." [2]. Probably some fifty years ago an article like this would have been almost impossible to write,

because taboos and swearwords were still influential even in lexicography. But today all has changed, one proof of which is the publication of the supplements to different dictionaries such as Oxford English Dictionary and the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang.

We can find the first two recorded instances of what we may regard as swearing in Ancient Egypt. “One of these is found on a stela, an upright stone slab with a commemorative inscription, dating back to the era of Ramses III, pharaoh between 1198 and 1166 BC.” [3]. The inscription tells us that a certain local official offered a daily ration of five loaves in favor of his deceased father. The offering is described to be ‘everlasting’ and promises that the official in charge of it will enjoy the protection of the gods. There is also description of the punishment that will be given to people who fail to follow the instructions: “the person ...shall fall to the sword of Amon-Re and ... a donkey shall copulate with him. [3]. It is interesting to find swearing using ‘donkey’ as a way of threat of retribution. It is amazing to note that ‘donkey’ – or something like that – is still used as a standard curse in today’s Iranian languages, that is more than 3000 years later than its first known appearance (cf. Demirbag-Sten 2005: 219). Swearing by invoking the gods was not limited to the Egyptians but was also common among the Jews (cf. Montagu 1967: 19). In the Koran and the Old Testament, there are strict rules for the use of swearwords. An important distinction is made in the Old Testament between the swearing of God and that of humans.

2-2-REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Different researchers have been attracted by the phenomenon of swearwords. In her research entitled “A Discourse Analysis on English Swear Word Used in American Movies”, Sukmaningrum [in 4] was able to work about the type and the phenomena used within the swearwords. She limited her study to investigation of swearwords in American movies. Her study centered on the functions and reasons of participants and actors/actresses in using the swearing terms in movie dialogues.

Another related research was carried out by Wulandari [in 4]. Her research entitled “A Descriptive Analysis of Swear Words used in Rock Music” pursued a descriptive analysis of swearword in other form. She focused on the type and the features of swearwords inside the Rock music.

A third research was done by Nuraini [4]. In this research the researcher wanted to analyze the comparison made between English and Indonesian swearwords used in English and Indonesian movies. Her research could contribute new results and complete the previous research about swearwords.

Langley [5] in a research titled “A comparison of swearing and the use of euphemisms in Swedish and English” studied the swearword habits of English and Swedish speakers from linguistic point of view with a concentration on the gender of the speakers. It was known that male speakers are more inclined to use swearwords by nature, an inclination which develops in childhood.

Shakiba [6] studied the effect of social context on the use of swearwords by male and female subjects in Tehran. Her results indicated that women spoke more correctly than men. She studied the use of swearwords in three different contexts: men only, women only and mixed contexts. The results also showed that men use more swearwords than women; men have their own manly swearwords, and aged men and women used fewer swearwords than young people. It was also demonstrated that educated women used polite language more often.

Modarresi [7] believed that women are more sensitive to using valid language features and this is because of the role of mothers in teaching educated language to their children and passing them to future generations.

The present research, however, is different from them in that it is going to study social, psychological and linguistic factors triggering swearwords in academic milieu.

3- METHODS

The present study is a qual-quan applied survey research. A questionnaire with a total of 55 questions consisting of research questions and the participants’ personal information was employed. The questionnaire was first validated through the expert opinion-seeking from fields of sociology, psychology and linguistics. The Chronbach’s Alpha for all research questions stood at .886.

Participants 300 students from IAU, Chaloos Branch were selected through simple random sampling method. They were given the questionnaires and 238 completed questionnaires were returned to the researchers.

3-1- Objectives

The present research sought to satisfy the following objectives:

- a. the effect of gender on the use of swear words
- b. study of linguistic aggression in terms of the use of swear words

- c. study of the level of formality of the context of use of swear words on using them
- d. study of the effect of age on using swearwords
- e. study of the effect of own and parents' education on the use of swearwords
- f. study of the effect of economic status of the family on the use of swearwords
- g. study of the effect of cultural status of the place of residence on the use of swearwords
- h. study of the effect of the mother tongue on the use of swearwords
- i. study of the effect of the amount of socialization among friends on the use of swearwords
- j. study of the level of anger on the use of swearwords

3-2-Research hypotheses

- a. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's age
- b. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's gender
- c. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's level of education
- d. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's economic status
- e. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's cultural status of the place of residence
- f. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's mother tongue
- g. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's within-group socializations
- h. The use of swearwords is a function of the level of formality of the context
- i. The use of swearwords is a function of the user's level of anger

3-3-Findings

The authors are going to report only the inferential findings. Table 1 includes correlation between dependent and independent variables.

Table 1: Correlation between dependent and independent variables

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Pearson Correlation	Amount of Significance	Level of Significance
Use of Swear words	Age	-.156*	.036	.05
	Gender	.048	.521	--
	Level of Education	-.083	.272	--
	Father's Level of Education	-.033	.671	--
	Mother's Level of Education	.162*	.033	.05
	Economic Status	-.070	.361	--
	Place of Residence	.025	.753	--
	Mother Tongue	-.053	.475	--
	Socialization with Friends	.339**	.000	.01
	Socialization with Family	-.178*	.016	.05
	Time Spent on the Street	.226**	.002	.01
	Time Spent at Parks	.065	.390	--
	Time Spent at café	.330**	.000	.01
	Time Spent at Game Net	.273**	.000	.01
	Time Spent at Coffee Net	.139	.063	--
	Time Spent at University	-.049	.519	--
	Time Spent at Mosque	-.174*	.020	.05
	Self-control at anger	-.430**	.000	.01
	Cold-bloodedness	-.311**	.000	.01
	Threshold of Tolerance	-.441**	.000	.01

As Table 1 demonstrates, the relationship between age, time spent with family and time spent in mosque with use of swearwords is negative. This indicates that when participants spent their time at home, with family or in the mosque, they made very little use of swearwords if at all. In addition, the age factor reveals that the younger or the older the age, the lesser use is made of the swearwords.

The relationship between some of the independent factors and the use of swearwords is positive:

a. Mother's level of education has positive and meaningful relationship with the use of swear words. This indicates the fact that mothers are regarded to be directly involved in training and educating their children. The negligence of mothers from training and educating their children will cause irreparable damages to children.

b. Time spent with friends is positively and meaningfully related to the use of swearwords. This is indicative of the fact that groups of friends, though not necessarily always, are suitable loci for the growth of antisocial behaviors such as using swearwords.

c. Time spent on the streets usually refers to the time when the individuals, accompanied by friends, spend roaming on the streets with no definite purpose or destination. Under these circumstances, Satan seems to be the stage-manager.

d. The correlation of spending one's time in café is greater than that of game net. The reason is that the participants in this research spend more time in cafés drinking tea or smoking and using hubble bubbles. In fact, they are already past their age of play in game nets. Cafés are more pleasant a place for them at this age than game nets.

e. However, game nets are better places for the growth and exchange of swearwords. Personal observation has confirmed the fact that attendants in game nets use swearwords as a within-group consolidation instrument.

f. The three psychological factors of cold-bloodedness, self-control at anger and the threshold of patience show negative and meaningful relationship with the use of swearwords. This means that when individuals are cold-blooded with high self-control at anger and with higher threshold of patience, they make lesser use of swearwords and vice versa.

g. No meaningful relationships were found between gender, own level of education, father's level of education, place of residence and economic status with the use of swearwords.

Table 2: ANOVA of psychological, social and language factors and the use of swearwords

Psychological Factors	Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Between Groups	47334.658	40	1183.366	20.720	.000
	Within Groups	7653.079	134	57.113		
	Total	54987.737	174			
Social Factors	Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Between Groups	40543.141	45	900.959	11.699	.000
	Within Groups	9318.212	121	77.010		
	Total	49861.353	166			
Language Factors	Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Between Groups	819.723	7	117.103	.386	.909
	Within Groups	52418.089	173	302.995		
	Total	53237.812	180			

The information in Table 2 shows a meaningful and linear relationship between psychological and social factors and using swearwords. Such a relationship is absent between language factor and using swearwords.

4-Conclusion and discussion

Swearing now includes so many varied and different forms. The forms are so varied that we have to make some broad distinctions. At the outset, a distinction can be made in the differences between mode and content. "In terms of mode, we swear by some higher force or somebody; we swear that something is so; we swear to do something; we swear at something or somebody; and we swear simply out of anger, disappointment, or frustration." [2]. These different modes can be renamed by various other terms, "such as asseveration, invocation, imprecation, malediction, blasphemy, profanity, obscenity, and exclamation." [2]. As we see, several of the terms named above have complex histories and complicated volatile meanings. Even the word "Taboo" contains a binary opposition. On the one hand, it refers to human experiences, words, or behavior that are unmentionable because they are extremely sanctified (like the name of God or Jesus in some cultures). On the other hand, it refers to some phenomena that are indescribably despicable (like calling bad names at the Infallible Prophet or Imams in Islam). Now that we are familiar with most of these swearwords and their different modes, we should know that they have not been always with us in the past. They represent a constant growth, accumulation and evolution during centuries.

The results of some experiments have shown that "too much swearing can make men impotent and women develop male characteristics including facial hair and extra muscles." [8]. What the research results by Russian scientist Gennady Cheurin and his team at the Centre for Ecological Safety and Survival in Yekaterinburg shows is that water has a kind of 'memory' that can be affected by positive and negative forces. Cheurin stated that when his team swore at a glass of water for several hours and then poured it over wheat seeds, only 48 per cent of those seeds watered with the 'foul' water sprouted. This opposed to the higher figure of 93 per cent of seeds irrigated with water obtained from natural springs. In another experiment, Cheurin and his team observed some heavy swearers and others who never used bad language. They found that whenever men used foul words in their daily life, they faced with sexual dysfunctions. They also found that those women who used bad language and foul words in their daily speech, gradually started changing into male stature: they grew more facial hair and got manly muscles.

Another noteworthy point is that the context of utterance significantly affects the perceived offensiveness of swearwords. This is the reason why the amount of swearwords used in the street, in university campus, in presence

of women, and in presence of strangers is very little and speakers take great care not to offend others by untimely use of swearwords ($p < .001$). On the other hand, they may use swearwords at home and in the offices ($p > .05$) to varying degrees. They might find home a place where they can get rid of their daily disappointments by using some swearwords. The use of swearwords in offices can be justified by the fact that if the clients face a barrier such as underwork or procrastination by a certain official, they may lose control and use swearwords.

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