

SWEARWORDS, FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

By

Devi Mulatsih, S.S., M. Hum.

Swadaya Gunung Jati University

devimulatsih@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the use of swearwords with reference to Sociolinguistic, and Psychological conceptual frameworks. It starts with an emotions and feelings when one is expected to be careful in selecting the words to express his/her thoughts. In the guise of tackling the problem, Sociolinguistic and Psychological explanation is pursued, which in the end, shows that Sociolinguistic explanation is not really adequate to handle the issue. This relates to the possible notion that swearwords might be enacted as a (very) personal expression, devoid of any physical addressees.

Key words: swearwords, Sociolinguistic.

Introduction

One of the media is able to connect people in a communication is through a language. Language is one of the media to communicate with others. Generally, people have communication with others using a language. One is expected to be careful in selecting the words to express his/her thoughts. As stated by Brooks and Emmert (1976) "there are words which are assumed to be negative and positive words", because those words have got a certain meaning for certain people as the result of their experience. For example calling 'Negro' to an African-American may offend his/her feeling. How are we to know that certain words are offensive for certain people? There is no better recipe but to sharpen

our sensitivity by considering the background of the communicator, such as including ethnic group, religion, and political association. As stated by Myers (1993), "when people from different culture interact, sensitivity to their differences helps minimize misunderstandings and awkward moments." People always associate swearword with a bad word or inappropriate word, which is not allowed to be used in a conversation or talk. However, there are some group considered that swearwords are the appropriate media to express strong emotion and attitudes. It means that people can use swearword if they are angry and they can express their emotive feelings through swearwords. In the

development, it seems that swearwords are more accepted by the society nowadays. It can be seen from the existence of swearwords in movies, songs lyric especially rap music or hiphop, television even cartoon movie, one might be surprised by the amount of swearing vocabulary. Swearwords that occur in those media are not only used as bad or inappropriate word, but they can be used for many reasons. Swearwords are one of the language forms which sensitivity is needed in communication. Sears, Peplau, and Taylor (1991) define swearwords as words which has different meaning from dictionary, and which can be used to express certain emotion.

Sociolinguistic- Language and Society

There is some different view hypotheses developed in various forms by different linguists. This hypothesis is proposed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. In this hypothesis, they said *"a speaker's native language sets up a series of categories which act as a kind of grid through which he perceives the world, and which constrain the way in which he categorizes and conceptualizes different phenomena."* (Trudgill: 25). From the hypothesis, it means that a language of a speaker can affect the society by influencing even controlling them. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is concerned with the possibility in which human's view is influenced by the language. According to Sapir-Whorf there are three effects of society on language and the

way in which environment is reflected in a language (Trudgill, 1983). First, the physical environment in which a society lives is being reflected in its language. Secondly, the social environment can also be reflected in the language, and can often have an effect of the structure of the vocabulary. Thirdly, the values of a society can also have an effect on its language. The example that reflects this situation is through the existence of swearwords.

Language and Communication

To understand the relation between language and communication, it is important to find out what communication is. *Dictionary of Behavioral Science* (Wolman, 1973), mentions six definitions of communication: "(1) the transmission of energy change from one place to another as in the nervous system or transmission of sound waves; (2) the transmission or reception of signals or message by organism; (3) the transmitted message; (4) (communication theory), the process whereby system influences another system through regulation of the transmitter signals; (5) (K. Lewin) the influence of one personal region on another whereby a change in one results in corresponding change in the other region; (6) the message of a patient to his therapist in psychotherapy." In psychology, communication has a broader meaning. It includes every transmission of energy, sound waves, signals, system or organism. The word organism itself is

used as a process, a message, influence, or especially as a patient's message in psychotherapy. Miller (1962) wrote that there are a set of tools that can be used to control people's mind and act. This control tool can cause one do something one does not imagine before. This tool can change opinions and beliefs, can be used to fool, can cause happiness and sorrow, can put new ideas into your head, and can make one want something he/she does not own. One can even use it to control him/herself. This tool is an incredibly powerful tool and can be used for anything. This tool is usually called *language*.

Swearwords

Swearwords are one of the language form for which sensitivity is needed in communication. Some of the words are derived from certain vocabularies which are assumed to be sacred, dangerous, having magical element or which can surprise the hearer, and used only on certain circumstances or certain people. Sears, Peplou, and Taylor (1991) define swearwords as, "words used expressively, cannot be understood by referring to the dictionary, they can only be understood only as conventionalized ways of giving vent to certain feelings". McArthur (1992), "*Swearword is a non-technical term for a word or phrase that is obscene, abusive, and socially offensive. Swearwords are usually associated with the genitals and sexual activity, excrement, or religion, and may combine elements from each*

are (fucking shit, fucking hell)". English swearwords can be derived from many sources. They are categorized into words related to Christianity, sexual activity and genitals, body waste, abnormal behavior, and words related to one's personal background. The following are some example of swearwords used in English language along with their meaning, grouped according to their source area.

a. Words in Christian religion range

Those words are used for swearing because they are assumed to be sacred; so they prefer to use them in a formal atmosphere and with respect. They will be very surprised if those words are used hastily. Those words are:

Swearwords	Meaning
Damn	- (of God) condemn to everlasting punishment
Hell	- place believed to be the home of wicked people after death
Devil	- evil spirit
God	- the maker and the ruler of the universe
Jesus	- founder of the Christian religion
Christ	- founder of the Christian religion

b. Words related to sexual activity and genitals

In formal conversations, and also written, some words related to sexual activity and genitals are usually avoided or replaced with other words or other term. For example, *fuck* is replaced by *make love* or *have sexual*

intercourse with; balls by testicles, etc. some example of words related to this group is:

Swearwords	Meaning
Prick	- penis
Cock	- penis
Rod	- penis
Shaft	- penis
Cunt	- penis
Pussy	- penis
Muff	- penis
Cocksocker	- female sexual organs
Asshole (GB arshole)	- female sexual organs
Ass (GB arse)	- female sexual organs
Balls (GB bullocks)	- vagina
Tits	- a male sometimes a female who perform fellatio
Bugger	- anus
Fuck	- anus
Screw (esp GB)	- anus
Come	- anus
Wank	- testicles
Fucker	- breast
Mother fucker	- to have anal sexual intercourse with a person or animal; person who does so
	- have sexual intercourse (with)
	- have sexual intercourse (with)
	- reach a sexual climax (orgasm)
	- masturbate
	- a male lover
	- any despicable person or thing

c. Words related to animal

Words related to animal can be shocking for the interlocutor because animals are assumed to be lower than human. People would generally feel offended to be equaled with animals. Words which belong to this group are:

Swearwords	Meaning
Bitch	- a female dog
Pig	- animal without fur that does not chew grass; dirty, greedy or ill-mannered person
Skunk	- small North American animal that sends out a strong smell when attacked

d. Words related to body waste

Words related to body waste are included into swearwords because those words are assumed to be dirty. The use of these words are often replaced by other words which sound more polite, such as *piss* by *go to lavatory*, or *urinate*; *shit* by *defecate*. The swearwords which belong to this group are:

Swearwords	Meaning
Shit	- Excrement, defecate
Piss	- Urine, urinate
Crap	- Excrement, defecate

e. Words related to one's social background

One's social background which is considered to be inappropriate with social norm or assumed to be abnormal can also offend one's feeling. Some examples of those words are:

Swearwords	Meaning
Sod (GB)	- Homosexual (short for sodomite)
Slut	- Prostitute; dirty woman
Whore	- Prostitute
Bastard	- A child born of unlawful sexual intercourse

- f. Words derived from one's abnormal mental condition

Words which included into this category are:

Swearwords	Meaning
Idiot	- Person so weak-minded that he is incapable of rational conduct
Imbecile	- Weak-minded
moron	- Feeble-minded person (with a mental level not so low as imbeciles or idiot)
loony	- Lunatic

- g. There are also some words which do not belong to any of the group mentioned before but also used as swearwords. Those words are usually used for making emphasis. These words are:

Swearwords	Meaning
Bloody	- Bleeding
Bally	- Bleeding
Bullshit	- Nonsense

Emotions

Emotion is not easy to define. Many scholars have tried to define the term. The reason why emotions have many definitions is because emotions have many aspects (Morgan: 1986). Basically definition can be regarded as definition of emotion as long as: "(1) it mentions something about how we feel when we are in an emotional condition; (2) mention about psychological background of the emotional feelings; (3) mention the result to mind perception and behavior from the emotion arisen; (4) express motivation values of the emotion such as fear and

anger; (5) referred to how emotions expressed through language, facial expressions and gestures". (Kleinginna & Kleinginna in Morgan, 1986). People may tend to relate emotion with the negative one, such as anger, sadness. In reality, though, the positive emotions which human experience are just as rich as the negative emotions. Argyle and Crossland (1987) classify eight kinds of positive emotions.

The first positive emotion according to Argyle and Crossland is potency that is feeling capable and able to do whatever you needed. The second emotion is sense of spirituality or wonder, which might be part of the feeling involved in listening to a particularly beautiful piece of music or enjoying nature.

Furthermore, Argyle and Crossland also mention contentment, relaxation, and self-indulgence (for example when you are enjoying a long hot bath). The next positive emotions are altruism (for example sharing and caring other people), absorption (feeling of interested in something or fascinated by a hobby), and exhilaration (that is feeling excited on something).

Pattijohn (1987) formulated emotion as a complex condition of feeling which involves psychological shock; a feeling arises as the consequence one's appraisal of situational values and spontaneous behavior as the reaction of a motivation.

Swearwords and the Expression of Emotions

Swearword represents vulgarity. It is transmitted to others through oral or written communication. A swearword is regarded as a 'rough' expression against based on the existing social norms and values in society. If swearwords are rude words, then why are they still alive in our society? The answer is because swearwords are important enough to keep (Ariani, 2002). Surely swearwords can be used to express emotions. People sometimes swear to express anger, to insult, or to tell a joke. But to understand what the swearwords are uttered for needs a thorough attention. The difference in the way you say things is very small. To see the emotion expressed by swearwords, one also needs to pay attention to nonverbal cues. Facial expression and gesture are most commonly useful in studying people's emotion (Anonymous 1#).

Classification of Swearwords Based on the Expression of Emotions

The meaning of swearwords always differs from the literal meaning, and the grammar is also different. For example, *piss off* means tell someone to leave in a rude way, *pissed* in British Slang means drunk, and *pissed off* (US) means very angry. Swearwords grammatically are often very much flexible. *Bloody* (and many other words) can function as an adjective and as a stress for adverbial meaning (for example, it's *bloody* raining, *bloody* fool, *bloody* soon, etc). The

following are the context in which swearwords may appear.

a. Expression of annoyance

Damn (it)! (US)	God damn (it) (US)	Fuck (it)! (US)
Hell (US)		Blast (it)! (GB)
My God! (US)	Jesus! (US)	Bugger (it)! (GB)
Jesus Christ! (US)	Shit! (US)	Sod (it)! (GB)
	Christ! (US)	
	God! (US)	

Example:

Shut the *fuck* up!

Oh, *shit*!

b. Expression of surprise

God! (US)	My God! (US)	Fuck me! (GB)
Christ! (US)	Jesus Christ! (US)	Damn me! (GB)
goddamn it! (US)		Bugger me! (GB)
	Damn! (US)	Sod me! (GB)
	Jesus! (US)	

Example:

The *fucking* car just die!

Shit, we're being evicted!

c. Question of surprise

What <i>the hell</i> ...?	Who/Where/Why/How/When the hell...?
What <i>the fuck</i> ...?	Who/Where/Why/How/When the hell...?

What *the hell* is he talking about?

What *the fuck*, man?

d. Expression of contempt (in noun)

prick (US)	bitch (US)	ass (US)
cunt (US)	motherfucker (US)	shit (US)
bastard (US)	cock sucker (US)	wanker (GB)
fucker (US)	asshole (US)	sod (GB)
		bugger (GB)

Example:

This *ass* got a *fucking* problem.

What's your problem, *bitch*?

- e. Expression of contempt (in imperative verb + object)

Damn... (US)	Fuck... (US)	Sod... (GB)
Screw... (US)	Blast... (GB)	Bugger... (GB)

Example:

Fuck you, Jeneane.

- f. Tell someone to leave

fuck off! (US)	bugger off! (GB)
piss off! (US)	sod off! (GB)

Example:

Get the *fuck off* me!

- g. Expression of ignorance

I don't give a damn.	I don't give a fuck.
I don't give a shit.	I don't give a bugger. (GB)

Example:

Yo, I don't give a *fuck* who he is.

- h. Rejecting something

(I'll be) damned if I will!	(I'll be) buggered if I will!
(I'll be) fucked if I will!	(GB) Stuff it!

- i. Support to adjective/adverbial meaning

damn(ed)	bloody (GB)
fucking	sodding (GB)
goddamn (US)	bleeding (GB)
	blasted (GB)

Example:

Shut the *fuck* up!

What the *fuck* guys!

You want the *fucking* pancake or not?

Don't play *fucking* stupid.

- j. Replacing object

- Shit

Examples:

It's not you Janeane, it's my *shit*.

Where do you get that *shit*?

Put that *shit* away, yo!

- k. Mixed meaning

Fuck (up); screw (up) and bugger (up) can mean destroy, ruin, or damaging.

"You've *fucked up* the TV."

"Stop *screwing* my live!"

"You *fucked* it all up for me."

Fucked and buggered can mean very tired (GB)

"Want another game of tennis?" –

"No I'm *fucked*!"

Bullshit and crap can mean talking nonsense.

"I don't know why you tell me that *bullshit*."

"He sometimes talks some *bullshit*."

"I don't wanna hear this *crap*."

In GB *pissed* means drunk, but in US it means angry or bored.

"One glass of beer and he's *pissed*."

Pissed off in GB means angry or bored.

"I'm getting *pissed off* with London."

REFERENCES

- Anonymous#1. Undated. *Emotions and Facial Expressions*. Available: <http://face-andemotion.com/dataface/emotion/theories.jsp>. Current as of 29 August 2008, 08:00 a.m.
- Anonymous#2. Undated. *Emotions*. Available: <http://www.san.beck.org/Life9-Eemotion.htm>. Current as of 29 August 2008, 08:00 a.m.
- Anonymous#3. Undated. *Nonverbal Communication – Eye Contact*. Available: <http://www.getahead-direct.com/gwnonver.htm>. 21 April 2008, 11:29 a.m.
- Anonymous#4. Undated. *Emotions Among Gender*. Available: <http://www.percepp.demon.co.uk/pfolrefd.htm>. Current as of 21 April 2008, 11:29 a.m.
- Anonymous#5. Undated. *In a World of Differences*. Available: <http://nonverbal.ucsc.edu/xcult.html>. Current as of 29 April 2008, 11:29 a.m.
- Anonymous#6. Undated. *Social Diversity and Inclusive Language: an equal opportunities guide*. Available: http://www.fvcc.edu/academics/dept_pages/social.sciences/psych/emotion2.htm. Current as of 29 April 2008, 9:20 a.m.
- Baron, Robert A. and Donn Byrne. 1984. *Social Psychology*. United States: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Boeree, C. Goerge. Undated. *Basic Emotions*. Available: <http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/emotion.shtml>. Current as of 29 August 2008, 08:00 a.m.
- Bolinger, Dwight, and Donald A. Scars. 1981. *Aspects of Language*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, Inc.
- Buck, R (1984). *Nonverbal Behavior and the Communication of Affect*. In Baron and Byrne (ed) *Social Psychology*. United States: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Chomsky, N. 1967. *The General Properties of Language*. In Anonymous#4 (ed). *Emotions Among Gender*. Available: <http://www.percepp.demon.co.uk/pfolrefd.htm>. Current as of 21 April 2008, 11:29 a.m.
- Cohen, David. 1994. *Essential Psychology*. Great Britain: Blooms Bury.
- Gumperz, John J. 1971. *Language in Social Groups*. California: Stanford University, Press.
- Hayes, Nicky. 1999. *Access to Psychology*. London: Hodder and Stroughton.
- Izard, C. 1077. *Human Emotions*. In Baron and Byrne (ed) *Social Psychology*. United States: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Kendon, Adam. 1990. *Conducting Interaction: Patterns of Behavior in focused encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McNeill, D. and E. Levy. 1982. *Conceptual Representations in Language Activity and Gesture*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
- Mercury, Robin-Elice. Undated. *Swearing: A Part of Language: A Good Part of Language Learning*. Available: <http://home.hucnyrr.room/conmechu/taboo>. Current as of 9 April 8:45 a.m.
- Miller, George A. 1962. *Psychology (the Science of Mental Life)*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Morgan, Clifford T. 1986. *Introduction to Psychology*. Singapore: Mc Graw-Hill Book Co.
- Myers, Davic G. 1993. *Social Psychology*. USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Sapir, E. 1970. *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. London: Hart-Davies.
- Searing, Hilary. Undated. *Social Diversity and Inclusive Language An Equal Opportunities Guide*. Available: <http://www.radical.org.uk/>

About the Author

Devi Mulatsih earned her Bachelor in English Literature from Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta and Completed her Master in Linguistics from Padjadjaran University. She is currently working as Lecturer in the Dept. of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences (FKIP), Unswagati University. She teaches Psycholinguistics, Pronunciation, and Grammar. Her main research interest is in Linguistics.