

THE USE OF SWEAR WORDS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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UIVERSITI MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

2022

THE USE OF SWEAR WORDS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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17021756

SUBMISSION OF THESIS/DISSERTATION FOR EXAMINATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITI MALAYA, IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (LINGUISTICS)

2022

UNIVERSITI MALAYA
ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

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Title of Project Paper/Research Report/Dissertation/Thesis ("this Work"):
The use of swear words among students in Universiti Malaya

Field of Study: Sociolinguistics

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THE USE OF SWEAR WORDS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

Swearing has always been regarded as an expression of negativity. Swear words can be defined as language used offensively and can be sexist, racist, homophobic and masochistic. This study aims to examine the types of swear words used by university students and how they use these words to accustom themselves in a new environment. A mixed method was employed in this study using online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Research data were limited to English and Malay languages, with swear words listed out by university students relating to certain contexts. Findings show that swear words used by university students fit into epithets, profanities, vulgarities, and obscenities as outlined in Battistella's (2007) Model of Taboo words Categorisation. 53.5% of respondents state that they are not affected by this usage either by others or themselves. Respondents also believe that using euphemisms, gestures, grawlixes and emojis during social discourse is not swearing. 99% of respondents were conversant in English and this paved the way to the majority of them using an equal number of English and Malay swear words. They are clear about the context and circumstances in which to use swear words. These findings indicate that usage of swear words among students has become normalised and a part of everyday life and provide a mode to accustom themselves in a new environment.

Keywords: Swear words, Battistella's Model, University students, University campus

KATA-KATA SERANAH YANG DIGUNAKAN OLEH PELAJAR UNIVERSITI

ABSTRAK

Kata-kata seranah telah menjadi ungkapan negatif. Perkataan seranah boleh ditafsirkan sebagai bahasa yang digunakan secara menyinggung dan boleh menjadi seksis, perkauman, homofobik dan masokisme. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki jenis kata-kata sumpah oleh pelajar universiti dan bagaimana mereka menggunakan kata-kata ini untuk membiasakan diri dalam persekitaran baru. Metodologi yang telah dipakai dalam kajian ini adalah kaedah campuran iaitu kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Data penyelidikan terhad kepada bahasa Inggeris dan bahasa Melayu, dengan kata-kata seranah disenaraikan oleh pelajar universiti dalam konteks tertentu. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa kata-kata seranah yang digunakan oleh pelajar universiti sesuai dengan kategori julukan, kata-kata tidak senonoh, kata-kata kasar dan kata-kata lucu seperti yang digariskan dalam Model Pengkategorian Kata Tabu (2007) Battistella. 53.5% respondant menyatakan bahawa mereka tidak terpengaruh oleh penggunaan ini oleh orang lain atau mereka sendiri. Responden juga percaya bahawa menggunakan eufemisme, gerak isyarat, grawlix dan emoji semasa wacana sosial tidak menyeranah. 99% responden fasih berbahasa Inggeris dan ini mengarah kepada kebanyakan mereka menggunakan sebilangan kata-kata seranah bahasa Inggeris dan bahasa Melayu secara sama rata. Mereka jelas mengenali konteks dan keadaan di mana menggunakan kata-kata seranah. Penemuan ini menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan kata-kata seranah di kalangan pelajar telah menjadi norma dan sebahagian daripada kehidupan seharian serta menyediakan cara untuk membiasakan diri dalam persekitaran baru.

Kata kunci: Kata-kata seranah, Model Battistella, Pelajar universiti, Kampus universiti

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research project becomes a reality with the kind support and help from many parties. I am glad to have this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the people who have helped me to complete this research. I am indebted to my senior supervisor, Dr. Malarvizhi a/p Sinayah for her guidance and assistance leading to the writing of this paper. My second supervisor Dr. Nurul Huda binti Hamzah, was my constant guide and mentor on this journey and I am deeply indebted to her. I am happy to have this opportunity to also express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my family, especially my daughter for her constant support and understanding.

Without them, I could never have reached this current level of success. I am also indebted to the participants of this study, for their valuable help and cooperation and to the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of Universiti Malaya for the opportunity, guidance and support given.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

I	Interviewer/ Researcher
R	Respondent
FLL	Faculty of Language and Linguistics
MELS	Master of English Language
L2	Second language

Universiti Malaysia

THE USE OF SWEAR WORDS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The Malaysian linguistic arena represents a fluid mixture of languages that are responsive to contemporary societal changes in political, socio-economical, and globalisation processes. Aronin and Hufeisen (2009, p. 104) state that the 'new sociolinguistic dispensation embraces language ideologies and policies, education, language practices of communities and individuals, teaching languages and teaching/learning through languages.' Malaysia, as a thriving economic and academic hub in Southeast Asia, must provide the impetus to the fields of investigation and research, especially in the areas of soft sciences such as linguistics research.

Culpeper's (1996) Theory of Impoliteness proposes the definition of politeness as an attitude of one's beliefs about certain behaviour in certain social settings and the interaction that happens upon the activation of that attitude by the person who produces them. Further, he says linguistic politeness is material that can be used to trigger attitudes about politeness. Culpeper, in his more recent paper (2016) states that impoliteness is an extension of politeness, the difference being politeness maintains societal balance while impoliteness causes imbalance and conflict. He also proposes that the listener's understanding is essential to understand the context and interpretation of the speaker. During a communicative interaction, lexical and grammatical components also sway the limited views towards the perspective of politeness and impoliteness.

Words have the power to positively or negatively impact a person. Words can uplift your prestige or destroy your family name. Given the situation and context, they can transform, motivate, hurt and humiliate people. Consequently, Dewaele (2004 p. 204)

says that some swearwords and taboo words are the 'verbal equivalent of nitroglycerine' and can have devastating social consequences. This leads to native speakers avoidance of using such words in public places, and non-native speakers general reluctance to use them at all.

The main concept behind this research is that swear words usage among multilingual people corresponds to contributions in research in the fields of emotions, pragmatics, psychology, bilingualism and language learning in the second language (L2). The relationship between languages and emotions is the main focus as there is an interesting paradox where learning swear words of a foreign language is often the first motivation for new learners of L2. Even so, these swear words are rarely learnt in an official setting, as mostly they are learnt outside of the classroom. They fascinate new learners, yet due to the learner's limited knowledge, they are seldom used. This may be because knowledge of profanity can work both ways, a double-edged sword. It may show a person as sophisticated and well-travelled but may also cause social embarrassment if said in the wrong context.

1.1 Background of the Study

In Malaysia, the early education system comprises the primary and secondary school system which has two parallel branches. These are the national school system which has the Malay language as the medium of instruction, and the national-type (vernacular) system, which has Mandarin or Tamil language as the medium of instruction. Da Wan (2018 p.3), states 'these primary and secondary schools include government and government-aided schools; more precisely, the national, national-type (vernacular), religious, technical, vocational, special education, sports, and arts schools'. Tertiary education follows level six in secondary education, achieved through Matriculation (a special system in selected schools designed as a fast-track option to college) according to

the Ministry of Education's official website (MOE). Similar options are the *Sijil Tinggi Pendidikan Malaysia* (STPM), a higher school certificate after five years of secondary education or a diploma leading to an undergraduate study.

As university campuses represent a polyglot of culture, environment and languages, it is an ideal platform to provide an interesting contrast in the differentiating viewpoints. Languages frequently spoken in Malaysian campuses are from the main language groups, which are English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil. Daily conversations on campus expose the student to nuances and words in different languages that may have multiple layers of meaning. Research in the area of impolite speech has the capacity to build bridges between differing cultures. It stands to reason that a better understanding of why these societies use swear words can provide and foster a much-needed comprehensive window into the linguistic psyche.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Fischer et al. (2019) states that using a second language can lead to stress. In the Malaysian context, the education system may contribute to stress due to education policies, the multilingual scenario, and the emphasis placed on good grades. Fagerston (2012) also states that swear words have the potential to make changes in social relationships. Forming social relationships can be stressful in a new environment such as a university campus. This means that students will navigate various ethnicities, cultures and languages. A student thrown into this situation needs to quickly adapt using whatever linguistic resources available, especially understanding the nuances of swear words in everyday conversations. Earlier studies regarding swear words in the Malaysian context focused on Chinese youth (Tian, 2014), Indian males (Fernandez, 2008), female teenagers (Paramasivam & Baudin, 2015), Malaysian youth (Azman et al. 2020), and Malaysian netizens. (David et al. 2016).

Paramasivam & Baudin (2015) posit that swear words are among the first to be learnt by speakers of a second language but are not featured in academia prominently because of their 'tabooness'. This is because these words can leave an emotional impact depending on the speaker and listener, their background, and their characteristics. Hence, swearing has always been regarded as an expression of negativity. However, little effort has been directed towards examining all the nuances of slang discourse, swear word usage and reception, especially in the multilingual Malaysian context.

This study will identify the categories of swear words that are used among university students. The viewpoint of students towards these swear words will give an indication of how they use swear words to adapt to new environments. This will then contribute to understanding the effect of swear words on students' stress in daily discourse.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to identify the types of swear words used by university students and examine how students use them to accustom themselves to a new environment.

1.4 Research Questions

With the above objectives in mind, the following research questions have been formulated.

RQ1: What type of swear words are used by university students?

RQ2: How do university students use swear words to accustom themselves according to the new environment?

1.5 Research Limitation

Based on the objectives of this research, there were limitations that have affected data collection, quantity and quality of swear words compiled and categorised. The instruments of data collection used in this study were an online questionnaire and a semi structured (telephone) interviews, but these were restricted by the time and schedule of respondents. Due to the Covid 19 Movement Control Order (MCO), much of the data collected was through online mediums. Google Forms was used because of its convenience. Furthermore, the data collected was stored easily and could be viewed via Google Spreadsheet. The form was sent via email or as a link shared across social media platforms such as Whatsapp groups. The semi structured telephone interviews conducted proved to be a cost-effective measure which could be done at the respondents' convenience and over a wider geographic region. By conducting these interviews, the researcher could compare different opinions from multiple respondents. Despite the MCO, it must be noted that the data from the telephone interviews assisted in providing a coherent picture of the respondents' backgrounds.

All the swear words researched in this study were identified through the Google Form. As the questions about perception were clear and unambiguous, the responses received gave a comprehensive picture of the respondents' perception of swear words and how they will use these to adapt to a new environment. The parameter of this study consisted of only one university and one faculty. Apart from this, only two languages, English and Malay, were researched and considered for the categories and the viewpoint of swear words. Due to this, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to students in all universities or to swear words in other languages which were submitted in responses by international students.

1.6 Significance of Study

As this study aims to examine the types of swear words used by university students and their use of these swear words to assimilate, a better understanding of the campus social environment and swear words can enable a student to accurately judge a potential situation and express themselves on campus discourse adequately.

The rationale behind this study is relevant because the emotional perception of students' personalities has important consequences as it carries a negative or positive influence. For example, the student may enhance their personality if they can prejudge the social situation acceptable to a swear word they use or lose credibility for uttering a swear word at the wrong time in a socially unacceptable environment. This can make or break the popularity of a student among their peers and members of the opposite sex. Particular note must be taken of the Malaysian education system and the multilingual background of the students as they are a product of these systems due to exposure, intentional or accidental, from these two influences from birth.

A second and more important rationale is that a better understanding of impolite speech employed by the various ethnic communities in Malaysia can foster better intra-community relationships because there will be a greater awareness of the reasons behind the swear words and the different layers of meaning attributed to a swear word, and this may contribute towards less name-calling, misunderstanding and promote harmony among Malaysians. Therefore, a deeper awareness of swear words and the context in which they are spoken is important in campus discourse. Identifying this aspect will assist in dismantling the 'tabooness' towards swear words and elevate the effects of these swear words related to students' stress.

Jay and Jay (2015) posit that swearing had become a common occurrence in daily life especially noticeable due to media platform exposure. These include film, music,

professional sports, radio, advertisements, and television (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). Tian (2014) opines that youth across the spectrum of nationality, race and gender use impolite speech to express emotional states. Thus, it is not surprising that the usage of swear words can substitute physical violence in the form of verbal aggressions (Jay, 2009). Interestingly, Grohol (2018) states that swear words can also constitute a positive form of social commentary, especially when with friends, in storytelling, emphasising positive emotions about people, situations, objects, or events.

1.7 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the objective and rationale of this research by focusing on the background, the statement of the problem and the relevant objectives and research questions required. Further, this chapter also explains the limitation as well as the significance of the study in order to obtain a clear perspective of this research study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the history of swear words followed by origin of swear words, operational definitions, types of swear words, studies related to this research, as well as the science and context of swear words. Further, this chapter also provides a look at the gaps of previous studies, which will assist in analysing the limitations of this study.

2.1 History of swear words

Vingerhoets (2013) states that swear words have been in existence since the emergence of language. Swear words and taboo words have long been used to express feelings. In mediaeval times, one such scholar writer was Shakespeare, an authority on puns and profanity, who was also known to create many such words himself when there wasn't a suitable one available. Ghanooni (2012) corroborates Shakespeare's use of coarse language, citing Kiernan (2007), who states that Shakespeare's creative wordplay involves all his characters including kings, queens, clowns and courtiers who are experts in double meanings and sexual puns.

McAlindon (2000) also states that Shakespeare's work exhibits an almost obsessive interest in impolite language and far more than other literary works of the same era. It is most obvious in his works of English histories, where the bard writes about the ills of his times, reflecting a disintegrating social order. As mentioned above, the literary works of Shakespeare are peppered with risque and saucy passages. *Twelfth Night* makes a reference to the word 'cunt'. The character Malvolio speaks, "These be her very 'C's, her 'U's, and her 'T's, and thus she makes her great 'P's'. Here the word 'and' is read as 'N' therefore spelling out the word 'cunt'".

Another interesting perspective from Mediaeval times comes from marginalia. Mediaeval manuscript illustrators sometimes elevated their boredom by adding weird and grotesque art to the margins of manuscripts known as marginalia. These included hybrid animal forms, nature as in leaves, flowers and branches as well as unexpected knights fighting snails. Also included in this repertoire are disembodied illustrations of penises and scrotum portrayed in a basket or growing from trees. More imaginative illustrators use these organs as a pointing 'finger' towards important parts of the text. According to Re'em (2015), these represent the imaginary attitude towards sex and gender in medieval times. They represented daily life, poking fun at how culture perceived life.

In more contemporary times, Montagu (2001) states history has taken a negative view on those accused of using impolite speech with punishments such as death penalty, jail time, fines and other forms of punishment being imposed. However, he posits that the function of swearing itself is an act of relief mechanism. This allows excess energy to act as a release for the speaker while not doing any serious physical harm to the listener. Authorities who understand this function, although they may oppose the concept of swearing, recognise the many psychological levels of using profanity and should allow some leeway for displays of strong expression in organised society.

Vingerhoets (2013) further remarks that federal registrations in the U.S. Trademark Register uses the term 'scandalous contents' as a reason to reject certain name registrations. This simply means that companies cannot make an official application to name their brands anything that the Federal US Trademark Register deems as scandalous or taboo. These 'suspect' trademarks include brand names such as 'schitted', 'good shit', 'fuct', and 'holy shit'. He also states that the U.S Federal Communication Commission regulates offensive speech on radio and television.

Origin of swear words

Scribendi Inc., (2020) provides the origins for some of the main swear words in the English language.

Shit - Of Germanic origin; old English 'scitte' meant diarrhoea. Both the Dutch '*schijten*' and the German '*scheissen*' today share the same meaning as the English word, which means to defecate. But originally, 'shit' came from an even older word that meant to part with or to separate and did not have a vulgar interpretation.

Piss - The word 'piss' originates from Middle English which imitated Old French 'pisser'. Funnily, this Old French word did not mean urine but rather meant 'that which dispels the urine' meaning one who pisses.

Ass - Of Germanic origin, this old English word is a variant of arse, which is related to Dutch 'aars' and German 'arsch'. This word refers to the body part responsible for excretion and is the main point for many jokes and puns. Meanwhile, the Latin 'ass' means a donkey and as an insult also carries the meaning stupid or foolish.

Hell - Old English 'hel' comes from Germanic (Indo European) origin, a root word meaning to cover. This is categorised as blasphemy because the basic meaning of hell is a place of suffering and separation from God.

Damn - Coming from Middle English, from the Old French word 'dam(p)mer', it meant 'to inflict loss'. This is also blasphemy, and like the word 'hell', it is not considered a very strong or harsh swear word.

Bitch - Old English. *'bicce'* of Germanic origin. This word means the female dog, used in its literal sense. However, it has morphed into gender slang for an unpleasant woman and is considered one of the most insulting things to call a woman. This is because human status has been relegated to animal status, and the saying 'bitch in heat' also relates to the person's sexual drive. On the positive side, the modern slang term 'bitch' now may have a cool connotation: as in girl comrade, female friend, or badass girl.

Fuck - This word is of Germanic origin from the 16th century. It means to strike or fist. This word is termed offensive of the severe category but is used on a regular basis creatively. The definition, however simply means sexual intercourse in a vulgar manner.

According to Scribendi Inc., these words originally did not start out as swear words or anything other than as descriptors. With the possible exception of 'hell' and 'damn', most of the current swear words were normal words but could not be spoken lightly due to their direct meanings. The change process of how these normal words become swear words would elicit a separate and exhaustive investigation in itself, which is not enabled by the parameters of this study.

Operational Definition

a. Swear words

Dewaele (2004) explains that the power of insult is gained when real or imagined negative traits of the victim are highlighted. Vulgar words refer to coarse words that are often related to the language of under-educated people. Slang is a particular non-standard form that is often used to communicate internally among the members of a particular group of people, such as teenagers, musicians, drug users, and other such groups. When someone utters insults and slurs, they express verbal attacks on others. The main cases of insults and slurs are related to ethnic or racial terms and may lead to stereotypes or

prejudice. Insults are related to the speaker's inadequate respect for others. Ethnic insults are racially bound insults such as terms like 'flip' for Filipinos and 'ape' for a black person.

b. Context

Mercer (2000) gives the definition of context as in a state of constant flux and is an endeavor by all parties involved. This lays the foundations for social discourse with enough shared knowledge so that the speaker and listener can achieve some joined understanding in order to progress with the conversations. As is obvious, swear words bear an emotional impact depending on the speaker's and listener's background. These may be further prioritised based on culture, language and other aspects, context, level of taboo-ness and speakers' and listeners' predisposed characteristics, all of which determine this impact of swearing.

As this 'profanity is good/bad' debate rages on, many studies have shown interesting aspects of profanity not thought of previously. According to Feldman (2017), profanity is used to express emotions like anger, surprise, or frustration. It can be used to relieve stress and thereby produce a cathartic feeling in the person who swears. It also brings about an influence in negatively impacting the credibility of the speaker. Other than this, it is a bonding tool, promoting interpersonal communication in specific circumstances and humour in the right situation. Lastly, it becomes a verbal tool of aggression aimed to cause ridicule, shame or emotional pain to the listener.

2.2 Definition and types of swear words

According to Battistella (2007), impolite language can be categorised as obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, and epithets. Obscenity and vulgarity are related and refer to sex differentiating anatomy and excretory functions such as 'fuck' and 'shit'. The relationship between these two categories only differs as a point of intensity. Both deal

with crude expressions. Profanity refers to cursing relating to matters of religion. This may involve the use of sacred terms such as 'hell', 'damn', and 'god damn'. Meanwhile, epithets range across the spectrum of slurs. This includes 'fag', 'rag head', 'witch', and 'wop'. These slurs may refer to sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, disabilities, appearance, and other characteristics such as retard, gimp, and midget. These four categories are not mutually exclusive. Further, compound expressions can include words from more than one category such as 'god fucking dammit'.

Cursing

According to Jay (1999), the definition for cursing is a call to the divine to cause harm or injury to someone. The person who curses, uses certain words which are imbued with power (through religious or social standing). In some societies there are special sets of words, specifically used for these purposes. These words provide psychological and emotional resonance and are carried out as punishments which would be physically or psychologically, such as complete banishment. Also called hexes of ancient times, these curses sounded like 'damn', 'goddamn', 'hell'. Jay (1999) also categorises the following types of impolite language.

Profanity

Profanity can be defined as something secular that is unconsecrated, contaminated or words that convey contempt and abuse on something considered religious. These examples would be 'Jesus H. Christ!', and 'For the love of God, get off the phone'. The previous two expressions convey religious terminology in a casual, secular manner.

Blasphemy

Profanity and blasphemy carry different meanings. Blasphemy is an attack on religion or its creed while profanity may touch on the secular or be indifferent towards religion, blasphemy aims directly at the divine (church). These curses take the lord's name or curse the deities. Naturally, the greater the power of the religious institution, the more severe

the punishment for the usage of such blasphemous words. The very devout find these particularly offensive examples of which are, 'Screw the Pope!'. At one time in history, blasphemy was punishable by death or excommunication. But nowadays the church does not hold as much power as in the past. This is reflected in the uptick of use of blasphemous language. However, areas within the church belt and highly orthodox communities do not tolerate blasphemous expressions.

Taboo

According to Jay, taboo are words and phrases which are forbidden to use as they are loaded with dangerous 'powers' which may be invoked. For example, euphemisms such as 'passed away' are used in place of 'died'. This taboo serves to suppress certain behaviour and speech and is used to preserve social order and control in a community. Needless to say, the larger the perceived 'danger' the greater the suppression.

Obscenities

Obscenities equals something being repulsive and offensive to societal moors and attracts depravity. Obscene speech is understood as unprotected speech that is not within reason or the guidelines of the law of the land. It cannot be used freely and is restricted with a risk of legal action. Obscenity protects society from harmful language while taboo restricts the actions of society. These are words such as 'motherfucker', 'cocksucker', 'cunt', and even 'tits'. However, interesting to note is that the word 'fuck' is restricted in media but is the most frequently used expletive.

Vulgarity

The definition of vulgarity are words or actions that are morally crude and lacking in refinement. This can mean the actions or language of the common person which implies unsophistication or the illiterate or ignorant. It is taken more as a value judgement by the entitled classes onwards the working classes. This means that to be vulgar is to be

common and that is not necessarily a bad thing. It just reflects crudeness or street language with examples such as 'bloody', 'slut', 'piss', 'puke'.

Slang

Slang is a part of language that is common to a specific group. It consists of changed words and put-on figures of speech. It is particularly prominent in subgroups such as teenagers, athletes and other cliques and provides for ease of communication. It also provides an easy code to show solidarity among the members of that particular group and the ignorance of or misuse of these codes can identify non-members. Examples for slang would be 'John' (a prostitute's customer), 'jock' (an athlete archetype).

Epithet

Epithets can be defined as a disparaging word or phrase that accompanies the name of a person or thing. These are simple one or two word-phrases such as 'up yours', 'piss off' and 'son of a bitch'. It may mark a sense of hostility and can be uttered from frustration and seeks to reduce the stress level of the speaker. Epithets are words or phrases which are usually brief but effective to express frustrated feelings. People may utter a certain epithet when they hurt themselves. In addition, Jay (1996) defines epithet as a powerful burst of emotional language due to sudden anger or frustration. According to him, words or phrases like 'Nazi', 'midget', 'retard' and 'motherfucker' are examples of epithets.

Insults & Slurs

Insults is seen to mean to belittle someone while a slur disparages another. Both are verbal attacks on people and are used to harm the other person by the words spoken alone. They yield their power by targeting the characteristics of the other person and may be social, racial, or ethnic. They may also touch on physical, psychological, or mental qualities and may use animal imagery such as 'son of a bitch', 'dog', 'fag', 'weirdo', 'dago'. However, some of these words have been adopted within their own communities as terms of

endearment or humour for example the term ‘nigger’ among African Americans. If used by members outside the group, these terms are deemed highly offensive.

Scatology

Scatology is related to excrement and waste products. Different communities have different references about waste products. They may be ‘poopoo’, ‘kaka’, ‘crap’. Germans appear to have more scatological references in their culture than other communities of the world.

Jay states these categories allow researchers to understand the different types of meanings that dirty words and expletives can project in society. Upon further research, it can be observed that taboo words hinge around perceptions of human experience and there is a logic to the origin of the usage of the words. Context and culture have to be also considered when attempting to analyse swear words as they may fall into more than one category. One example is ‘shit’ which can be a scatological term, or an insult or even an epithet.

David et al. (2016) says a variety of swear words include “obscenity, swearing, profanity, epithets, name-calling, blasphemy, insult, slurs, slang, scatology, vulgarity, verbal aggression, and taboo words.” Pinker (2008) says that taboo words are language windows to emotions as language becomes the channel to verbalise extreme feelings. Jay’s (1999) Neuro-Psycho-Social (NPS) theory defines cursing as a kind of language which encompasses all these aforementioned categories. This theory relates to the physiological, neurological, cultural and linguistic factors that underlie impolite language. Earlier studies differentiate between the categories of swearing such as taboo, obscenity, profanity, derogation and epithets. Tian (2014) states that these involve semantic stereotypes, which are derogatory negative words associated with women.

Hashim (1999) states that the very existence of taboo gives rise to euphemisms because when taboo items are referred to in formal situations, a euphemism is the acceptable way of referencing. Jay (2009) states that it is interesting to note that swearing crosses all socio-economic statuses, age ranges, and levels of education. This allows the speaker to express something with a taboo innuendo but to circumvent any fallout that may occur if the speech were more direct. However, the intensity of swear words differs when examined from the gender viewpoint.

Kremin (2017) introduces a subset of swear words which is directed towards genders insults. General slurs towards women imply their chastity and sexuality, whilst slurs towards men imply them being too soft or womanly. Both these categories are influenced by patriarchal views on gender roles in society. A major part of the world's societies is patriarchal, where men are believed to be better, stronger, and more competent while women are deemed to be vulnerable and weak and therefore have to be protected. These societal parameters influence the way either gender behaves when the other gender is displaying emotion in a manner contrary to their gender role. Overall, both men and women have accepted the patriarchal limitations of their environments and gender directed slurs is one form of expression that are influenced by these societal mores.

Jay et al. (2008) state that profane words leave a stronger impression as they are processed on a deeper level in a human mind. For a long time, swear words functioned in a specific way, that is, to hurt, shame and convey hostile emotions. This is consistent with the idea that emotional words function to evoke a different level of arousal, and the superiority of profanity recall is due to cognitive neuroscience and brain imaging systems. An example would be events or emotions associated with strong feelings such as the 9/11 attacks instead of the day before or the day after. Stone et al. (2015) posit that this emotional arousal stage makes them more memorable because brain structures use

different pathways in processing emotional hurt.

Robbins et al. (2011) and Vingerhoets et al. (2013) all state that in contemporary times, profanity is seen as also a cathartic instrument, where it has positive characteristics if it does not inflict stress and pain. It stands as a substitute for the potentially more unhealthy and harmful forms of violence. Jay (2009) also states that letting off steam can help reduce the possibility of aggression as the person who swears now feels less inclined to act out a potentially harmful situation. Sapolsky and Kaye (2005) say that swearing has become a channel to entertain and attract, much used in the advertising media, comedy, and sports.

Variations of Swear Words

Ghanooni (2012) states that word games and puns bring certain artistic value to the linguistic. This helps enrich academic work with second and third levels of meanings so that this type of literary work can permeate, enhance, and lend an element of humour to an otherwise dry subject. However, it must be noted that sexual puns have to be handled with care when translating into another language or to a more contemporary form of spoken English, as some element of sexuality would have been normalised, leading to the loss of the original richness in meaning.

Abbreviation of swear words

Abbreviations are the shortening of curse words. Correspondingly, University of Sussex states that an abbreviation is a shortened form of a written word or phrase that could also be written in full and is used in place of the whole word or phrase. This allows space and time to be saved and helps to avoid the repetition of long words and phrases in conversation. Bergen (2018) states a further categorisation is acronyms, or abbreviations formed from the initial letters of words on a phrase and do not include full stops such as

PR for public relations. The most prolific being 'fk', 'fking', 'fck', denoting 'fuck'. It has become a common occurrence, especially on social sites, to use abbreviations as a lazy attempt to get the opinion across. Other examples are 'WTF', 'FFS', as these abbreviations constitute fewer keystrokes, saving time and effort. This is not a new phenomenon as, according to Elkin (1946), in the military field 'SNAFU' (situation normal, all fucked up) was already in use in the 1940's period. This simply portrays the creative acrobatics of informal linguistics. They may not be long term but they are popular.

Studies related to euphemism

Yu (2012) categorises euphemisms into six categories: harmonic tones or homophones, metaphor or metonymy, borrowings, symbols, new words and abbreviations. Harmonic tones or homophones, this term is used when one word is substituted with another (carries the same sound but has a different meaning). It is easier to understand homophones as words that have different spellings but share the same pronunciation. This makes homophones a part of homonyms which would also include homographs. These indicate words that have different pronunciations but the exact same spelling similar to 'sea' and 'see'. Another example is the word 'bitch' which is sometimes referred to as beach or beech. This type of usage is called harmonic tones.

Lakoff (1975) stated that euphemisms are an indirect form of expression and gave examples such as 'oh dear', 'fudge', and 'shoot' as expressions taking the place of swear words. This may be because the use of swear words to express feelings is considered unladylike. Tian (2014) states that euphemistic words are used to soften the impact, and examples for this are 'shoot' for 'shit', 'f-word' for 'fuck', and 'gosh' for 'god'. Jay (1999) states that euphemisms developed through the centuries to describe body products, body parts, sexual acts, and genital organs. Instead of the phrase 'having sex', Jay states that phrases like 'making love' and 'sleeping together' are used. In a study on swear

words used by Chinese students, Tian's (2014) findings show that the highest number of participants gave the reason as wanting to be more polite. Tian also investigated the reasons behind the use of euphemisms, finding that the primary reasons given were, in order of priority, to appear polite, to make the conversation sound better, to curtail the usage of swear words and to avoid giving a bad impression.

Symbols of swearing,

Some creative words and phrases use symbols to substitute curse words. According to Lee et al. (2019), a better word to explain symbols in swearing is 'grawlix'. This represents profanity as a series of typographic characters better explained as bleeping out a word in a graphical sense. A reason this may have arisen is to get around censors but at the same time still ensuring that the original 'naughty' meaning still reaches the reader, such as '????? WTxxxx???' , 's2pid ppl blocking wedding' and 'what the #u#k is happening in Malaysia?'

The first example shows that the first initials of the word are followed by 'xxxx'. W and T denote What The. This is now sandwiched between question marks which means 'What The Fuck'. The second example would be the personal insult 'stupid' replaced with 's-2-pid', which, when spoken, sounds the same. The third example is the word 'fuck' replaced by '#u#k'.

Metaphors

Bergen (2018) posits that metaphors do not always apply themselves to a profane situation; for example, the phrase 'get laid' would never justifiably replace 'screw you' or 'fuck you' in emotional quotient. This speech act is derived from two categories: elevation or amelioration and degeneration. Elevation takes the meaning of a word that grows stronger and more agreeable, and degeneration means the opposite, whereby the

meaning becomes weaker and less agreeable. An example would be by the word 'hippopotamus', where the reference is made to the physical characteristics of a person who is fat. Bergen states that this picturisation creates a negative image of fat, clumsy, and ugly and, in this instance, was used to ridicule the person it was referred to.

Borrowings

In a multicultural perspective, borrowed words occur in order to conceal the original meaning of a curse word. Phrase borrowings can take place when two languages are exposed to each other simultaneously. This may happen when immigrants from one land with their particular linguistic background settle in another land with a foreign language. Borrowed words can occur both ways but it stands to reason that more words of the original language will be used to facilitate understanding when speaking in the new language. Holmes (2001) corroborates this by giving an example where the speaker of a second language borrows a word from his original tongue because he is unaware of a suitable phrase and has a limited vocabulary. Thirusanku (2013) in his research cites Bloomfield's (2015) article defining two types of borrowing, that is dialect borrowing and cultural borrowing. The first refers to features from the same speech sphere that are borrowed while the second refers to features from a different language that is borrowed. Examples are 'spaghetti' borrowed from the Italian language and 'nasi lemak' and 'ikan bilis' borrowed from the Malay language. These words are frequently used by university students in the Malaysian context. This is corroborated by Thelwall (2008) and Crystal (1987), who note that Malaysians tend to use covert forms of speech under the guise of different semantic masks. The creation of new words allows users to push at the boundaries of speech acts as it provides an interesting and stress-free channel to create humour. In Malaysia, each culture is unique, and each specific culture's demographic can provide for an interesting scenario where language is used for code switching and code

mixing. This then can produce the combination of swear words in two or more languages to create a completely new and creative word.

Impolite hand gestures

Axtell & Parker Pen Company (1993) categorises an obscene gesture as a movement of hands or arms that may be sexually suggestive and are considered offensive in certain cultures. These are The Finger, V sign, Dulya, Corna, Moutza, Thumbs up, and Okay gesture. The most widely used hand gesture, recognised almost globally is flipping the bird which is also called 'The Finger'. It symbolises disrespect. However, cultures that are exposed to the West follow this meaning of disrespect for The Finger. The V sign with palm outwards symbolises a sign of peace, whereas turning the back of the hand towards the recipient and the previously peaceful sign now has the same meaning as The Finger.

The Fig sign or Dulya comes from Russian speaking areas and is made with the hand and finger curled and the thumb between the middle and index fingers. It is considered a mildly obscene gesture and has been around since the time of the Ancient Romans. However, it is to be noted that this sign is now losing its prominence. The Corna, also called The Sign of the Horns, is formed by extending the index and the little finger while simultaneously holding down the middle and the ring finger. This gesture when directed towards another person and rocked back and forth represents cuckoldry. This is common in the Mediterranean Region and is used to ward off the Evil Eye and used as an obscene gesture to mean cuckoldry.

For Moutza, it is a Greek gesture that is traditionally insulting. Five fingers are spread wide with the palm thrust towards a person. This represents the same insult as The Finger. In Africa and the Caribbean, this means 'You have five fathers' with the gesture of having the palm facing downwards towards the ground. In the Middle East, thumbs up

express an impolite gesture that means 'up yours'. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has a version of this gesture where a Capulet bites his thumb at a Montague in order to start a fight. This carries the same meaning as giving someone *The Finger* and thus incites a fight.

Lastly, the 'Okay' gesture is made by connecting the thumb and index finger in a circle, and holding the other fingers upright would usually mean okay or good. In fact, this gesture is used underwater amongst divers to portray 'I am okay' or 'Are you okay?'. However, in some cultures, this is deemed an offensive gesture as the 'O' shape stands for zero giving the meaning of 'worth nothing'. This can also symbolise an anus leading to a reference to sodomy.

Verbal duelling

Shavladze (January 2020) states that verbal duelling as a part of culture occurs across Greece to Japan. Verbal battles are large and complex and can comprise poetic duels and insults. Shavladze's research focuses on forms of verbal duelling from Georgia called *kapiaoba/leksaoba* and from England and Scotland called *flyting* which have a proven oral tradition of verbal duel that contain obscenities and profanities. The interesting part is both these cultures use this form as a ritual competition and regard them as entertainment. The profanity used refers to dirty words (sex and excretion), blasphemy, and animal abuse where a human is equated to an animal. The context for these competitions can be at parties or the court. This provides a window on the lighter vein of profanity usage within adversarial context, more precisely as a method for de-escalation. This offers us an interesting insight into a culture that accepts impolite language as something other than something negative.

A study in France was conducted by Lieury et al. (1997). Dewaele (2010) quotes this study which investigated word memory recall in French. To this end, it was found

that profanity word recall was four times more superior to neutral words. Another study by Raysen et al. (1997) investigated the effect of independent variables using a frequency analysis of vocabulary teams. The variables which were studied were social class, age and gender and how these demographic groups use swear words. The study found that social class did not affect the use of swear words but male speakers under the age of thirty five used more profanity than other groups in this study. Equally important was another research done by Stenstrom (1995) which confirmed that (not surprisingly), teenagers swore more than adults, with teenagers primarily using taboo words associated with sex and drinking and adults veering towards religious blasphemy. Moreover, she also found that girls used weaker swear words, primarily to accentuate or intensify their conversation.

Bayard & Krishnayya (2001) studied swear words university students used by examining quantitative analysis of their dialogues. Here too, it was found that gender differences did not make much of an impact on the strength of profanity uttered although males using stronger expletives. From the above studies, it can be inferred that the use of swear words in the first language is often linked to generational status but not so much related to the gender or social class of the speaker.

Studies based on emotional resonance and bi-and multilingualism show that languages learnt after puberty differ from childhood languages. Interestingly, bilinguals have the option to code-switch so that they can distance themselves when using swear words. Javier and Marcos (1989)'s study found that certain words that were too intense in the first language could be expressed without the same anxiety in the second language. For this reason, it was deduced that their mother tongue had more emotional resonance with the speaker. They also found that understanding the way stress affects languages in the linguistic and cognitive level is very important as there is a different impact on the

functional separation of languages. Dewaele (2004) found that extroverts used more colloquial words as extroverts were more open to experimenting and risk taking. Using a swear word and gauging the context and correct setting can be risky but extroverts enjoyed this challenge. This study also found that fluency in the language and frequency of contact enabled more utterances of swearwords. However, as with earlier studies, other elements such as gender and social class did not affect utterances of profanity. Labov (2014) differs in his perspective of social class affecting impolite speech. He says that society is made up of groups of people who share behavioural norms relating to class levels within that society. According to him, speech communities are a loose structure that can be made up by participants who demonstrate a set of shared societal behaviour and this correlates with class positions of the societal structure.

This also holds true in the Malaysian context as Fernandez (2008)'s study found that in Malaysia, Indian male undergraduates are greatly influenced by these trends because they believe that using swear words made them look easy-going, informal and trendy. Horan (2013) states that language learners need to learn how to express powerful emotions and point of view. However, this can require awareness of the linguistic feel from which these words come as well as an understanding of the seriousness of the words used.

Innovative words

According to Valdesolo (2016), creative swear words are lyrical and smart. Speakers of swear words are creative in using new and innovative words to describe swear words similar to 'fuckadoodledo', which also goes to show that curse words can be used to portray emotion other than anger or aggression as there is an inherent humour present in this word. New swear words are constantly being created due to creative minds on the internet. Most recent additions are compound swear words that blend obscenities with

riffs. An example would be 'shit' with its history rooted in the 1300's period (a Germanic word which carries the meaning 'to cut off'). This little word has now proliferated into interesting compound words such as 'shitface', 'shitbag' and 'shithole'. Old Latin and old German records "ficken/fucken" to mean strike or penetrate. Further, this had a slang meaning: to copulate. More interesting are words like 'fuckology' and 'fuckening' which show the modern creativity of the user at work.

Jay (1999) states that coarse language functions as an outlet for hostile aggression, which aims to achieve a reward such as satisfaction felt by the speaker and admiration or respect by peers. In cyberspace, speech acts such as developing new curse words are referred to as pseudo swearing. Here, speakers of swear words use a variety of words from different perspectives. They may pick on curse words that are culturally prescribed for them or invent their own words as a result of wordplay. Therefore, when people want to swear, they refer to terms they already possess in their language vocabulary.

Theories related to the study

From a sociolinguistics point of view, there are several different classification systems of 'bad language' due to the fact that the value of 'badness' in all languages constantly changes. Additionally, according to sociolinguists, the variation and differentiation of these various classifications is needed to enrich language variety and add knowledge to each classification of this non-standard language. Similarly, understanding the development of the classification of foul language is important to derive the complete meaning of any sentences or utterances that are uttered within this 'bad language'. The following are theories that have provided a guideline structure for this research. In addition, studies relating to the usage of swear words among students and the different types of swear words used are also reviewed.

Battistella's (2007) categories of swear words describe swear words as offensive and categorises taboo language such as epithets, profanity, vulgarity, and obscenity. A detailed rationalisation of Battistella's categories is examined in chapter 3.2 The following studies provide a guideline to analyse the findings.

Gender of swearing

Studies have indicated that gender plays a certain influence in the types of swear words uttered. Although gender as a demographic variable is not focused in this study, this factor cannot be disregarded as it throws some interesting perspective into the general overview of this research. Understanding this factor is deemed necessary to view the macro picture of swearing in the Malaysian context.

Jay (1999) states that men tend to use more aggressive, sexual and racist terms compared to women. This may be because men are more sensitive to verbal harassment and easier to be provoked into fighting when they believe they are being insulted. Jay also states that women, however, tend to use polite forms in order to avoid impolite speech. Miller and Swift (2001) state that this derogation is based on semantic shifts in vocabulary and is determined by men and not women, simply because naming and defining becomes a symbol of power. These are controlled by men in most societies. The word 'coed' came about as derisive slang to denote female students who entered academia when these institutions of higher learning were solely male bastions. This term was coined for a female student with an element of frivolity and described as a person not serious in studies.

2.3 Studies related to swear words among university students

Jay and Janschewitz's (2008) study found that swearing is significantly dependable on the relationship between speaker-listener, on social and physical environment and on the actual word used. Other studies such as Byrne (2019) offers an interesting take on group rapport using swear words. She states that teams in the manufacturing and IT sectors, as an example, that joke with each other using impolite speech tend to report that they trust team players more. According to her, this correlation may be because of the emotional impact related to swear words. She states that to use swear words on another person; the speaker must have worked out the limit between shocking the listener enough to get their attention engaged but not offend them mortally. Using just the right swear word or with the appropriate level of intensity denotes how well you know them and how well you understand their mind. This is actually a demonstration of the sophisticated theory of mind regarding the person you are speaking to. Other than this, it is a bonding tool, promoting interpersonal communication in specific circumstances and humour in the right situation. It also brings about an influence in negatively impacting the credibility of the speaker. Lastly, it becomes a verbal tool of aggression, aimed to cause ridicule, shame or emotional pain to the listener.

In this regard, Jay and Janschewitz (2008) state that taboo words allow us to vent anger without getting physical. This can be regarded as an important 'stress busting' tool. Likewise, in their study, Stephens et al. (2009) indicate that swearing may help alleviate pain, but Johnson and Levis (2010) state otherwise: that is, in the corporate field, it is better to avoid colourful language. This gap invites meaningful debate and deliberate investigation as the effects can be an eye-opener in the field of emotion. Stress inducing environments such as the workplace and home can benefit as well. Studies state that swear words reduce stress levels and also help reduce physical aggression. However, there

seems to be a delicate balance between the intensity of expletives used. Mild swear words seem to elicit sympathy and show the strength of character, whereas coarse swear words merely invite repulsion from the listener and may not get the desired result.

It must be noted that Fernandez (2008) only focused on male students, and therefore his findings theorise only the male perspective. Also to be noted is Tian (2014)'s study on swearing among Chinese youth of both genders. However, both researchers only studied this phenomenon among a specific ethnic group. In order to obtain a more comprehensive result, this study tested both male and female participants. The research has currently addressed this gap as it encompasses all three major ethnic groups of Malaysia and both genders. It is hoped that the findings provide a more comprehensive result of swearing among young adults in Malaysia.

Studies in swear words using mixed method

According to Hanson et al. (2005) combining these two methods (qualitative and quantitative) provides for a richer process outcome. The goal to use this mixed-method was to combine the strengths of both types of data collection into a single research method. This, in turn, maximises the strength and minimises the weaknesses in order to employ a deductive approach to analyse the data as some questions represent the complex nature of touching on emotions and the relationship between variables.

Williams (2007) states the type of research method is determined by the researcher in relevance to the research question. Factors influencing the type of data will guide the data collection approach. Williams discusses qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods as a basic approach to conduct the collection of data that focuses on the research question.

Dewaele (2004) stated that data obtained from both qualitative and quantitative methods assist in showcasing a bigger picture and can draw a fairly accurate overview of

the issue being studied. He also stated the combination of quantitative data collected through Likert scale responses and qualitative data collected through open questions makes it possible to draw a detailed picture of multilinguals' speech behaviour and opinions. Sinayah (2015) elucidates that the qualitative approach takes into consideration the subjective perceptions and uniqueness of the individual respondent. Further, this approach can also allow for circumstances both expected and unforeseen, which the quantitative approach does not encompass. Thus, the research design in this study employs a mixed method that combines a quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative approach enabled categorization of swear words, and the qualitative data derived from telephone interviews further supports and substantiates the views of the respondents towards the swear words used in campus social discourse.

Theories related to language and society

Language is a basic component in social interactions for all communities of the world. Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015) states that one possible relationship between language and society may be that social structure can influence linguistic structure. Labov (1972) considers that language has a special ability because it is a “sensitive index” for other social speech acts as language is malleable. It becomes a primary indicator of social change and can play a part in exerting influence on social development. Meanwhile, Fairclough (2016) sees interpretation as a complex process that needs an element of understanding what speakers or writers mean. It also involves judgement or evaluation of the sincerity of what was said, and this may relate to the social context where the event is taking place.

Interestingly, just as language is a tool to bring people together, the absence of it may be considered as a symbol of alienation. Depending on the culture, this type of communication can mean distance or even danger. In other cultures, displays of strong

emotions such as laughing, crying, and speaking loudly are frowned upon. Relevant to this, Page et al. (1978) state that speaking in a high vocal volume gives the impression of aggression and is also perceived as lacking in self-assurance. Alternatively, some cultures prefer silent communication, such as the Paliyans of Southern India or the Aritama of Colombia. Crystal (1987) and Montagu (2001) also give an example of the Quaker community, which abjures all swearing as part of their social structure. There are native American communities who also do not emote openly and are conscious of overly laughing and weeping. This is also part of their social structure. Montagu (2001) explains that while it is possible to control these urges, it depends on the person's attitude.

Jay (1999)'s Neuro-Psycho-Social (NPS) theory defines cursing as a kind of language and relates to the physiological, neurological, cultural and linguistic factors that underlie impolite language. It also explains why people curse and why they choose the words they use to curse. This theory further explains neurological control, psychological restraints, and socio-cultural restrictions as influential factors that represent cursing.

Jay explains that the speaker uses filters such as humour to determine if the correct word is being used in the proper social context. This depends on the sociocultural parameters of different cultures and languages where there may be linguistic and semantic constraints. Each person's usage of impolite language is also determined by their own psychological development, which is further influenced by culture, family, religion, temperament, and personality. He believes that the influence of language on identity reaches deeper than previously thought. Swearing is an emotional element added to language whereby the speaker showcases a part of himself. For example, an aggressive person uses aggressive curse words to extend his aggression to another. The same applies to a sexually anxious person who uses sexual terminology to elicit emotional responses in order to agitate the listener. An interesting perspective revealed by Jay states that two

personality factors are linked to cursing. They are religiosity and sexual anxiety. According to him, individuals with high levels of these two personality factors feel highly offended by impolite language, thus restraining themselves and other people from cursing in public.

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. According to Bandura, imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities. Humans develop similar behaviour through observation and imitation. Specifically, when they experience positive and rewarding feelings. Güvendir (2015) explains that swearing is verbal violence. It enables a speaker to protect himself verbally, giving him a degree of control. Making a verbal stand also assists in building self-esteem. This corresponds with SLT which explains that people learn from social interactions, especially when they derive positive feelings from the experience. Burgoon's (1988) Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) is a theory of communication that analyses how individuals respond to unanticipated violations of social norms and expectations. Participants in communication will perceive the exchange positively or negatively, depending upon an existing personal relationship or how favourable the violation is perceived. Burgoon's EVT analyses how individuals respond to the violation of societal norms, especially when unanticipated. This communications theory enables participants to judge the situations positively or negatively relating to their personal relationships. Communication is seen as an exchange of behaviour where positive violations increase the attraction towards the violator, and negative violations decrease the attraction.

Hymes (1997) developed an Ethnographic Approach Theory involving participants. According to this theory, speech events involving setting and scene, genre, norms, goals, order of event, and tone and manner of speech can be used to analyse speech

events. Bem (1982) developed the Self-perception Theory. This theory relates to an attitude that is developed when there is no previous existing attitude. This may be due to a lack of experience or emotional response. The person interprets their own behaviour and concludes what attitudes caused it. Pinker (2008) shows another perspective to categorising swear words. His theory prioritises the intent behind the swearing rather than the actual words themselves. He states that there are two categories of swearing: propositional and non-propositional. Pinker further categorises propositional swearing as dysphemistic, euphemistic, abusive, idiomatic, and emphatic. These kinds of swearing are often used when speakers are aware of their usage and ultimately have an objective. This learning process is in line with Jay (2009), who stated that nobody is born with the innate knowledge of taboo words and swearing etiquette. These are achieved as people learn a language in society through the process of socialisation.

In Dimpleby and Burton's (2007) Group Communication Theory, it is proposed that communication makes connections between two individuals or groups of people. What flows from one party to another, ideas, beliefs, opinions, is called the content of the communication. This means that speech links us with each other even though it does not mean we can convey everything we want to say. Humans communicate to fulfil a purpose. Sometimes it is the conveyance of information, other times it is to impress the other party with their knowledge. This relates to the need for the speaker to get done what is needed through communication. The outcome may be intentional or unintentional as the other party may or may not get unsettled. According to this theory, communication is used for the following functions; survival, cooperation in order to work with others, personal needs to be satisfied, to form and maintain relationships with other people, to persuade others to think or act the way we do, to gain influence of power over other people, to hold society and organisations together, to exchange information, to make sense of the world and our place in it, and to express our imagination and ourselves through words.

Giles (2008) Communication Accommodation Theory examines the speaker-listener's changes to be attuned to their partner's communication. This theory elucidates the 'convergence' and 'divergence' elements of communication where one speaker adjusts their behaviour to relate to the people they are speaking to. This could include attempts to gain social approval, establishing identity and efficacy of communication. 'Convergence' deals with communication between people who adapt to each other's behaviour as a way to reduce social differences. In contrast, 'divergence' is the attempt to emphasise the differences. In this research, this theory is demonstrated by respondents who have stated that they are attuned to other speakers in their group and know how to read the context of the conversation before they apply their swear words during their discussions.

Gumperz's (1971) Theory on Speech Community relates to a set of shared social norms. This is called interactional sociolinguistics and uses communication as a social activity to understand both linguistic and non-linguistic processes. This theory also examines the relationship of a speaker's goals and the functions of linguistic variability apart from the order of situations and the speaker's culture. These factors assist in influencing nuances in social discourse and interpretations of nonverbal and verbal cues.

Studies related to swear words among university students

Jay and Janschewitz (2008) used a cognitive psychological framework to research students from the University of California. This research found that respondents take a more than average time to learn the context in which they can use swear words. Studies made among Malaysian students are few and tend to be environment-centric. This is a prevalent theme running through almost all Malaysian studies regarding this subject. The exception is Azman et al. (2020), who collected data from the youth of both genders between 18 to 28 years old in Malaysia and Paramasivam & Baudin (2015) who did a

sampling of only female teenagers in Malaysia. Meanwhile, Fernandez (2008) studied male Indian students specifically in the University of Malaya campus, while Tian (2014) researched 74 youth of both genders from a private school. Both latter studies focus on specific environments. However, the consensus of all these studies states that Malaysian youth swear regularly.

Studies related to categories of swear words

The studies on swear words in students' context demonstrate interesting differences. Tian (2014) differentiates the categories of swearing as taboo, obscenity, profanity, derogation and epithets. These involve semantic stereotypes, which are derogatory negative words associated with women. Tian finds that male speakers tone down their language in the presence of the opposite gender. They use euphemisms or refrain from swearing altogether. However, interestingly, the opposite occurs among the female speakers, where they do not stop or reduce usage of swear words. Tian concludes that swear words have become an important instrument of communication amongst youngsters of both genders without the intention of harming others.

Nevertheless, Tian's research has concentrated only on one ethnic group, namely the Chinese youth. As such, a more comprehensive study can be conducted involving different ethnicities and the use of English together with their mother tongue. Additionally, other age groups such as young adults, older adults and children need to be researched so that the usage of swear words in different age groups can be revealed. Lastly, people of different localities, such as city dwellers as well as rural folk should be researched in order to determine whether the environment affects the use of swear words.

Jdetawy (2019) states that the subjects that can be included in swearing are epithets, profanity, obscenity, cursing, blasphemy, taboo, vulgarity or the use of substandard vulgar terms, slang, insults, scatology, semantic derogation,

ethnic/racial/gender, slurs, animal names, and ancestral allusions. Jdetawy finds that these categories are according to different classifications of bad language but concurs that it is difficult to differentiate between certain categories such as profanity and blasphemy. Similar to Tian, Jdetawy also finds that gender differences affect usage of swear words in that males and females swear more in their gender groups. Also similar to Tian, this research focuses only on a particular ethnic group. Therefore, he recommends that research should be also based on different ethnicities as this would allow researchers to determine how different cultures impact swear words. His research also recommends different types of environment and age groups to enable a comprehensive picture on swear words in society.

Rullyanti (2014), quoting Karjalainen, (2002) 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. Her research finds that the swear word '*kurang ajar*' is the most frequent swear word used by the Bengkuluese people especially in anger, frustration, or disappointment. However, other swear words used are '*pantek*' (meaning vagina) and '*gilo*' (meaning crazy). According to Rullyanti, the underlying motives for the usage of these swear words may be psychological, linguistic or social.

Studies related to the usage of swear words

Horan (2013) highlights that social discourse was often regarded as a boon by God that separated humans from other species of animals. This is seen through ceremonious languages in all cultures as well as prayers. Because of this, cursing and swearing were regarded as blasphemous and morally bankrupt as it heralded a potential supernatural articulation and a transgression against God's goodwill. As such, swearing

was regarded as an abomination as it was considered dirty both verbally and mentally. This was always subject to religious censorship in part because societal structures consisted of the purist and moral figures of authority policing social dogma. Jay (1999) states that people choose taboo words to help them achieve a certain purpose even when they know that it is considered inappropriate. This may be due to an awareness that swear words have a certain power. To perform an act of taboo makes a person feel powerful. Sohn (2010) states that swear words are taboo and prohibited in most cultures, therefore, it becomes more attractive to certain types of people. It shows that the speaker of these words is willing to break the social mores of society, especially when they want to emphasise something important and significant to themselves. Wajnyrb (2006) states that television shows and movies tend to gain one upmanship by highlighting reviews or showing trailers of their dialogue or situations, including swear words uttered by the actors.

According to Scribendi Inc., (2020), a taboo word attracts attention even if the listener does not feel offended. This is because it has a close relationship with emotion. In fact, people living with dementia can still swear even though they have speech-related defects. This may be because profanity is computed in a different part of the brain as compared to other normal words. The listener may feel less emotion to swear words the more they use or are exposed to these swear words. Feldman (2017) states that profanity expresses emotions like anger, surprise or frustration. It can become expressions to produce stress relief and thereby produce a cathartic feeling in the person who swears. Pinker (2008) posits that taboo words are language windows to emotions as language becomes the channel to verbalise extreme feelings.

Feldman et al. (2018, p.222) has argued that “honesty that is meant to express true self, and honesty that is meant to express coexistence with others in society are the two types

of honesty people practice. One is being true to oneself, and the other is adhering to codes that conform to societal rules.” It is interesting to note that a person who frequently swears may also generally disregard social norms, including a willingness to cheat and tell lies. There is, however, no definite consensus on this, as abstract concepts like lying and honesty are qualitative and difficult to define by statistics. This is particularly true in daily life and especially in the Malaysian context, where not wanting to hurt other people can make a person avoid confronting unpleasant truths in order to avoid awkwardness. Jay (2009) states that swear words violates social and moral codes with its users being deemed untrustworthy, dishonest and antisocial. On the other hand, swearers are thought to be more honest in their opinions, not afraid to vocalise what they feel and generally come across as authentic. According to Jay (1992), swearing appears in all age group discourse, but the highest prevalence exists among teenagers.

Jay and Janschewitz (2008) separate swearing into automatic swearing and consciously controlled swearing. Joking among friends using swear words would fit the bill of conscious, controlled swearing. While an example of automatic, unconscious swearing is the extreme spewing of profanity that accompanies a medical condition called Tourette Syndrome. Meanwhile, Cavanna (2013) defines vocal tics as meaningless sounds while complex tics produce meaningful words and short sentences called coprolalia.

Jay (1999) states that coarse language fulfils 2 purposes. The first is hostile aggression which has its objective of hurting or ridiculing another and the second is instrumental aggression which has an objective of achieving a reward such as satisfaction felt and peers admire or respect. In cyberspace, speech acts such as developing new curse words are referred to as pseudo swearing. Here, speakers of swear words use a variety of words from different perspectives. They may pick on curse words that are culturally

prescribed for them or invent their own words as a result of wordplay. Meanwhile, David et al. (2016) states that when people want to swear, they refer to terms they already possess in their language vocabulary.

Swear words in general get a bad rap. Feldman (2017) states that profanity, as with dishonesty, are both non-violent forms of behaviour. According to him, profanity is used to express genuine feelings and is often thought to attract conflicting attitudes from society. He also states that society has held conflicting attitudes towards the nature of profanity with a negative/positive slant. It is intriguing to note that this idea of two different types of honesty can exist and that profanity may correspond with dishonesty in one sense and honesty in another sense. But this second category may be present in very limited and probably less socially desirable situations.

Science of swear words

Bergen (2018) mentions that there is always a technical word for every profane utterance, and these technical words can be used without fear of offending someone; although they refer to words in the taboo category, they are not considered profane. A good example would be copulation for 'fuck'. To understand this word as profane, there must be something beyond the meaning that determines its profaneness. A possibility may be how these words follow a certain syntactic or grammatical structure in the English language. According to Bergen, the English language contains many four-letter words that are profane. Eight letter profane words are basically due to a tandem of 2 four-letter words like 'bullshit' or 'shithead'. An interesting observation done by Bergen is that most three-letter or four-letter profane words are pronounced with just one syllable. There are just a few words that use more than one syllable. These words tend to be built in a particular way as the English language allows that every syllable has a 'vowel at its core'. And these profane words end with one or more consonants called closed syllables. This

theory about swear words having closed syllables is projected into circumstances where movie makers invented new fictional swear words. For example, HBO's Game of Thrones has its own version of 'fucker' which is *Govak*, and *Graddakh* for 'shit'. Star Wars used its own expletives, *poodoo*, which meant *Bantha* fodder (a type of animal steed in the fictional Star Wars universe). Some longer words have four-letter words embedded within them, such as 'motherfucker' or 'wanker'. Bergen also observes that some languages contain groups of words that are similar in meaning and have similar sounds. His examples are words pertaining to light which start with 'gl,' similar to 'gleam', 'glitter', 'glow'. This may explain the new words that people invent, which may be attracted to the clusters with which they are accustomed. This is seen in monosyllabic acronyms like 'MILF', which means 'Mother I'd Like to Fuck', or 'THOT', which means 'That Hoe (whore) Over There'.

Tourette's Syndrome

The Malaysian version of Tourette Syndrome can be loosely termed *melatah*, an affliction that has sufferers who utter involuntary words of surprise. A respondent, aged 22 years, volunteered the information that she suffers from this condition. In her words, *'I have had the experience of melatah impolitely in front of the Principal and always feared after that that he would take me for a negative character. Even now, I melatah when I am surprised or shocked. The words just spew out spontaneously from my mouth.'*

Bakker et al. (2013) gives the history of *latah* as 'strange behaviour.' According to him, it means ticklish or love madness and constitutes an uncontrollable, startled reaction usually characterised by an exaggerated physical response. It is also not something that is genetic but more so is a socially learned behaviour. It is sometimes considered the 'hyper startle' pattern among those who exhibit it. (Hamzah, 2018). In the Malaysian context, *latah* is a female disorder and tends to be culture-specific, occurring

more in the Malay Archipelago of Jawa, Sumatera and East and West Malaysia. It also occurs in Thailand, Burma, and the Philippines in the South East Asian zone. It relates to other behavioural responses like coprolalia and can be an involuntary behaviour and makes the affected person comply immediately to given commands. As a feature of speech, this behaviour has been exploited by others for humour. Jilek (2001) also lists out *latah* reactions as a startled response is triggered by some external element such as tactile, acoustic or visual stimulus which may be individual and culture specific. According to him, the response to this puts the person affected in an altered state of consciousness where they may repeat impulsively certain sounds or inarticulate words, sometimes swearing, using sexual or obscene words which is termed corporolalia. As earlier stated, there may also be imitations of the provoking persons gestures and compliances to commands given at that time. This serves as an element of amusement and comedy to the provoking person and onlookers.

These above reactions were also observed by Gilles de la Tourette as a variant of his neurological syndrome known as Tourettes syndrome. Ganos et al. (2016)'s research on Tourettes syndrome and coprolalia reports increased anxiety, sexually inappropriate and non-obscene socially inappropriate behaviour in sufferers of this syndrome. Sufferers also display uncontrollable tics and sudden movements. This also happens to neurologically impaired disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, where the sufferer cannot inhibit involuntary inappropriate swearing as the ability to do so has become impaired. These corporolalic words have been found to be used loudly during sentence pauses and are usually uttered in a different pitch and tone from the ongoing conversation. They typically consist of short four-letter words and may be a ploy to attract attention. This, however, is not typical of all cases, as Ganos et al. also reported of patients who uttered longer compound words. According to him, corporolalia is described as the occurrence of obscene and socially inappropriate vocalisation without intent. This description is also

applicable to Gilles de la Tourette's syndrome, and functioning patients usually have a poor quality of life with some form of tic severity inhibiting their movement.

Pain Adapter

In their article, Jay and Janschewitz (2012) say that swear words can be used to emotionally arouse stimuli, and therefore they are suitable tools to study the effect of emotion on mental processes. The swearing process tends to lend itself to a positive effect also. Jay and Janschewitz also state that positive outcomes of swearing include joking, storytelling, a means to adapt, a tool for stress-busting and as an aggression substitute. It would seem that swearing has a cathartic role to play in pain management. As Stephen et al. (2009) states in his University of Keele study, pain tolerance and heart rate increase and perceived pain decrease with swearing. Stevens (2020) researched somatosensory systems and pain, in particular, whether swearing affects pain tolerance. Here the participant was tested on the ability to endure immersing their hand in ice water. Pain perception and heart rate were monitored. The method outlined participants repeating a swear word or a neutral word. The findings show that uttering a swear word in pain increased pain tolerance and heart rate and decreased the alleged pain compared to uttering a neutral word. Surprisingly, this was found mainly in female participants but not so much in male participants.

The health article titled 'The 4 Occasions It's Okay to Curse' which was published in Feb 2017 denotes occasions when swearing is considered acceptable. According to the writer, when in pain, swearing can increase pain tolerance. When angry and swearing is not directed at someone; it is healing or cathartic. When feeling helpless, swearing gives a sense of control and helps take corrective action. When on hold on the telephone and when frustrated with the automated voice response, it makes one feel more in control. Stevens (2015) quotes Jay and Jay (2015) who state that there is an additional reason to

swear. It is a sign of verbal fluency and intelligence because it uses both the left and right hemispheres of the brain and may help stroke victims relearn their capacity for language. Jay (2009) states that swearing is like using the horn in your car to signify a number of emotions. We make choices of swear words depending on the situation we are in, how we relate to that situation and who the participants of those situations are. In mixed company and work settings, we tend to use less intensive terms but in a situation that is comfortable, such as same-sex conversations or with a partner we know, more offensive swear words are used.

Grohol (2018) elaborates that this hypoalgesic effect is more evident when a flight or fight response is expected, and the relationship between the fear of pain and its perception is nullified. This seems to be tied into earlier research done by Keene University, as stated above, where respondents were given a test where they had to plunge their hands into ice water. They were then observed for pain perception and heart rate with participants repeating a given swear word versus a control group repeating a neutral word. Here too, the same observations were made. That is, the idea of pain decreases with swearing as it is compared inversely to the tolerance of pain. This in turn, highlights the idea that swearing can now be seen in a more sobering light, that is, as an aid to manage stress, anger management and as a useful tool in social and medical psychological fields. If developed in the proper manner, this can be an important instrument in the future.

Speech areas are generally thought to be located in the brain's left hemisphere. Fridriksson et al. (2014) defines the broca area or convolution of brocas, the part of the brain that contains neurons or speech. This is located in the left frontal hemisphere and plays an important role in speech articulation. Damage to this area can cause aphasia, where the speaker can only speak by deliberate telegraphic speech. Van Lancker and Cummings (1999) explain that there are several neurological disorders that increase the

use of swear words. These are severe aphasia, left adult hemispherectomy, and Gilles de la Tourette syndrome (GTS). These language behaviours, together with certain variables, provide the neurobiological basis for certain types of swearing behaviour. This study also explains GTS, where patients with coprolalia showed the highest frequency of expletives as well as other motor tics. However, Van Lancker and Cummings (1999) demonstrate that swearing occupies the right hemisphere in their study. To further elaborate, Jay (2009) states that if swear words are being used with intent and purpose, then the left hemisphere is also engaged. He also states that impulsive, automatic swearing comes from the limbic activity from the basal ganglia of the human brain. If the process is in any way impaired, a disorder called coprolalia results, where the speaker is unable to control the flow of swear words uttered. Jay and Janschewitz (2008) corroborate that neurobiology is related to language nuances. The amygdala region is found to be involved in the initial processing of taboo words and can be prone to damage depending on the frequency of swearing and the different cognitive processes involved.

2.4 Context of swearing

Impolite speech cannot be removed from the context of social discourse. Fägersten, (2012) states that this view of negativity does not allow a holistic observation or understanding of the subtleties of sociolinguistic discourse in its entirety

Swear words have always been known to exist in some form or other because words and phrases are limitless, and so are the methods to put them together. Any word said out of context or is ambiguous can be regarded as taboo. This is the reason why people who hold high office and those who hold authority have scriptwriters in order to wean out all statements and words that may discredit their image. However, freedom of expression is allowed in social media. Upon hearing impolite words, the listener has to analyse the variables present when the words were spoken in order to find the meaning

behind the words. Social norms are also relevant in this aspect as the culture of a nation can change the meanings attributed to certain words. Jay and Jay (2015) debunked the assumption that taboo words are used only because the speaker does not have enough vocabulary to express themselves. In their study, they found that taboo fluency correlated with letter words and animal names; therefore, as fluency improved, so did the ability to say swear words.

Dimbleby and Burton's (2007) Group Communication Theory explains the term context as communication happening in some sort of surroundings. Examples are physical contexts such as university grounds or office buildings and the social context which relates to the people involved in a situation and an occasion for which it is happening, for example, a family meal or a group of friends. The third context referred to is the cultural context which relates to a set of circumstances and beliefs which can influence how we talk. An example of the cultural context in Malaysia would be a church mass or a Deepavali gathering. This theory also elaborates on purpose and needs as two factors that are basic to communication, as communication cues differ depending on the audience present. For example, a student does not talk to his teacher in the same way as he talks to his peers.

Malaysian context

The appropriateness of swearing is often questioned, and this study investigates the Malaysian perspective relevant to this notion. As citizens of a multiracial country, Malaysians are in a unique position to learn and understand swear words in more than one language. Though swear words are among the first to be learned by speakers of a second language and most Malaysians are bilingual, they do not feature prominently in Malaysian daily life due to cultural mores. Jay (2009) states that it is interesting to note that swearing crosses all socio-economic statuses, age ranges, and levels of education.

This allows the speaker to state something with a taboo innuendo but to circumvent any fallout that may occur if the speech were more direct.

In the Malaysian context, euphemism is denoted by the Malay word *berkias*. Some attitudes are more prevalent in Asian cultures, and one of them is the culture of *berkias*. The culture of *berkias* speaks out to most Malaysians as a basic necessity in their daily communication. It is prevalent among all groups of citizens and is ingrained from childhood. Azman et al. (2020) states that being indirect is an essential part of Malaysian culture. This is aimed at making the other person comfortable and not losing face. Our thoughts are not spoken or written directly, rather they are couched in euphemisms and polite terms so that the listener can move on to the next part of the conversation with dignity. He, in turn, affords the speaker the same courtesy and so the conversation moves from one turn of politeness to another.

The cultural and linguistic mix in university life gives us an interesting insight into Malaysian society. University society represents a mini-Malaysia where the various races, cultures and languages come together to live as a community. This is more so in a Malaysian setting where the culture and language converge to provide a unique blend of the social spectrum. Home to three major languages and many more linguistic variants, Malaysia affords a window into the richness of Asian multifaceted social fabric. This microcosm is symbolic of the social discourse seen in the world outside university gates. University life is rife with swear words. Here, bonding and camaraderie is cemented by casual conversation, usually interspersed with colourful language. Granhemat and Abdullah (2017) state that Malaysia has a multicultural and multilingual social life, which depends on the socio-cultural history of Malaysian civil society, thereby indirectly influencing choice and usage of swear words. This study also found that ethnic identity also influenced the language choices of communities in Malaysia. Kita (2009) gives

another perspective on culture and gestures. He states that speaking and gesturing are closely related as speech is undeniably universal in all cultures. Closer to home, Malaysian culture frowns on pointing at a person with the forefinger. This is typically done with the index finger pointing forward. The palm is pointing downward and is considered rude because it constitutes a direct action that can be construed as aggressive.

Fernandez (2008) states that Indians place importance on preserving the family name and thus are guarded against misbehaving or engaging in any wrong activities that will lower and embarrass the family name. It is common for Indian parents to admonish their children against wrongdoing by saying, "how am I going to face people?" This contributes to the importance of how a single individual can diminish the prestige and stature of his immediate family and also his community at large. However, that is not the case with the respondents that he studied. In his study, he acknowledges that their parent's generation did not enjoy the freedom allowed to the respondents (by their parents). This freedom has been allowed to cater to the changing environment as Indian society and culture adapt to the ongoing developments in society. Thus, Fernandez states that swearing has become habitual among Indian males and occurs as spontaneous speech. Its meaning is purposeful and goal-directed. As these words are uttered in a close circle of friends without external factors such as judgmental perspective or preconceived opinions from others. This type of interaction in a relaxed atmosphere helps maintain social relations and ensures a continuous social discourse consisting of personal information at informal levels. This may be so because humans communicate to feel secure and, among other things, to have a good opinion of themselves where they feel wanted and valued by other people. This is corroborated by Labov (1972), who states speech communities are a loose structure that can be made up by participants who demonstrate a set of shared societal behaviour, which correlates with class positions of the societal structure.

Although polite speech is traditionally the Malaysian way of life, we see that is not the case in this study. This opinion was highlighted by Azman et al. (2020), quoting an article about the ranking of Least Courteous Cities appraisal conducted by Reader's Digest (The Star 2012) which shed some light on how this change is happening in Asia, now deemed the most consistently rude area. This survey in rudeness and communication showed that Malaysia, unfortunately, has garnered the 33rd position out of 35 participating countries. Needless to say, this finding does not show Malaysia in a good light. Horan (2013) points out that an important part of language repertoire is cursing and swearing, which are considered manifestations of impolite speech. She opines that these should be incorporated into the literature of academia. However, Byrne (2019) states that swearing may be a sign of distress because it is not necessarily about semantics. Instead, it may herald a different emotional condition. The swearer themselves may not be able to assess their own emotional state and may be unable to articulate in the proper channels as social pressures and expectations may prompt unfiltered responses.

Crystal (1987) states that we use language to communicate our ideas to convey information about ourselves, others, and circumstances and also to exchange facts and opinions. According to him, the most common use of language is as a stress-busting tool whereby we get rid of our nervous energy. This represents the emotive function of language and can be used when we are alone or in the company. Specifically, profanity is a red flag in this context. Other emotive utterances can be positive such as reactions to awe, beauty, fear, and affection. These may be conventional words or phrases but often are uttered as interjections such as 'WOW', 'tsk', or 'Ouch'. The writer's feelings are conveyed on many levels as language is one of the devices of grammar and vocabulary. It both helps to maintain an amicable relationship between speaker and listener and is also a channel to avoid negative situations. Some statements are commonplace and stereotyped such as verbal exchanges about the weather. Others require some thought or

explanation in order to convey and maintain rapport among listener and speaker. (Holmes, 2006).

Holmes (2006) also states that in the language world, the term domain denotes speech communities that organise and define social life. These include friendship, family, education, religion, and employment. Each of these domains has specific elements as the addressee, setting, topic and influencing choices of speech. David et al. (2016) denotes that there are a number of domains such as home, education domain, workplace, friendship, kindergarten, and emails. Cursing in social networks is quite prolific because speakers of swear words assume that emotions can be freely expressed as their identity is concealed due to anonymity on the internet. Goffman (1978) states that strong emotions precede angry swearing. This may be a response cry, adapted to communicate a situation the speaker is confronting that invokes deep emotions and strongly affects the speaker. This can be seen most frequently in the sports arena. As swearing becomes firmly centered in our daily life, one of the main areas where it is revealed is the sports arena, either on the field or during commentary and communication between players. Rainey and Granito (2010) researched a study based on athletes and swearing. Their findings show that a large number of sportsmen admit to the regular usage of swear words. Montagu (2001) gives the physiological basis of swearing as the reestablishment of the equilibrium in a person's mental state. He says that weeping, laughing, and swearing all function as relief valves for sudden energy that requires a proper channel of expression. This depends mainly on the attitude we bear towards the situations that require our responses.

The acronym "LFG" has been circulating in the sports world for several years and has crossed over into general use. This now has been accepted in mainstream discourse as 'let's fucking go.' (<https://stronglang.wordpress.com>) As sports commentators include

such words in their commentary, they are unknowingly endorsing the casual usage of swear words to their audiences. These words are then bandied back and forth as proper sporting terms in normal conversations of their viewers. This is a small window of opportunity to observe how such words can make the crossover from profane to casual discourse. Of course, there is a direct negative of this phenomenon, where swearing at the wrong time and place can cost dearly.

Following this sports analogy is another instance where a highly credible sportsman may have lost his edge due to swearing. In an interview, (Los Angeles Times, 2017) author Twenge says that swearing is caused by individualism in a society that is increasing and emphasising the 'self' more than societal rules. An example is Australian tennis player, Nick Kyrgios, being thrown out of the Indian Wells Masters after repeatedly using 'fuck' even after repeated warnings from the umpire. Kyrgios is now seen to be losing his credibility as a serious player after frequent emotional outbursts. Another example of swearing in sporting circles demonstrates the ability to communicate emotions like joy and surprise. This was obvious in the reaction of British Olympian athlete Briony Shaw when he unexpectedly won a bronze medal in the 2008 Olympics and spontaneously expressed on live television, "I am so fucking happy!" (Piercarlo Valdesolo, 2016)

2.5 Summary

This chapter elaborates on previous studies relevant to language and socio-economic aspects of swear words. The objective of this chapter was to highlight the different elements of curse words used by students. An overview of prominent studies on language and emotional impact was also examined to provide a comprehensive review of linguistic scope in this topic of focus.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design, conceptual framework, theoretical framework, data collection, research instruments, pilot study and data analysis. The framework and methodology of this study provide a concise platform towards a better understanding of swear words among university students and how students use swear words to accustom themselves to a new environment. Nine sections of the research plan such as title, field, objective, model, methodology, data instruments, research sample, data analysis, findings and discussions are categorised. Articles of the relevant field were examined for similarities with this research topic in order to provide a comprehensive picture of theories, framework, findings and limitations. From the review of other articles, suitable objectives, theory and methodology were identified.

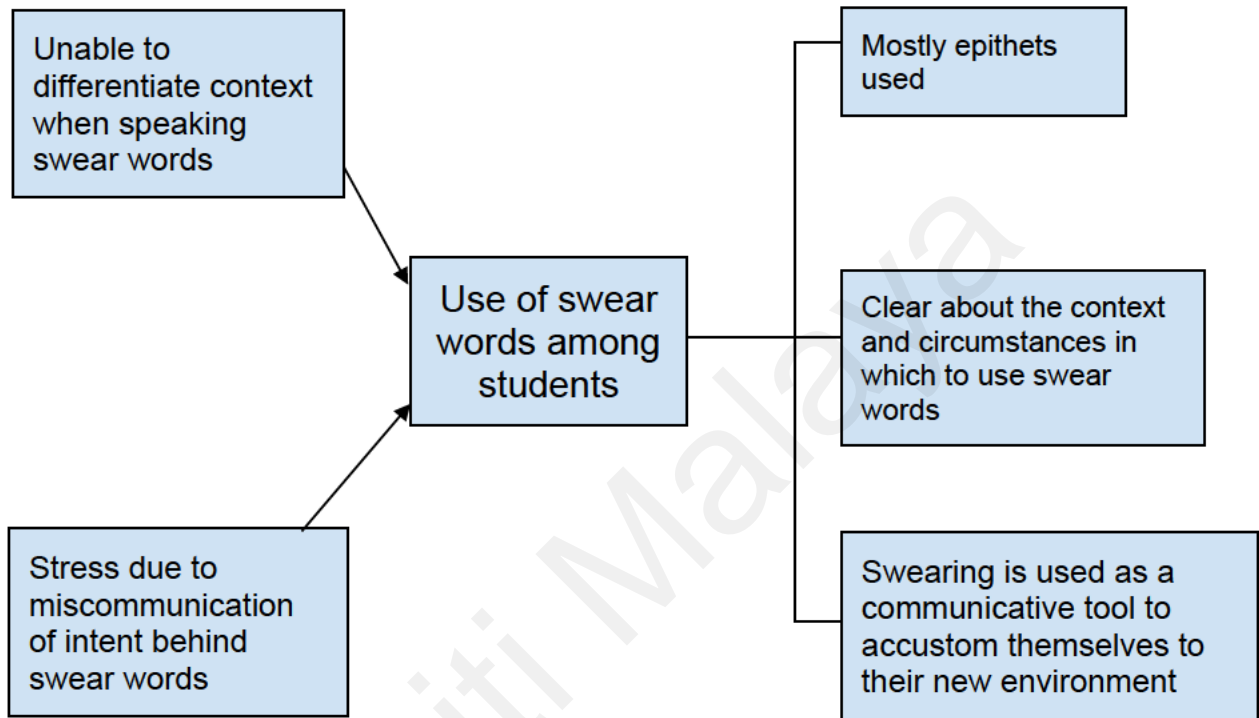
Questions for the questionnaire and semi structured (telephone) interview were formulated relevant to the research questions and validated using google forms. Data collection was then subdivided into four categories, identification of sample and size, the design of the web questionnaire, the administration of the questionnaire, and the conduction and transcription of the interviews.

Redman and Mory (1933) state that research embraces a search for knowledge in a systematic and scientific way. Research studies are commonly associated with a theory that brings advantages for the evolution of a particular discipline. Through research, one can find answers to the unknown areas, filling gaps in knowledge and changing the way an individual thinks. Research papers have developed over the last decade, and it helps to relate to the researchers' focus. (Haruna et al., 2017). Hence, when research is conducted with a theoretical framework and methodology, it will be valued.

3.1 Research design

Figure 3.1

Research design



3.2 Theoretical Framework

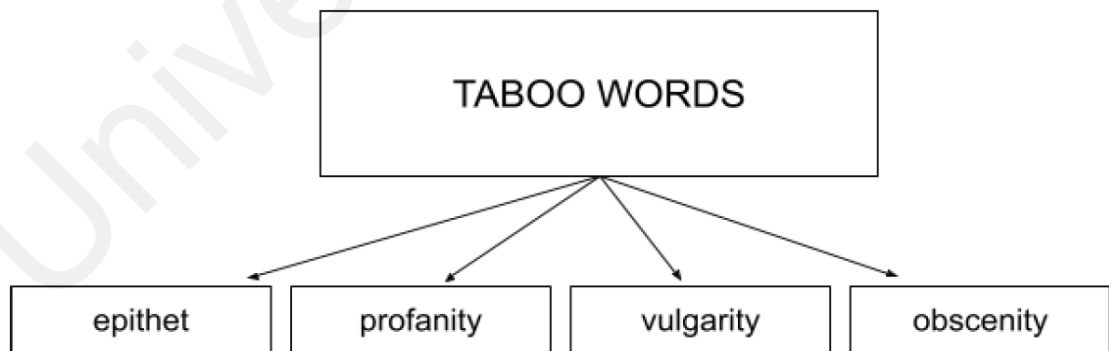
Adom et al. (2018) defines a theoretical framework as a path of research construct that assists in making research findings more meaningful and ensuring generalisability. As such, this research utilises the theory of Battistella's (2007) categories of swear words in order to categorise the list of swear words collected from the respondents. Battistella describes swear words as offensive or taboo language and categorises taboo words as epithets, profanity, vulgarity and obscenity. Although the term 'taboo language' is used in this theory, Battistella's explanation includes all categories that are relevant to the swear words researched in the present study. This study will look at the categories of swear words reported to be frequently used by the participants of this study (Research

Question 1) as well as which category is used as a tool to assimilate into new environments. (Research Question 2)

Figure 3.2 below shows the categories of taboo words used in Battistella's research. According to Battistella (2007), the epithet category relates to swear words that are mild and expresses a quality or characteristic. Profanity refers to cursing relating to matters of religion. Obscenity and vulgarity are related and refer to sex differentiating anatomy and excretory functions. The relationship between these two categories only differs in intensity. These categories look at the etymological background of a swear word and delegate a category for that word based on its denotational meaning. Examples of Battistella's categories for epithets are 'bitch', 'fag' and 'retard'. Profanity is 'goddamn', 'hell' and 'Jesus Christ'. For 'Obscenity' and 'Vulgarity', examples given are 'fuck', 'shit' and 'bollocks'.

Figure 3.2

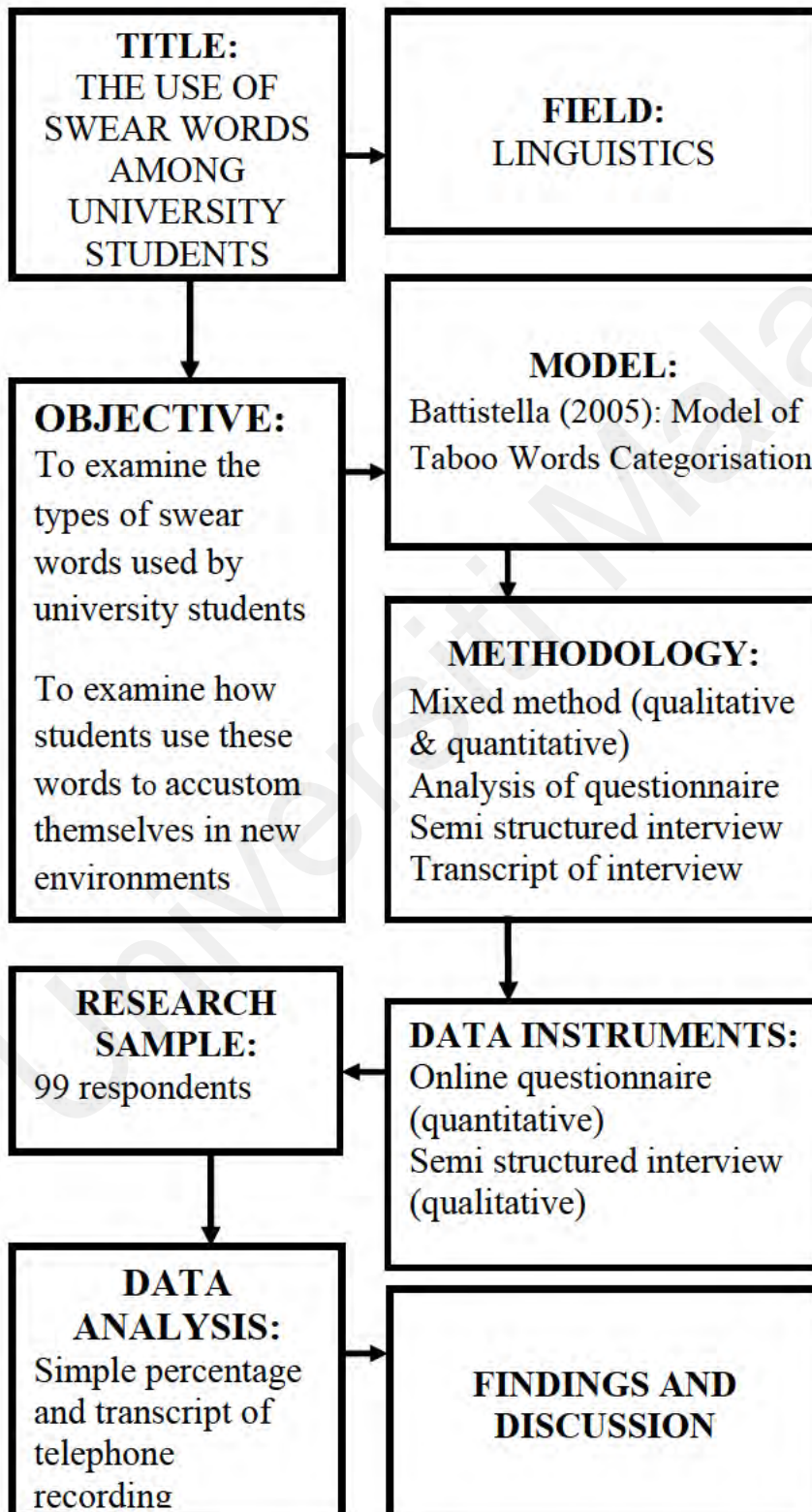
Battistella's Model of Taboo Words Categorisation (2007)



3.3 Research Plan

Figure 3.3

Research Plan



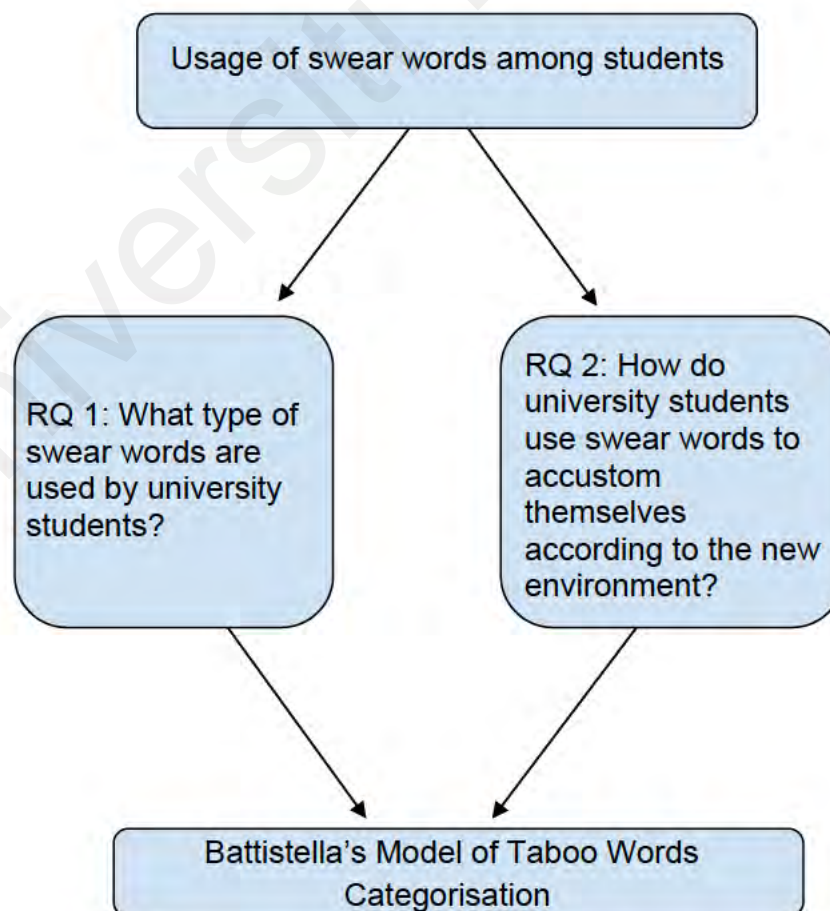
In order to simplify the research design, the following research plan was explored. This design is tabled in 2 parts, namely data collection and data analysis. These divisions were further subdivided into stages, denoting the progression of the collection process and analysis process. Further, the methodology used in this study is highlighted with the profile of participants and the types of instruments used to collect data. This research is based on the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 3.4

3.4 Conceptual Framework

In order to simplify the research design, the following framework has been conceptualised.

Figure 3.4

Conceptual Framework



Respondents

The participants involved in this study were 99 students from a public university. Respondents belonged to Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnic groups as well as the Malacca Portuguese and Dayak communities. These participants were selected randomly utilising various faculty Whatsapp group platforms (random sampling). This was done in order to procure an unbiased representation of the target population. This method was used because it is simple and cost-efficient during the Covid-19 pandemic. From this number, all participants responded to the online questionnaire, and 11 participants also volunteered for the semi structured interviews (purposive sampling). All respondents were informed of the ethical considerations, and their consent was obtained before the interviews proceeded. Of these respondents, six were male, and the remaining respondents were all female. Apart from this, other questionnaires from studies in this field were reviewed and adapted for this purpose. The respondents were asked to spare 15 minutes of their time and were explained the due process of ethical considerations and guidelines. This online questionnaire was emailed to student Whatsapp groups in order to reach a wider number of participants. The time frame to disseminate and collect the answers from the questionnaire took two months.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection for this research was subdivided into four categories which were identification of sample and size, the design of the web questionnaire, the administration of the questionnaire, and lastly the conduction of the semi structured (telephone) interviews.

The next stage was data analysis which consisted of sorting and readapting questions from Tian's (2014) and Paramasivam & Baudin (2015) questionnaires. These consisted of questions that included the profile of respondents, languages spoken and usage of swear

words in different languages. Step three consisted of collection of data and analysing of this data using a qualitative approach through further audio recording and transcription of the recordings (interviews).

Research instrument

Online questionnaires and interviews were the two instruments used to collect data for this study. The online questionnaire was used to provide data in a quantitative form for the first objective of categorising the swear words used by university students. Further, the semi structured (telephone) interviews provided qualitative data that assisted in determining objective 2 (how students use swear words to accustom themselves according to the new environment). A pilot study was undertaken to ensure that the above data collection instruments were validated and credible. At this stage also, the researcher identified the population and sample to be studied.

a. Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire was adapted from Tian's (2014) and Paramasivam & Baudin (2015)'s studies. The online questionnaire consisted of 3 parts.

Part I related to the demographic details of respondents and was used to obtain a clear picture of the respondent. This included particulars such as gender, age, education level, ethnic group, languages known and dominant language of the respondent.

Part II related to the usage of swear words with questions such as the type of swear words used in the English and Malay languages spoken by respondents.

Part III related to questions on how students use swear words to accustom themselves in a new environment. These included onset of swearing, environment and source of learning swear words, the viewpoint of swearing, the effect of swear words in the respondent's lives, whether swearing affected the respondents' relationships with

others, the usage of euphemisms to avoid using swear words and the reasons behind avoiding usage of swear words. This provided an insight into the respondent's views about swearing. This viewpoint assisted in a better understanding of why the respondent used swear words or did not want to use them. The time frame to disseminate and collect the answers from the questionnaire took two months.

Roopa and Rani (2012) state that questionnaires are an inexpensive method used in contexts where the literacy rates are high, and participants are responsive. The above questions were formulated from the experience derived by the pilot study undertaken for this research. Apart from this, other questionnaires from studies in this field were reviewed and adapted for this purpose. These represented 99 respondents of the online questionnaire who further volunteered for the telephone interviews. The time frame taken for this questionnaire took three weeks. The 12 questions were developed and adapted from the online questionnaire, specifically focusing on unclear responses. By treating the adapted questions as a discussion, the researcher gained a clear picture of the perception of individual respondents towards swear words and the types used by them. This resulted in a meaningful discussion and assisted in validating each response. From these interviews, more quality responses were obtained related to the specific objectives of this research. The adapted questions on types of swear words and the perception towards swear words proved effective in capturing sensitive feedback in the topic of swear words.

Dewaele (2004) states that in order to get a detailed picture of multilinguals' perceptions and speech, Likert scale responses and qualitative data through open questions are invaluable. Both Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002) and Wierzbicka (2005) also state that quantitative methods can be aided by open questions in the online questionnaire. Dornyei (2003) further states that usage of Likert scales can balance out the open-ended questions in the online questionnaire, especially being advantageous in contributing

towards baseline data. Joshi et. al (2015) states that the Likert scale was devised in order to measure responses credited to feelings and attitude in a structured and scientifically accepted manner. This comprises a set of statements predetermined by the researcher, which the respondent gives responses to. Hence, the Likert scale was the best instrument to be used to quantify abstract concepts such as intensity and perception of words to the listener in order to provide structured values that could be analysed in a scientific manner.

This study used a 5point symmetrical scale with scores ranging from 'strongly disagree' (value 1) to 'strongly agree' (value 5). This scale enables all the combinations of feelings towards the issue to be recorded specifically. The value 3 denoted neutrality in order to provide a neutral choice for the respondent.

b. Semi structured interviews

These interviews were semi structured and each respondent was asked between 8 to 12 questions related to the type of swear words used by them or the reason for not using swear words. Further, they were also asked to speak about their views on swear words, whether spoken by them or by others. These interviews were paced out for the duration of three weeks with each session taking 15 - 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded via a recording application on a Samsung Galaxy A5 smartphone. The second step in this interview stage was transcribing the data into a document for easier data retrieval.

3.6 Pilot Study

This pilot study provided the impetus for a more comprehensive scaffolding and a better understanding of the processes of gathering data and analysing that data. This study was undertaken to determine the feasibility of this research and test if the data instruments used were best suited for this study. It also helped to identify and refine the questions needed for the questionnaire and telephone interview. In the pilot study, data

from a sample of 66 respondents were compiled. The sample used for this pilot study was selected to reflect the participants of the full study and to highlight any shortcomings that may occur when the full study is conducted. This pilot study was also conducted to determine the validity of the questionnaire and interview questions. It must be noted that the 66 respondents from the pilot study were studied in 2019 and consisted only of the undergraduate target group. This group of respondents do not overlap with the respondents of the current study. The experience gained from this pilot study has proven invaluable as a baseline in constructing this research. For easy perusal, the structure of both the pilot study and this current study are indicated in Table 3.1

Table 3.1

Comparisons of Pilot Study and this research

	Pilot Study	Research
Title	THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF SWEAR WORDS ON MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATES	THE USE OF SWEAR WORDS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
Online questions	Not comprehensive enough	Adequate for this study
Face to face interviews	Physical	Telephone
Respondents	66	99
Focus	Emotional impact and Demographic factors	Category of swear words How students use swear words to accustom themselves in a new environment
Target population	Undergraduates	Undergraduates & Postgraduates
Language	Multilingual	Malay and English

From the pilot study, it was found that the emotional impact could not be measured accurately from the linguistics perspective as these required measurements of

a medical nature. This can be supported by a statement from Mauss and Robinson (2009), who state that there is no concrete method to collect measurement on a person's emotional state, and this proves to be the most vexing problem in affective science. The newly proposed research then changed its focus to the usage by university students regarding swear words categories and how students use swear words to accustom themselves to a new environment.

Online questionnaires were also employed as one of the methods in this pilot study. It was found that the questions in the questionnaires of the pilot study did not contribute much new information; therefore, the questions have been improvised to suit the new focus of the study. The questions regarding emotional impact were removed and the new questions focused on categories of swear words and assimilation of students to their new environment by using these swear words.

Apart from that, a semi-structured face-to-face interview was also used, which suited the requirements of the pilot study. However, due to pandemic restrictions, only semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with more questions added in order to obtain in-depth data from the respondents. However, the pilot study and this research share similarities in certain respects, such as investigating the relationship between emotions and language of swear words used but differ on the third focus, namely that of gender variance being included. For the earlier project, this gender aspect of impolite speech added an interesting perspective to the project as a majority of respondents were female. This addition did give a different perspective on intensity and frequency of swear words used. However, this study investigates both genders in an attempt to gain a clearer perspective of the research topic and in order to provide an overall view of the university students.

This pilot study focused on the emotional impact of swear words on undergraduates. While the overall results are similar, it is important to note that the target population comprises only a portion of students from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (FLL). At the same time, the current research study encompasses all levels of students from FLL. Thus, a larger population could be studied for a more comprehensive result. Also, germane to this discussion is that the pilot study necessitated an applicable measurement from a multilingual perspective. Of note is that the pilot study investigated all four main Malaysian languages, namely Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil, while the current study focuses on only two core languages, which is English and Malay. The Malay language is the national language, and the English language is most widely used, notably via social media. As such, all the respondents are conversant in both languages.

3.7 Data analysis

The data collected from online questionnaires and semi structured were then analysed using simple percentages. Further, data derived from the transcription of the interview recordings were analysed to corroborate the findings of the questionnaire. Utilising these two systems in a structured way has been instrumental in providing primary data for this study.

The online questionnaire data were analysed using a quantitative approach. The data enables the categorization of swear words according to the four categories in two languages and by usage. The data derived from semi structured interviews further supports and substantiates the opinion of the respondents towards the swear words.

3.8 Ethics

The three codes of research ethics: honesty, objectivity and integrity were maintained in collecting and analysing this data. Informed active consent was obtained

by explaining all relevant information to participants. Contact details of the researcher were provided in case of queries and further doubts on the material given. Privacy of personal data was ensured as only the researcher and supervisors had access to the materials gathered. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw at any time in case of doubt or insecurity about this project.

3.9 Summary

This chapter records the steps taken in collecting and analysing data needed for this study. The structure is divided into research design, conceptual framework, theoretical framework and data collection and analysis. The researcher also describes the methods of data transcription and the research instruments. The conceptual framework was shown in this chapter to give a clear impression of the procedure for this study. As such, it was determined that the framework and methodology of this study provide a concise platform towards a better understanding of swear word usage among university students.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This study aims to identify the types of swear words used by university students and examine how students use these words to accustom themselves to a new environment. The first section of this chapter deals with the demographics of respondents' backgrounds to provide a clearer picture of the findings. The following section discusses the findings on the categories of swear words that respondents used based on Battistella's (2007) framework. The next section reveals the findings on how students use these words to accustom themselves to a new environment.

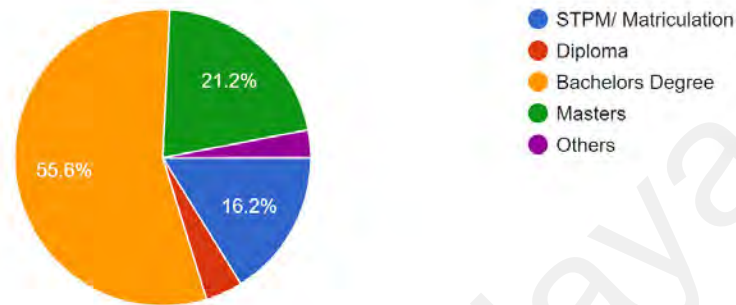
Respondents' Background

76.6% of respondents in this study were female, while only 19.2% were male. The percentage of respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender was 4% which accounted for 4 individuals. Most of the participants are in the 20 to 27 age group, with the largest group being 24 years of age while the smallest group, 45 years of age. 43.4% of participants who responded are from the Malay community, followed by 53.3% Indians and 17.2% Chinese. East Malaysian of Dusun and Kadazan origin are 1% each while 4% identified themselves as foreigners. Official statistics show that out of 30 million citizens, the major ethnic groups' composition is as follows: Malays 69.8%, Chinese 22.4%, Indians 6.8% and others 1% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). The racial composition of respondents mirrors the percentage of the national, ethnic composition only for the largest (Malay) community. However, the second largest group consists of Indians, followed by the Chinese as a third major group. This is in contrast to the national statistics where the Chinese are the second largest ethnic group. The reason for this anomaly can be attributed to gathering respondents through WhatsApp groups. Due to

the pandemic situation, a percentage of students may not have the resources or time to participate in the questionnaire.

Figure 4.1

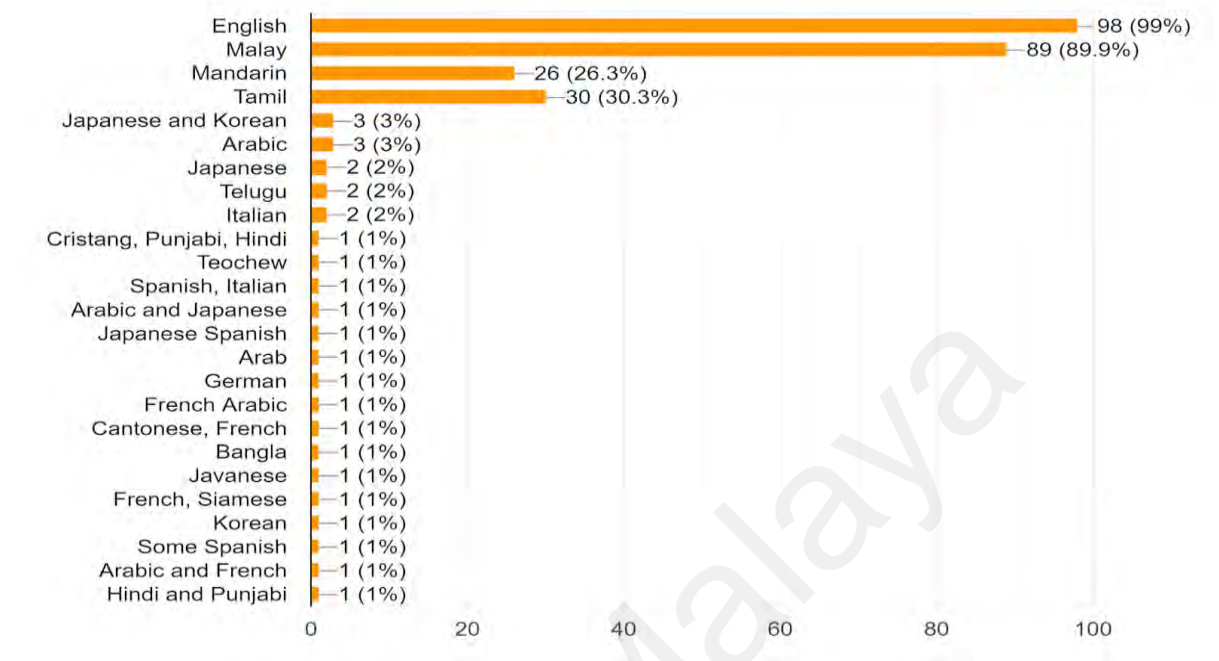
Respondents' education level



These figures represent the education level of the respondents. The largest group (55.6%) presented has a Bachelor's degree (pursuing master's degree) followed by 21.2% having a Master's degree (pursuing PhD). Other levels presented are STPM/Matriculation (16.2%), Diploma (4%) and Others (3%) (pursuing bachelor's degree). According to student statistics of University of Malaya, (2021), the student population stands at 20,425 as of January 2020. Of this, undergraduate students' number 14,291 and postgraduate students 8,134.

Figure 4.2

Language used among respondents

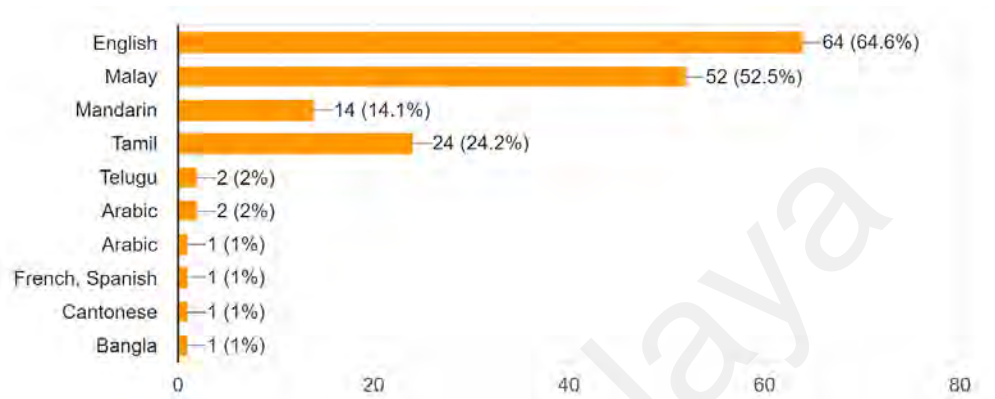


This data on language exposure and preference of respondents assists in establishing the background of language knowledge and rationalises the choice of languages selected for this research. The majority of respondents of the online questionnaire speak at least two of the four main languages. English usage by the respondents is 99%, while 89.9% speak Malay. Further, 26.3% speak Mandarin, and 30.3% speak Tamil. Respondents in this research will have undergone the Malaysian education process, with Malay being a compulsory language, and acquired more than one language by the time they become university students. As the languages frequently spoken in Malaysia are from the main language groups: Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil, the least number of languages acquired by a student will be two, Malay and one other language, while some may be proficient in four or more languages. The Malay language is the national language, and the English language is most widely used. Hence, it is no surprise that the results show a strong indication in favour of these two languages.

It must be emphasised that the English language is a 'media' language in Malaysia. The usage of English is largely in the field of social media, news, and information portals.

Figure 4.3

The dominant language used among respondents



It can be observed that the respondents of the online questionnaire state that English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil languages are their dominant languages. As the respondents are allowed to pick more than one language, it can be concluded that the values overlap, with 64.6% considering English to be their dominant language and 52.5% considering the Malay language to be their dominant language. Further, 14.1% state that Mandarin is their main language, with 24.2%, the Tamil language. Also, 1% Cantonese and 1% speak Teochew, which are dialects similar to Mandarin. Among the other dialects, 2% speak Punjabi, and 1% speak Bangla. Most of the respondents can claim to have some exposure to the English language either at home or through social media. A heightened knowledge of swear words in English is readily available in various levels of proficiency as the written word, and social media cater to different aptitude levels. Being the national language, Malay is equally widespread in Malaysian society.

4.1 Findings for categorisation of swear words

This section is based on findings related to categorisation of swear words.

Table 4.1

Categories of swear words based on the overall findings

Languages	Categories			
	Epithet	Vulgarity	Profanity	Obscenity
English	7	7	4	1
Malay	10	1	0	3
TOTAL	17	8	4	4

It must be noted that, according to this research's parameters, only the English and Malay languages are analysed for data. These results provide the rationale for the choice of languages to be researched in order to obtain more robust data. In order to fulfil the requirements of the first objective, this section describes the categories of swear words used by respondents. Swear words derived from the questionnaire data were categorised according to Battistella's (2007) Categories of Offensive Language and distributed according to the two main languages, namely English and Malay.

Table 4.1 provides data categorised according to English and Malay swear words found in this study. Overall, it must be noted that both languages studied have a similarity as the greatest number of swear words used belong to the epithet and vulgarity category. In the English language, there were 7 swear words under the epithet category, 7 for

vulgarity, 4 for profanity, and only 1 for obscenity. However, in the Malay language, epithet has 12 words, vulgarity has 1, profanity has 0, and obscenity has 5. From these values, it is observed that swear words used among students in the English language were most commonly epithets and vulgarity. In Malay, the highest values are for words in epithets and obscenity. The most frequent words used in Malay are '*bodoh*', '*babi*', '*sial*' and '*pukimak*' and for English 'shit', 'damn', 'fuck', and 'hell'.

According to Battistella (2007), epithets are words that relate to slurs, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, appearance, disabilities, and other characteristics. The epithet category relates to swear words that are mild and expresses a quality or characteristic. These are recognised as a coarse language that can cause a breach of peace and are not suitable for children and elders. Vulgarity relates to crude sexual anatomy and excretory functions, which are less severe in meaning. Profanity includes the coarse use of sacred, religious terms. Obscenity also refers to sexual and excretory terms. However, these are more severe in meaning as these swear words intend to hurt or humiliate the addressee. Interestingly the majority of swear words spoken by students in this research is derived from the epithet category and throws an early indication that students use swear words more as a fun tool to express individuality and cement relationships among peers.

Table 4.2*Frequency of swear words usage in English*

Epithet	%	Vulgarity	%	Profanity	%	Obscenity	%
bitch	45.4	shit	81.4	damn	71.1	cunt	1
mother fucker	28.9	fuck	60.8	hell	59.8		
scumbag	7.2	bull shit	47.4	holy crap	1		
pig	16.5	ass	33				
skank	1	dick	23.7				
slut	1	asshole	1				
idiot	1	bollocks	1				

The 11 most used swear words in English are listed in order of usage, with 'shit' used by 81.4% of respondents, 'damn' by 71.1%, 'fuck' by 60.8%, 'hell' by 59.8%, 'bullshit' by 47.4%, 'bitch' by 45.4%, 'ass' by 33%, 'motherfucker' by 28.9%, 'dick' by 23.7%, 'pig' by 16.5%, and 'scumbag' by 7.2%.

Some commonly used swear words with the value 1% are included as these are expressed and used by interview respondents. Other words given in this data are not analysed as they do not occur frequently, and some are not English. Nevertheless, several interesting perspectives on these categories can be derived from respondents who were interviewed. Respondent R42 states that there are many categories of swear words, such as animal and body parts. This shows a mild category, especially when used by children.

Respondent R24 states that " *From what I understand there are many categories of swear words. And people don't even realise some words are swear words. Swear words calling people animal names or identifying parts of the body. There are many categories. Many people are swearing without realising, like kids when they are fighting 'Oh, you're a dog, Oh, you're a pig' that's actually also a swear word but actually a mild category of swear words.*"

This concurs with Jay (2000) who states that taboo words allow us to reduce stress levels. Jay (2009) also states that there is a possibility that swear words are uttered spontaneously due to habitual epithets especially when the speaker is stressed.

Table 4.3

Frequency of swear words usage in Malay

Epithet	%	Vulgarity	%	Profanity	%	Obscenity	%
bodoh (stupid/ foolish)	81.1	pantat (vagina or butt)	11.1			pukimak (mother's vagina)	21.1
babi (pig)	67.8					butoh (penis)	10
sial (unlucky/ damnably)	48.9					burit (vagina)	2.2
celaka/cilaka (unlucky)	18.9						
haram jadah anak gampang (bastard)	7.8						
bongok (foolish)	3.3						
mangkuk (bowl/ stupid)	1.1						
siot (unlucky)	1.1						
kepala hotak (head brain/ stupid)	1.1						
pepek (vagina)	1.1						

Table 4.3 shows the Malay swear words that respondents used. The Malay speaking students favoured epithets with animal names such as '*babi*' being the most used. There are also slurs referring to intelligence such as '*bodoh*', words denoting maleficence such as '*celaka*' and '*sial*', and illegitimacy featuring among them. These words were most commonly used and are considered mild, while the vulgarity category featured only 1 word, profanity was 0, and obscenity was 3. The profanity value of (0) can be attributed to the Malay culture and Muslim religion which does not allow references to divinity. According to Allen (1988), the absence of material representations of both the natural and supernatural worlds is deeply ingrained in Islamic teachings, which is explicitly apparent in the architecture of mosques. Thus, the mihrab, an empty niche with no explicit primary iconography, became the apparent focus of mosque decoration.

However, in the obscenity category, there are 3 swear words. This is due to the inverse effect of their '*berkias*' culture, which nurtures diplomacy. Azman et al. (2020) states that politeness and being indirect in speech is a cultural characteristic of Malaysians. As the culture leans towards diplomacy, there may not be much middle ground for expression. This, in turn, contributes to severe swear words used to denote aggression so that the meaning is clear to both speaker and listener. An interesting element was brought up by respondent R67, who stated that she noticed that swear words are common animal words or family members in the Malay language. It is used as a replacement for bad words when the speaker is angry.

R67- "*But Malay, I notice that when they swear or get mad, it's animal words or they will use family members. 'Bapak engkau', 'mak engkau'. I don't know. It's a replacement for bad words but they are being mad about it.*"

It can be noted that in both languages, the animal term '*pig*' is used as a swear word. The Malay '*babi*' and the English '*pig*', may find common ground based on the

unclean state, appearance, and eating habits associated with pigs. This, then, can relate to the swear word referring to an unclean lifestyle. However, it must also be noted that *'babi'* is a resilient word that covers the full spectrum of meaning. It is a term of kinship when one person meets a close friend after a long time. Respondent R32 confirmed that *"Weii, sial babi kau! lama tak jumpa."* fits into this context. This translated as 'Hei, you pig! Long time no see!' to a close friend. Here, it is apparent that the epithet is spoken among friends who understand the context and circumstances of using this word. However, it can also have a severe meaning when hurled as a swear word with ill intentions towards another person. This is because the pig is regarded as forbidden (*haram*) by Islamic Law.

On the international arena, Olympic diving hopeful, Sarawakian Pandelega Rinong Pamg showed her frustration by allegedly mouthing the word *'babi'* when diving scores and individual placing were being broadcasted. Closer to home, this video clip has become viral, prompting many fans to become lip readers, with a sports journalist (Rozaidee, 2021) commenting, *'Can't get more Malaysian than this'*. Other words that are also resilient are *'sial'*, *'celaka'*, and *'haram jadah'* and can be used among friends as a sign of kinship but are actually intense in meaning when used with an intention to hurt. Respondent R67 says that in her Peranakan background, the word *'sial'* and *'celaka'* was just an exclamation. However, in an official context, these words could not be used.

R67 - *"Sial and celaka in Malaccan lingo doesn't have the same meaning. My father is Malaccan Baba. He said when he was in Malacca he used to use 'sial' and 'celaka' every day but when he went to work here, he learned that it is a serious word here. For us, it is more of an exclamation."*

In English, similar words are *'damn'*, which was once a serious blasphemy, *'shit'*, a scatology word denoting faeces, *'fuck'* a sexually explicit act, and *'bitch'* meaning a female dog especially applied to women. Once severe expletives, these terms are now

fluid, just like the Malay word '*babi*' and can take the meaning of both a severe swear word and also as a term of kinship and as a casual epithet.

R67 further corroborated by saying, "*Damn, darn, meaning damnation. Darn is a lower version of damn. A more subdued version of damn.*"

This respondent uses words like 'darn' because she understands that it is a severe word. In the Malay language, the same usage application occurs with words such as '*bongok*', '*mangkuk*', and '*kepala otak*' which carry the meaning of 'stupid' used to denote stupidity of a mild intensity. Of note is that the greatest number of swear words that are used belong to the epithet category and this is corroborated by the responses in this study.

4.2 Findings for assimilation using swear words

This section is based on RQ2 which demonstrates how university students use swear words to accustom themselves to a new environment.

According to Jay & Janschewitz (2008), the true etiquette of swearing still remains obscure and undiscovered. This may be partially due to the many different geographical, economic, social and linguistic factors that influence impolite speech. As different contexts have different implied rules on swearing, the onus is on the speaker to be situationally aware of the appropriateness of the setting. Understanding these nuances in multiethnic communication can provide much-needed insight into the Malaysian linguistics arena, thus furthering unity among the different communities. Understanding and perceiving the intent and context behind the usage of swear words can alleviate stress and minimise aggression among university students. Swearing can affect the relationship between the speaker and others in different contexts. When the context of swearing is among friends and office colleagues, the data shows that it is done as humour or in a casual environment. Fagersten (2012) states that swearing among friends is non-

disruptive conversational behaviour that results in no observable reactions but can be appreciated in a humorous context.

According to Paramasivam & Baudin (2015), respondents use profane jokes to cement group identity and to maintain a sense of community. However, Jay (2000) reiterates that this is confined to context, speaker-listener and setting in order to be appropriate.

Figure 4.4

Circumstances of swearing by respondents

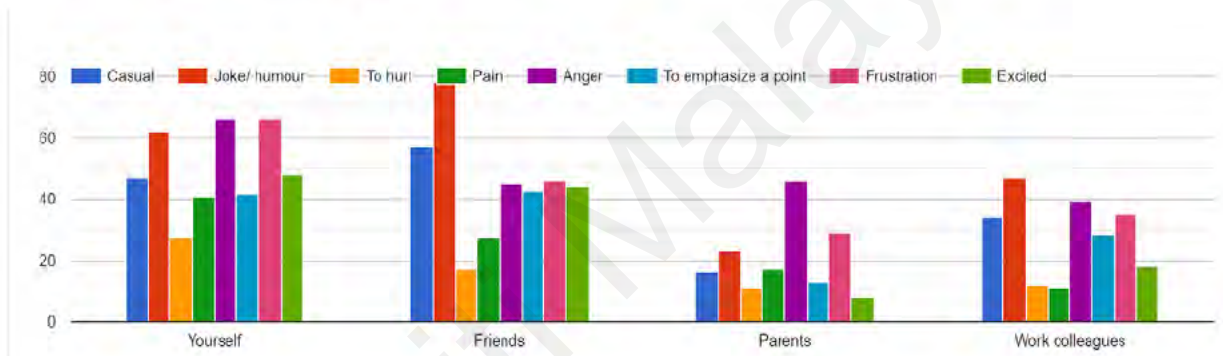


Figure 4.4 indicates data underlying circumstances for swearing. For example, 62 respondents state that they swear as a joke or in humorous circumstances, 47 in casual discourse, 66 in anger, and 66 in frustration. 78 respondents also state that their friends swear as a joke while 57 state that their friends swear in a casual way. 46 respondents believe that parents swear in anger, with 29 stating parents swear in frustration. However, 23 also state that their parents swear as a joke. Lastly, 47 respondents state that their work colleagues swear as humour, 34 state that that their work colleagues swear casually. 39 respondents state that their work colleagues swear in anger and 35 in frustration. The results show that swear words occur most often as jokes or in a humorous situation among friends and work colleagues and also when originated by the respondent. However, among parents the highest count is for swearing in anger which may be done involuntarily by elders or people in authority.

Giles (2008) Communication Accommodation Theory examines the changes made by the speaker-listener in order to be attuned to their partner's communication. This could include attempts to gain social approval, establishing identity and to promote efficacy of communication. This theory is relevant to this research as Malaysian multi-ethnic and multicultural platforms provide for the divergent clash. Students, from many communities' experience this in a microcosm where their varying cultures will 'clash'. In this scenario, a student may 'converge' to accommodate the overall view of the group, complying with peer pressure.

The following subtopics will be discussing the examples and extracts found from the respondents according to swearing by themselves, parents, friends and work colleagues.

Swearing by themselves

Respondent R42 states that she only swears when she is alone. If in company, she mutters under her breath only, but never audibly.

R42 - *'These are words I usually say under my breath, very quietly around my kids. It's only when I'm on my own, or when I'm driving. I swear to myself but not to anybody or not to anyone who can hear.'*

Respondent R42 further states that - *"I know my boys do swear. Both my sons are adults now and I know they do. I hear them saying it behind closed doors when they are talking with their friends like very, very strong swear words. But they don't do it in front of me. Maybe little things like 'hell' and 'damn' that may not be so strong. When they were younger, I prevent them from saying even 'stupid' but in their late teens and adults, I don't stop them because I feel they have to know themselves when to and when not to, in front of me and their father but if I completely shut them down, I will lose them. Being*

a little cool around my kids and letting it slide will ensure that they will still open up about most things."

R42 demonstrates that swear words are related to circumstances by stating that her sons swear behind closed doors but she does not reprimand them because she feels that they know which circumstances to say swear words. Also, they respect their parents by not swearing in front of them, so she lets it slide.

Rassin and Muris (2005) corroborate this by stating that swearing in these circumstances can be attributed to stress and frustration, finding that participants' stress level reduced after swearing. Figure 4.6 clearly demonstrates that swearing occurs across both multiple environments and different groups of people, all of which are familiar to the respondent. It must be noted, however, that no respondent has stated that they use swear words on strangers. This indicates that using swear words involves understanding the context and situation in which they can be used.

Swearing by parents

Respondent R 67 states - *'My parents use...when they are trying to emphasise something, when they are angry.'*

This respondent states that her parents use swear words only for emphasis when they are angry.

Paramasivam & Baudin (2015)'s findings also show that even after becoming parents, their study's participants still use swear words as a coping mechanism, especially to express strong negative emotions. Also, under circumstances where parents are swearing, it is often used in anger and frustration.

Swearing with friends

Respondent R75 states- *'They are my friends, so I know what they are ok with... Especially, if very close to them, among friends still, yes, because we know what we are actually trying to say. I swear depending on the context and depending on the group of friends I'm with.'*

This respondent is aware of the context when her friends swear. As close friends, her group can intuit what another person means, so swear words are spoken without misunderstanding. Nordquist (2018) states that speakers of the same or related languages can comprehend each other due to mutual intelligibility. When in company with friends, respondents say that they hear their friends use swear words in a casual manner, normally as humour or in jest. Kapoor (2014) states that a person's threshold for offensiveness will be lower when with friends, as when they will be using swear words casually. Baruch et al.'s (2017) findings also show that swearing helped to relieve stress, enrich communication and enhance socialisation. Paramasivam & Baudin (2015) investigated swearing amongst female teenagers in Malaysia. Their findings also showed that swearing is a tool to deal with daily life, as it lets off steam for negative feelings and displays solidarity with friends.

This corroborates with Dimberly and Burton (1998)'s Group Communication Theory. This theory elaborates on purpose and needs as two factors that are basic to communication. Another factor to take account of would be the audience, as communication cues are dependent on the audience's perception and reaction. Observing the above results, it is clear that a large percentage of respondents are desensitised by hearing swear words being spoken around them. The above findings show that swearing is used by the respondents as a tool to deal with daily life affairs. By themselves, they swear to release frustration. They also use swear words in positive circumstances mainly

when joking and storytelling with friends, and with work colleagues. This may be associated with feeling cool and awesome in their effort to display solidarity and to fit in with the group. However, respondents feel that parents use swear words specifically in anger and when they want to emphasise a point.

Swearing with work colleagues

Respondent R75 states - *"If you say something like swear words, whoever, who hears it knows that they are very angry and that the situation might have escalated. Swear words can then replace aggressive behaviour because the other party is aware."*

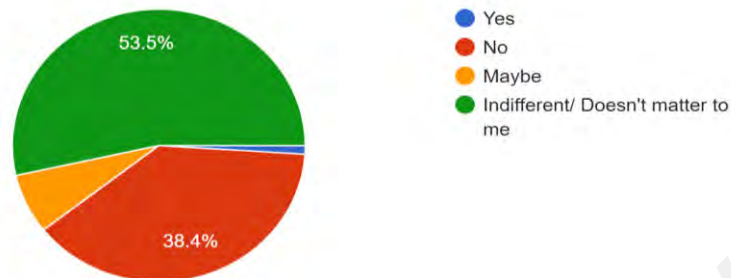
Respondent R75 states that, in office, if someone swears, others around understand that the speaker is angry. Swear words can then replace aggressive behaviour because the other party is aware.

Baruch et al. (2017)'s findings imply that although workplace swearing cannot be recommended, or perhaps not even tolerated, many employees have a natural need to swear, either as a stress release mechanism, to emphasise an issue, or to build rapport. In this study, respondents also use swear words in the workplace for humour, to be casual, in anger, and in frustration. Vingerhoets et al. (2013) also states that swearing may provide a sense of stress relief and can function as a replacement behaviour for physical aggression by its strong expressive power.

The acceptance of swearing by other people

Figure 4.5

Swearing by other people and the acceptance by the respondents



53.5% (53) respondents state that they are indifferent when people swear around them. 38.4% (38) have indicated that they do not like it when people swear around them. The remainder, 7.1% (7) have stated maybe and 1% (1) have stated they like it when people swear around them. The large percentage of 53.5% indicates that the majority of respondents have a casual perception about the usage of swear words and do not mind if other people use swear words in their company.

This viewpoint is corroborated by R67 who states:

"If people say to me, I don't get mad. I just think that people don't know how to express themselves other than using profanity"

R67 states that he does not mind other people using profanity because they are incapable of expressing their feelings in other ways. Similarly, R38 states that he is indifferent to swearing because it's like normal conversation and swear words don't have the power to hurt him.

R 38 states: *"I am indifferent, it doesn't matter if someone uses it in front of me. So it is like normal conversation and it doesn't have the power to hurt."*

The Effects of swearing on relationships

Figure 4.6

The effects of swearing on relationships of respondents

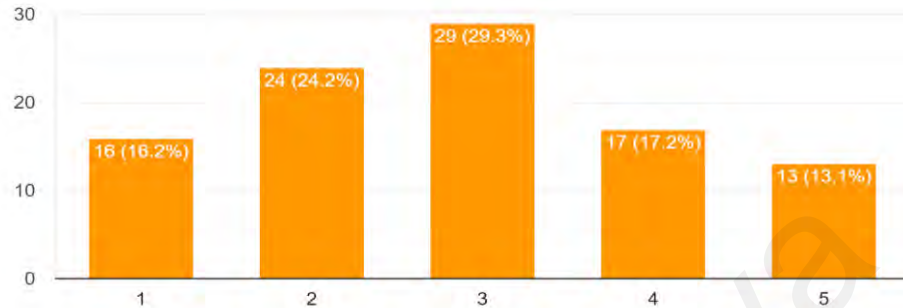


Figure 4.6 indicates the values that respondents have given relevant to the relationship between others and themselves in the context of swearing. It must be noted that this question uses Likert values which are 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree) in an ascending order. Significantly, the neutral value (3) indicates that a large number of respondents are unaffected by swear words. 17 respondents (17.2%) indicated that they agree that swearing affects the relationship between others and themselves. A further 13 respondents (13.1%) strongly agree that swearing has affected their relationships with others. This data indicates that swearing can affect relationships when the speaker is a parent and utters a swear word in anger or in the workplace where a colleague swearing gives a verbal cue to other workers. However, 29 respondents (29.3%) have indicated that swear words may or may not affect their relationships. A further 24 (24.2%) have indicated that they disagree while 16 (16.2%) have indicated swear words do not affect them at all. If these last 3 values are added, they indicate that the majority 69.7% of respondents view swear words as something that does not affect their relationships acutely.

These results are indicative of two salient points. A large percentage of respondents are not affected by swear words. Further, respondents interviewed on this question indicate that the context of swear word usage is necessary. This finding indicates that users understand that there is a time and place for swear word usage. It demonstrates that swear words are slowly becoming commonplace in students' daily conversations.

This sentiment was echoed by respondent R75 who stated that it helped in workplace situations also.

R75 - *"If you say something like swear words, whoever who hears it knows you are very angry and that the situation might have escalated. Swear words can then replace aggressive behaviour because the other party is aware."*

The respondent explains that hearing a swear word denotes that the speaker is very angry, and this swear word may then replace aggression because the other party is aware of the increased tension in the situation. As earlier stated, Vingerhoets et al. (2013) states that swearing has a communicative function; to warn others of the speaker's emotions. This sign of anger acts as an alarm signal.

Corroborating this finding that swear words affect relationships, R47 stated that *"Sometimes when my father gets angry, he will accidentally say something, like these swear words. Make me feel like OMG! The image of my father in my mind is going down."* This respondent says that people around him usually do not use swear words. However, his father accidentally uses swear words and this gives him a bad impression of his father.

The level of emotions when swearing

Figure 4.7

Emotions of respondents when they swear

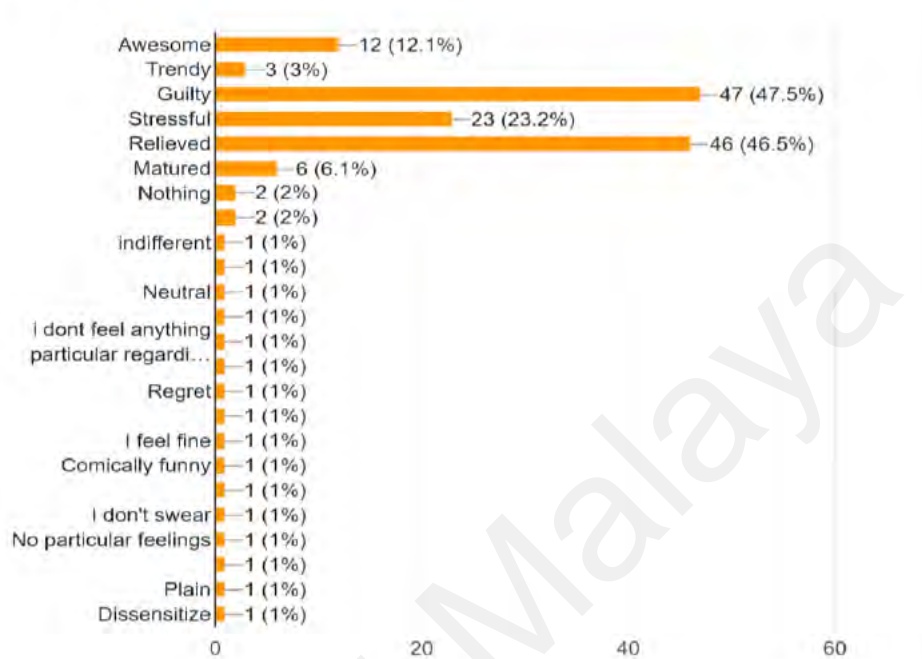


Figure 4.7 indicates values given by respondents related to how they feel when they swear. Surprisingly, 47.5% (49) have indicated they feel guilty, and an almost equal number of respondents, 46.6% (46), have indicated that they feel relieved. 23.2% (23) respondents stated that they feel stressed when they use swear words, while 12.1% (12) respondents stated that they feel awesome when using swear words. Here, respondents have given the highest values for the fact that it does not affect their relationship. However, in the area of emotions while swearing, respondents have expressed a balanced viewpoint. Almost half of the respondents indicated they feel guilty when uttering swear words. Notably another half, indicated positive feelings of relief and feeling awesome while saying swear words. This is similar to Azman et al. (2020)'s findings, which showed that the participants did not find swearing to be impolite and felt that it does not offend the listeners because they accepted swearing as a norm and purposeful in expressing emotion. Further, Vingerhoets et al. (2013) interestingly, explains that the tabooess of

swear words do not apply when used in comedic circumstances such as stand-up comedy. In this research, this context applies to students using comedy to fit into their social groups.

Respondents R42, R17 and R49 have corroborated these emotions felt when they hear swear words.

Respondents who are relieved

In Baruch et al.'s (2017) words, a cathartic effect is produced when swear words are used to relieve stress and to express strong emotions. This is demonstrated in R42's statement that she swears only to release frustration and thus does not feel guilty about it.

"I don't feel guilty when I swear because - Not really, because I never do it to intentionally harm anyone. I do it to release frustration and then I don't think about it."

Respondents who feel guilty

R17 - *"I think it's bad. 'Kurang enak didengar' (not polite to listen to). If it's a joke then it's ok but if it's too much (overdone) then I want to leave it."*, Hamzah (2018) states that the reluctance to admit to swear word usage openly may stem from tradition, culture, and personal ethics. Instead of plain speaking, the speaker may convey their irritation or anger by using a euphemism to express themselves.

Andersson and Hirsch's (1985) study also found that the participants used swear words to express their anger and acronyms were used to tone down the offensiveness of the swear words. Speakers of swear words use various strategies such as self-censoring (saying 'f-word' instead of 'fuck'), euphemism ('shoot' instead of 'shit') and innovative words ('mangkuk' which has the connotative meaning 'stupid'). This is also in line with the findings from Sukanob-Nicolaus's (2016) study where her participants too used self-censoring and euphemism and David et al.'s (2016) study where the participants

used innovative words. Due to a variety of reasons, some respondents do not use swear words. However, they admit that they use euphemisms, gestures, grawlixes, and emojis during social discourse, either face-to-face or online. During this analysis, it was discovered that respondents are not aware that the above means of communication are actually different forms of swearing. This finding was supported by information gathered during telephone interviews and provides new information to this study. Examples can be seen in Figure 4.8 which lists all the euphemisms observed in this study in words, abbreviations, grawlixes, and emoticons.

R17 - "...ok but if it's too much (overdone) then I want to leave it."

The above respondent R17 states that he feels swear words are not easy on the ears, but it is acceptable if it is spoken as a joke. If it is used to hurt or insult someone, he feels very uncomfortable. Another respondent, R67 says that there is no reason to swear at all. In any situation, the words spoken should be dignified.

R67: "This is what my father taught me. He said, anything you want to express, you don't need to use vulgar language. Can sound angry and classy. That's what my father says."

This sentiment can be explained further by Pinker (2008) who states that because swear words are considered taboo words in general across the globe and in Malaysia, public swearing is considered rude and inappropriate. Hence the adherence to social norms.

Respondents who feel awesome

Respondent R49 explains that she feels awesome and trendy when she uses swear words among her friends. However, she also feels guilty if her mother is around.

R49 - "...feel awesome and trendy but sometimes you feel guilty. Yeah, when my mom is around but if it's around my friends and we casually say it, it's casual."

Here, it is evident that this respondent understands that context is an important factor in swearing. Pinker (2008) also expresses a similar sentiment, stating that when the participants use swear words within a group, it might be to indicate familiarity, intimacy, and a sense of belonging with one another. This is because swear words' taboo status prohibits it from being used explicitly with everyone. Similar findings as this study are found in Suganob-Nicolau's (2016) research revealing that emotions such as anger, surprise, frustration and shock triggered the young learners to use swear words. However, the findings of Paramasivam & Baudin (2015) study highlights that the respondents mainly use swearing to express negative emotions. This is in direct contrast to the finding observed above. To summarise, almost half of the respondents feel positive about swearing while the other half feel it is negative. However, all the respondents interviewed are of the viewpoint that context is important when swearing.

Usage of euphemisms in replacing swear words

Figure 4.8

Usage of euphemisms by respondents

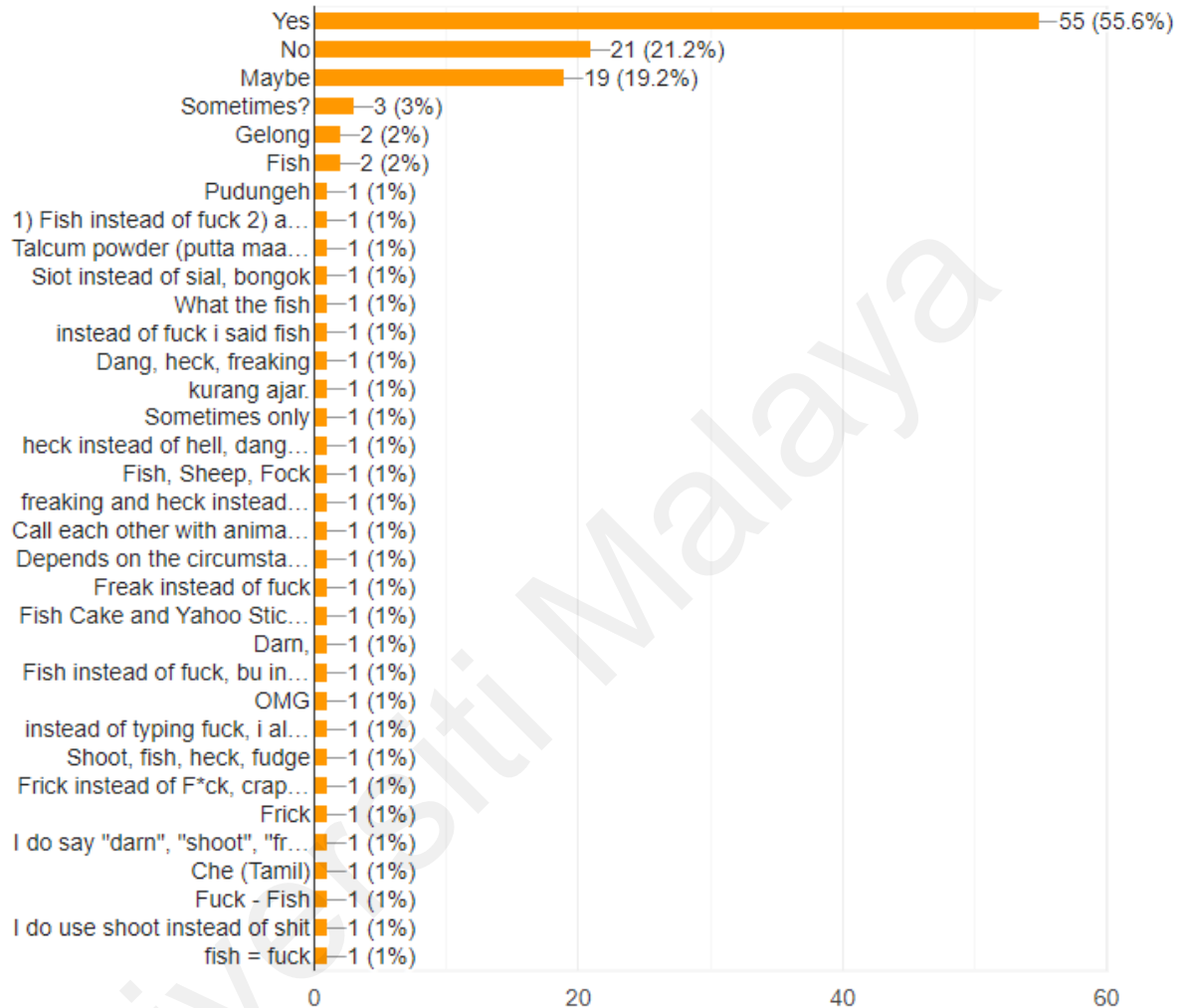


Figure 4.8 lists out euphemisms that respondents use in place of swear words. 55.6% (55) of respondents have indicated that they use alternative words to swear words. Further, 19.2% (19) respondents say that they may use euphemisms in place of swear words. 21.2% (21) have indicated 'no', they do not use euphemisms. This last group prefers to use swear words directly. The words submitted as euphemisms are interesting to observe. They are namely fish, freak, fudge and frick (for fuck), dang and darn (for damn), heck (for hell), and shoot (for shit).

Azman et al. (2020) states that being indirect in speech and giving importance to politeness is Malaysian culture. Corroborating thisiations, grawlixes, and emoticons.

This is corroborated by the following respondents R17, R47 and R54.

R17 - *"..yeah got. Like if 'bodoh', I will use 'kurang bijak' or 'kurang pandai.'"*

R17 corroborated this by stating that he uses replacement swear words such as *'kurang bijak'* (less intelligent) or *'kurang pandai'* (less clever) in place of *'bodoh'* (stupid).

R47 says this about his usage of swear words on the internet when in anger or frustration.

"Usually when people are arguing something with others online or a difference of opinion that they don't agree with. Or the other side is being unreasonable and I don't want to continue arguing and I don't see the point in continuing the argument, so I type this to end the argument. With a smiley face at the end. There is an age where older people would treat the smiley face as happy and the younger generation, when we use this smiley face, we are on the edge of angry. 'sindiran' (meaning sarcasm). Going to be angry but still want to maintain the vibe, so usually just send a smiling face. If the other side knows this meaning, they stop. If they continue to be unreasonable, next would just be more conflict."

R47 uses an emoticon to stop a conversation or argument that he does not want to continue online. He types in a smiley face and leaves the forum. This respondent says that the smiley face does not necessarily represent happy thoughts. To his generation, it represents the opposite (*sindiran* to mean sarcasm) and is used to denote disagreement but helps to maintain the vibe.

R54 - *"I use 'scheissen' and 'shoot'. 'Scheissen' is basically like 'shit' or 'fuck'. It's just I don't speak German and 'scheissen' is one of the few words I know in German. It is not mild. I know people don't really understand. I don't have a strong sentiment towards this*

word so it's not only a replacement to me, it's nobody understands. So I feel I'm not offending anyone. But if you speak with a German speaker, he knows it's really a great offence."

Respondent R54 uses the German word '*scheissen*' in place of swear words. His explanation is that other people don't understand the German language, so he is not offending anyone. This is a classic example of a respondent who states that he does not use swear words, only euphemisms, but is actually using a proper swear word in another language.

However, providing an interesting counterpoint to all the findings above, R49 says that she does not use any replacement words for swear words because she feels that the complete swear word should be said for full effect.

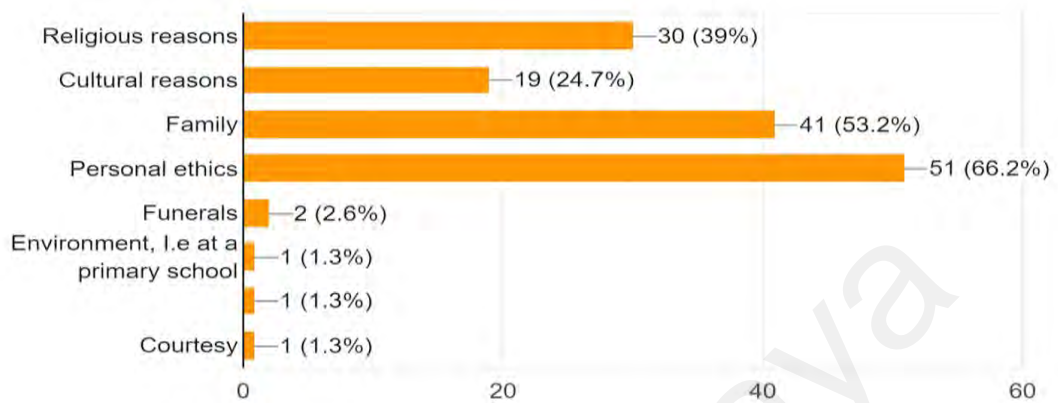
R49 states *"I just say the full word. I need to say the full word because it doesn't help otherwise."*

All but one of the respondents who participated above stated that they are not swearing by using euphemisms. Therefore, it must be reiterated that they are not aware that euphemisms, symbols, abbreviations and grawlixes are indirect forms of swearing. As such, they believe that they are not swearing.

Reasons for the avoidance of swearing

Figure 4.9

Reasons for not swearing among respondents



Due to a variety of reasons, some respondents do not swear. It must be noted that only 77 participants responded to this question. The main reasons given for not swearing were religious, cultural, personal and family ethics. Further, some respondents regarded swearing as an inappropriate manner of speaking in an unsuitable environment such as a funeral or in a primary school and an indecent way of expressing oneself.

Figure 4.9 indicates values for non-swearers only. 66.2% (51) have responded that they refrain from uttering swear words due to personal ethics, 53.2% (41) due to family, 39% (30) due to religious reasons, and 24.7% (19) due to cultural reasons. However, they admit that they use euphemisms, gestures, grawlixes, and emojis during social discourse, either face-to-face or online. As stated in the analysis of Figure 4.8, for euphemisms used in place of swear words, respondents are not aware that the above means of communication are different forms of swearing.

The following respondents corroborated this finding by stating their own reasons.

R67 - *"My upbringing, my nuclear family does not swear. My parents mostly say 'shit' but rarely, in school and surrounding, people swear but I decided this is how it should be for me. I also wrote in the survey that this is not an elegant way to get angry. This is what my father taught me. He said, anything you want to express, you don't need to use vulgar language. Can sound angry and classy. That's what my father says."*

R67 states that her family does not swear, and this influenced her reasons. She feels that there is no need to use vulgar language to express oneself.

R54 - *"I don't really use swear words a lot. Also because I'm religious and I'm Christian. I don't think it's appropriate to use swear words. That's the main reason. I personally think it's indecent to use swear words to anybody that you associate with and to me, it shows your impoliteness. That people who speak these words show that they are indecent and not so well behaved. There are other ways to express yourself. It may slip my tongue and say one or two swear words unconsciously when I'm talking to my friends. Usually, I don't use any swear words."*

This respondent does not swear because of her religion. The respondent thinks that it is indecent to use swear words and there are other ways to express oneself.

R42 states *"I believe it is based on personality. It may not necessarily be culture while it is culturally accepted. But I think it is more prevalent in personality."*

However, this respondent has a refreshing and different viewpoint, believing that swearing is not a cultural phenomenon but leans towards individual personality. The reasons given for non-swearing demonstrate that respondents are very well aware of the stigma surrounding swear words. However, they still use other means to channel their feelings. Interview respondents who answered they do not swear admitted that they use

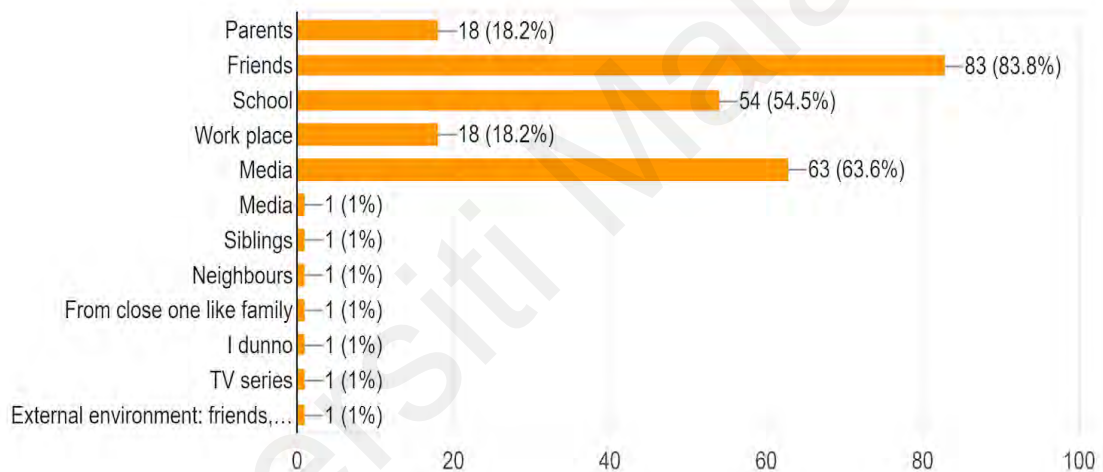
euphemisms. This finding provides a corroborative view relating to the Figure 4.8 question on euphemisms. This finding also substantiates that respondents are unaware that they are using swear words in other forms.

The following subtopic will be discussing the source of swear words among students.

Source of swear words

Figure 4.10

Source of swear words for respondents



In this study 83 of the respondents (83.8%) have stated that they learned swear words from friends. 63.6% respondents (63) have stated that they learned swear words from the media and 54.5% respondents (54) from school.

From the above results, it can be observed that respondents learnt swear words from friends, school and media, with some as early as primary school. These findings pave the way towards understanding that swear words are not being seen as taboo from an early age and are frequently being used in daily life. The context of learning can influence the impression of swear words.

This is corroborated by respondent R 38 who states "...Yeah, from friends and the media." Also, this respondent further states that on campus, swearing is part of his daily vocabulary. These form the highest occurrence while parents account for 18.2% (16 respondents) and workplace accounts 18.2% (which is 18 respondents). Other sources given are neighbours and siblings at 1% each.

This is supported by R75 who stated, "No, I learned from other friends and neighbours." This respondent explains that he did not learn swear words in school. However, he learned it from other friends and neighbours. R38 stated that he learned from friends and the media during secondary school. It was "*like part of my daily vocabulary. And I also use it in class but not with my lecturer of course.*" R38 is stating that he only uses swear words among friends and classmates but not in front of his lecturer. This demonstrates that he is aware of the environment and is respectful of the context in which he can use them.

R42 has an interesting perspective on the source of swearing. She maintains the current pandemic has provided a reason for increased swearing.

R42 - "*Due to Covid - Could be a possibility of increase because of frustration. Even sitting at home, or going out for that matter, the simplest task becomes so difficult now. Even getting groceries has become such a challenge. So people who generally swear may swear more than they usually do.*"

Bowers (2011) states that a listener's reaction may be influenced by early verbal conditioning rather than the actual meaning of the words. According to him, parents, teachers, and figures of authority will suggest swear words in a negative context, while friends, peers, schoolmates, and the media will suggest swear words as fun, casual and trendy. Anthropologist Hruschka (2010) states that humour and swearing are similar in that social risk and taboo are utilised as a method of bonding among friends. An online

study done by Wright and Mokbel's (2016) on college students from a public research university found that respondents were primarily exposed to swear words primarily from their mother and secondly from media sources. This demonstrates a completely different viewpoint from this research.

In the following section, the commonly preferred swear words will be discussed further.

Commonly preferred swear words

Figure 4.11

Respondents' favourite swear words

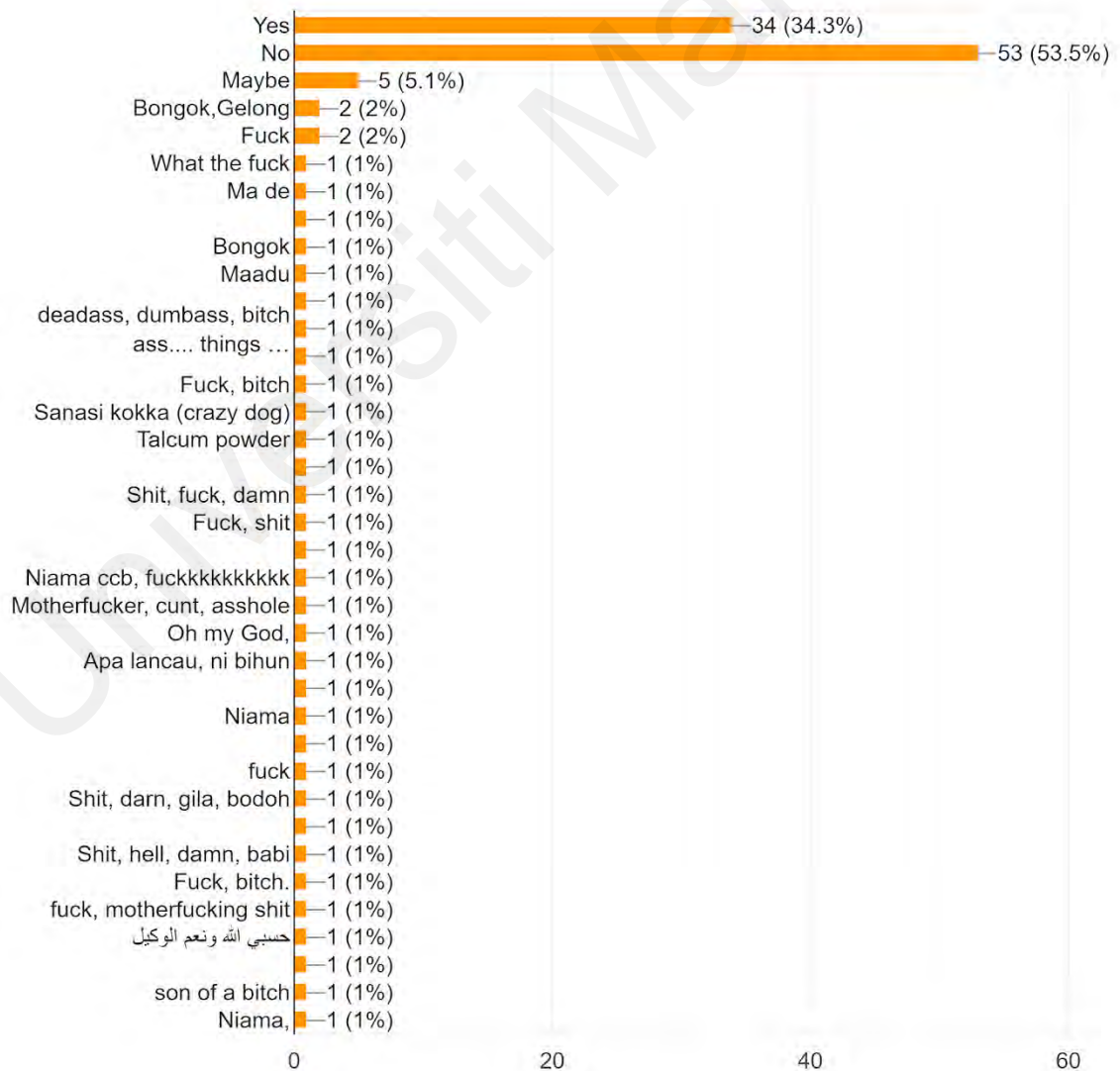


Figure 4.11 indicates that a majority of respondents at 53.5% (53 respondents) do not have favourite swear words. However, 34.3% (34 respondents) have stated 'yes' to having a favourite swear word and 5.1% (5 respondents) say they may have a favoured swear word. While taking into consideration that most of the respondents who answered this question do swear, this indicates that swearing does not require a special occasion or a favourite swear word. The above results indicate that the majority of favourite swear words listed belong to the epithet category. Some examples are 'bongok', 'gelong', 'bihun', 'gila', 'bodoh', and 'babi' (in the less severe form) for Malay and 'deadass', 'dumbass', 'bitch', 'fuck', 'shit', 'damn', 'motherfucker' for English. This relates back to Table 4.1 (categorisation of swear words) which has the same finding.

Respondent R52 describes his favourite swear words as 'fish cakes and yahoo sticks' or 'WHAT THE HELL' or 'WHAT THE F\$%&'. This is similar to respondent R17 who says he will use '*kurang bijak*' (meaning less smart) or '*kurang pandai*' (meaning less clever) in place of '*bodoh*' (meaning stupid). R60 has also stated the word 'fuckkkkkkkkkkk'. It must be noted that this respondent is in direct contrast to respondent R52, as R60's favourite word is a swear word while R52 has specifically stated that he only uses euphemisms and symbols in place of severe swear words. Respondent R87 also uses 'fuck' most often because it is less severe than the ethnic swear words that she knows.

"I often use 'fuck' instead of Chinese swear word, to me, it's more gentle than Chinese swear words."

It is interesting to note that all Malay favourite words are in the epithet category, but in English, the majority of favourite words are in the vulgarity category. Respondents are at ease speaking more severe swear words in English. This points to social conditioning that swear words in a non-mother tongue does not stigmatise. This relates to Kim and Starks' (2008) statement that speakers feel more emotions in their mother tongue

as opposed to other languages. Kim and Starks also affirm that the first language of the speaker contains too much emotional power. So, it is easier to use taboo words in the second language (L2) as it does not provoke strong emotions in the speaker and is used as a tool to distance the speaker from the 'tabooness' of the words spoken. This study further stipulates that L2 is used as it distances the speaker from the content and social constraints.

4.3 Discussion

Indication towards normalisation of swear words in daily life

The findings show that respondents are using swearing as a communicative tool. This enables them to accustom themselves to their new environment. The swear words used by them in larger numbers are primarily related to the epithet category in both English and Malay. These consist of low severity words that assist in releasing anger and frustration, relieve stress, increase self-esteem and bond in social groups. Swear words that are vulgar and obscene are context filtered, as most respondents have stated clearly circumstances where they feel it can be used and where these words cannot. The type of words used also give a clear indication that swear words are becoming normalised in student conversations and prove to be an invaluable tool in bonding.

Andersson & Hirsch (1985) has an interesting perspective on this matter. He states that if a person regularly puts the word 'fuck' into the majority of utterances, then any person in conversation with him will likely ignore this expression. According to him, these are regarded as 'habitual swearing' resulting from conditions of context and serve only as a secondary function such as normalising the conversation. Respondents further corroborate this towards how they feel when others swear. A large number indicated that they were indifferent because it did not matter to them. Only a little more than a third of respondents stated that they did not like it when people swore around them. This indicates

that almost two-thirds of respondents accept swear words and are desensitised to them in daily activities.

This further shows a correspondingly normalising of swear words in daily discourse. Azman et al.'s (2020) findings reflect this point. He found that the English language is common and preferred among his participants due to exposure in daily, social activities. Swear words have become so normalised and assimilated into normal speech that almost a third of respondents have a favourite swear word. The other two thirds do not have favourite words but do swear. Interesting favourite swear words fell into the epithet category mostly with 'shit', 'damn', 'hell', 'dumbass', 'fuck', and 'bongok'. According to Kidman (1993, cited in Wajnryb (2004), the word 'shit' is appearing increasingly frequently in casual conversation, and therefore, is attaining a less 'contentious' or 'offensive' status. Fagerston (2012) also reiterates that this could be because it has the versatility of being able to refer to any kind of 'stuff', without negative connotations necessarily being attached. Interestingly, respondent R38 says that he calls his female friends 'bitches', in a good way, because he wanted 'to take back the power of words'. This is an intriguing concept as it demonstrates that students now are able to discern that they understand the context of using swear words and want to be a game-changer. They want to establish ownership of the word and prove that it does not hurt them by changing the connotation according to circumstances.

R38 - *"I wanted to take back the power of the words. It started with me casually calling my friends bitches. ...and I was surrounded by a lot of female friends. So basically, this was among female friends but 'bitch' was not a nasty word, it means more like friends."*

This finding is important because it ties in with the normalisation process whereby it is observed that swear words are slowly becoming commonplace and indicates that users understand that there is a time and place for swear word usage. Jay and Janschewitz

(2008) mention that as swear words enter mainstream discourse, more relaxed attitudes tend to prevail. This is because swearing is a complex interactive speech act which is influenced by many variables and does not adhere to a simple linguistic framework. Similarly, Azman et al. (2020) 's findings showed that the participants did not find swearing to be impolite and felt that it does not offend the listeners because they accepted swearing as a norm and were purposeful in expressing emotion.

4.4 Summary

The analysis of how students accustom themselves to new environments brings to light an interesting indication. Students are using swear words to socially bond and relieve stress. A large majority are not unaffected by swear words spoken around them and know the context in which these words can be uttered. All these elements indicate that swear words have become normalised in students' vocabulary and daily conversations. This phenomenon relates to Figure 4.12 where respondents have demonstrated that they have become desensitised to such words from an early age due to exposure from primary education upwards and media where they have picked up English swear words. This has destigmatized swear words to the extent that they are typically using primarily epithets but surprisingly also stronger vulgarity to express themselves among friends. This is deemed normal among groups because they have learned how certain stronger words can be expressed without problems.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.0 Overview

This chapter summarises the findings while also discussing the implications of this study and the recommendations for any future studies.

A better understanding empowers the researcher towards adapting changes that are occurring in the world of social discourse. These findings can enhance the corpus of this area of linguistic discourse, providing an added awareness of this subject. The main contribution of this study has been new insights into the speaking of swear words. While researching, this study has provided experience and skills in understanding how multifaceted swear words are and how these layers may act as a channel to change emotions and language depending on the context. The objectives of this study dovetail to provide a clear and focused conclusion. Usage of swear words among university students indicates that epithets are the most used, followed by profanity and obscenity. As epithets are generally milder swear words, this indicates that students use these words casually. A large majority of respondents state that they are not affected by this usage either by others or themselves. They are clear about the context and circumstances in which to use swear words. These findings indicate that using swear words among students has become normalised and a part of everyday life and provides a mode to accustom themselves to new environments.

Swear words are multi-layered in meaning, depending on the context and perspective of the speaker and listener and also on what motivates the understanding of profanity. In the campus setting, students from many communities experience different levels of culture shock in a microcosm where their varying cultures clash. Daily conversations on campus expose the student to nuances and words in different languages that may have multiple layers of meaning. Foremost among these are swear words in

multiple languages, each having specific peculiarities. Dewaele (2004, p.204) explains that swear words are so powerful that they are *"the verbal equivalent of nitroglycerin as they may have devastating social consequences."* Jay (1996) states that swearing can be defined as invoking harm by using certain words and phrases on another person. On the other hand, Montagu (2001) points out that swearing and cursing are different in their nature. Swearing, according to him, happens on the spur of the moment, motivated by the situation at hand while cursing is toxic and malicious speech towards another. He also states that swearing happens in the present context while cursing affects the future context. As Jay (2009) states, research into the field of impolite speech is still in the stages of infancy as profanity is subjective. As such, to form a judgement about what is appropriate in a social setting requires time and experience. This needs the expertise of not only linguistics but also of cognitive psychologists as social swearing is guided by language, cultural, and contemporary social parameters.

It is interesting to note that 'shit' is a versatile word that can fit into multiple categories. Shakiba (2014) corroborates this by explaining that, common to all languages, scatological swear words show the highest usage. This could indicate why this word is consistently appearing with increasing frequency in casual conversation, and therefore, is attaining a less 'offensive' status. There are many ways to integrate swear words into sentences because they are so versatile and work in many different parts of speech. However, attempting to integrate swear words in a more creative fashion in daily discourse may be difficult for the non-native speaker. One, it may convey a more severe meaning than the original meaning of profanity and two, it may fall flat and not be offensive in meaning when translated.

Interestingly, this research found that 99% of respondents were conversant in English, and this paved the way for the majority of them using an equal number of English

and Malay swear words. Findings for the usage of swear words to accustom into a new environment indicate that respondents indicate that swear words are becoming normalised in their daily conversation, help them deal with stress and bond with friends, and understand the context for swear words usage. An interesting offshoot of this finding showed that respondents who did not swear, used other forms of euphemisms but were not aware that these are different ways of communicating swear words.

During the process of analysing the responses, certain uncommon patterns have emerged. The findings from Chapter 4 reveal that respondents are not using severe swear words to hurt others intentionally. If anything, they are using a majority of epithets as part of their everyday vocabulary. These swear words are now being utilised as intensifiers and for emphasis, thus softening the degree of severity in many of these words. Words such as 'fuck', 'shit', 'damn', and 'hell' are no longer used as their original meaning, which is to fornicate, defecate or to blaspheme. All these words, as such have assimilated into casual, everyday connotations and thus have lost their original intentions. These words are also used to relieve stress.

Of note in this data, is the admission that respondents started swearing in primary school, that is from ages 7-12 years. This is a good indication that the learning and usage of swear words has started early in school, most notably from friends. This in turn strengthens the perceptions of respondents that swear words are a channel of social discourse and assists in normalising these words at a very young age. This lends coherence where students state that they learn swear words from friends and media primarily with parents and workplace as other sources. Another interesting finding arose when respondents stated that they do not swear. Respondents participated giving reasons, such as personal ethics, family, religion, culture, and environment. However, at the same time, these respondents also admitted that they use euphemisms in the form of gestures,

gawlixes and emojis during social discourse. This constitutes an interesting phenomenon as respondents seem not to be aware that the above means of communication are actually different forms of swearing. According to Lee et al. (2019) these forms replace swear words with less offensive words. This may imply that swear words already represent a more common part of daily discourse than has been previously thought of.

5.1 Summary of findings

This study aims to identify the types of swear words used by university students and to examine how students use these words to accustom themselves to a new environment. This research has identified the types of swear words used and the usage of university students towards these swear words. This contributes towards understanding the effect of swear words related to students' stress. This research revealed the following findings relevant to the research objectives. The examination of categories of swear words revealed that respondents used mostly epithets in the two languages studied. However, in English, respondents equally used terms of vulgarity, while in Malay the next most used category was obscenity. The most frequently spoken swear word was 'shit', 'damn', 'fuck', and 'hell'. While in Malay, the most frequent was 'bodoh', 'babi', 'sial' and 'pukimak'.

5.2 Implications of the study

Language has become globally ubiquitous, underscoring a pressing need to introduce a more comprehensive understanding of different cultures. The expansion of the internet and social media has accelerated the emphasis needed to remove cultural misconception. This has placed a priority on establishing the proper understanding of speech acts through the perspective of speech nuances. Understanding the rationale behind the utterance of swear words as a part of social discourse can provide the impetus towards this. In today's world, puns, sexual innuendos and swear words have been absorbed into mainstream discourse. This can be seen among students where the majority population is

in their twenties and on the cusp of adulthood. This can be a strange and exciting time, trying to fit in and facing new challenges. Life changes, so do goals, friends and culture. This is because they are of an age neither teen nor matured adult, yet are thrust into a world where they have to grapple with adult issues and responsibilities. Social adaptation skills are essential to survive in this environment. It becomes imperative to blend in, be cool, one of the crowd, all the while maintaining one's individuality. There is a compelling need to excel in studies. There is the pull of sexual attraction to others around oneself and there is the challenge of adjusting to a new person emerging within oneself. All this puts tremendous stress on a young adult just leaving teenage hood and the regulated secondary education system. The university education can thoroughly floor an immature youth, giving them access to bad habits, friends and substance abuse. To many students, this faces a challenge as it introduces culture shock and an ability to think out of the box to adapt in this mini society. A student thrown into this situation needs to quickly adapt using whatever linguistic resources available. Hence, swear words appear attractive and help to define the credibility of a student's worth as 'cool' and popular. Much of their success in navigating these culture-change stems from upbringing and moral values instilled in their lives from childhood coupled with a strong motivation to succeed. The population sample of this research is focused especially on university students in order to tap into this period of their lives where they are grappling with motions on many fronts.

In the Malaysian student context, an in-depth study can provide answers how certain circumstances peculiar to Asian culture may consciously or unconsciously propagate swearing among students. This is a relatively new concept, therefore it is imperative to have an open mind when approaching this sensitive subject. A detailed investigation on the context in which swear words are spoken plays a key part of influence towards reactions to swearing. Jay (2009) also found that humans swear throughout their lives on average about 0.3% to 0.7% of the time. This translates to a significant amount

of time in a person's life. According to Jay, swearing knows no social boundaries or status, thus providing an interesting perspective to this study. Bailey & Peoples (2014) opined that language contains symbols used to convey conventional meanings. Part of what we present to the outside world includes the way we speak, including style and speech habits. These can combine to portray a picture beyond the words and sentences we use, subtly defining status, gender and power markers. The meanings attached to speech symbols form the basis of society and culture. Shared rules about speech dictate how people should act in certain situations. However, some rules are followed and some violated depending on various factors in society. Paramount among speech violations is impolite speech.

The education system may contribute to stress due to education policies, the multilingual scenario, and the emphasis placed on good grades. Fägersten (2012) states that the perception of young adult students towards swear words and the type of swear words they use constitutes a big indicator of current acceptable standards of casual conversation, which will help with accustom themselves to their new environment. Edison (2021) explains that strong taboo words such as 'bastard' now do not function as an illegitimate status but rather as similes describing a characteristic. Similarly, 'idiot' no longer refers to mental retardation. It functions as a mild characteristic. She opines that taboo words have a shelf life, whereby some get reduced to expletives and for terms of personal abuse. Due to changes in language and society, the original stigma disappears, leaving only a negative connotation. This explains why this research's findings indicate that swear words have become casualised and ubiquitous, with a little over half of the respondents stating that they are indifferent when people swear around them.

This research has strived to provide a comprehensive picture of university students who swear. However, various factors have to be taken into consideration during data analysis, in order to understand the restrictions faced. Several limitations have been

identified that may influence the results of this study. Further, the proposed solutions to these limitations have been listed out. The instruments of data collection in this study such as online questionnaires and interviews are restricted by the time and schedule of respondents. Due to the Covid 19 Control Movement Order, much of the data collected was through online and zoom medium. This impacted both the quantity and quality of data as the respondents who participated had to have proper online facilities and agreed to allow telephone interviews between their schedules of classes. As such, observation of respondents' facial and body language cues could not be done. This limited the overall perspective that would have allowed for a more comprehensive evaluation.

A detailed investigation on the context in which swear words are spoken plays a key part of influence towards reactions to swearing. This is one variable that was not factored in and should be included because context provides direct influence on the understanding of swear words. Also, no observation was done on other variables such as relationships between speaker and listener and social norms in a participant's background.

Tantamount in this matter is the gender imbalance in regards to the sample population used in this study. Universiti Malaya, as most universities in Malaysia, has a robust population of undergraduates and graduates. However, on closer observation, it is noticed that the student intake of this university has shown that there are more females than males. According to Ismail (2014), the female to male applicants and student population stands at a ratio 65.8% to 35.2%. As stated before, this phenomenon is widespread in the academic field in Malaysia. As such, this gender imbalance is true for the population sample of this study also. In an earlier study done on students in the Universiti Malaya campus, Ismail (2014) also stated that there may be an inherent character flaw in the general male population in this campus. She further stated that female

students differ in their approach towards hard work and attitude from male students. As such, it cannot be denied that a major bias in this study is gender based.

Another bias that must be considered is widening the population sample to other universities. Besides public institutions, this should also include private and other institutes of higher education thereby incorporating different levels of study. A study on primary and secondary school children may reveal different findings from a research project on tertiary students. The only demographics taken into account for this study were limited to education level. Data such as the cultural background of participants and financial background of participants or any data on parent's demographics were not included. As mentioned earlier, Javier and Marcos (1989) found that bilinguals have been found to code switch while swearing. Understanding the Malaysian context therefore, can provide an interesting perspective to this issue as this opens up an area of research that may not be previously well documented. However, due to certain constraints only two languages, English and Malay, were observed in this study and no code switching was apparent in the list of swear words responded. Swearing can now be seen in a more sobering light, that is, as an aid to manage stress, anger management and as a useful tool in social and medical psychological fields. In the current environment of lockdown, many instances of increasing verbal abuse have been recorded in which figures of authority such as police personnel, welfare workers and medical professionals are targeted.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Studies

In order to counter these limitations, it is suggested that future studies in this field do a robust collection of data from both gender participants, with a systematic method of collection specifically targeted towards acquiring a fair and equal number of male participants. This will place the collection of data that can be analysed on a balanced playing field and produce a more comprehensive result. This researcher suggests several

directions such as a continued and long-term profanity study coupled with an extensive set of variables. This will call for a multidisciplinary effort of experts and researchers so that a collaborative initiative can be taken to advance a framework of research scaffolding on this topic. This also will contribute towards a more controlled view of the usage of profanity and in turn, will help convey a liberal world view. Incorporating both private and public institutions of education can reap the benefits of observing students from a mixed pedagogical system and highlight more interesting findings. This can provide an alternative perspective to the outcome observed for this phenomenon of swear words.

Labov (1972) feels that it is necessary for the linguist to extend on their structure of analysis in the use of language so that new techniques of survey can produce results that can be reinterpreted so that the current direction of social discourse in the field of profanity can be understood better. A good solution to this will be conducting a similar study after the pandemic is over so that the face-to-face approach can be fully explored. This will strengthen the data with much needed nonverbal cues. Jay and Janschewitz (2008) reveal that the context plays a key part of influence towards reactions to swearing. The closeness of speaker and listener, especially if there is difference in status, amplifies this factor. This is especially true in situations of parent-child, figures of authority, man-on-the-street, educationist, and students. Future studies should encompass all parties who use swear words.

Alternatively, special focus should be on emotions and language based on gender demographics. Jay and Janschewitz (2008) state that swearing is seen as a masculine behaviour but the number of females who swear is increasing. This phenomenon should be included in studies on impolite speech because the results may very well be illuminating and carry far reaching implications in the modern era. Women and girls have long been regarded as a vulnerable subset of society as they are more exposed to verbal

domestic abuse. Understanding the reasons behind these negative utterances can help empower women withstand and overcome abuse as the attitudes and challenges that are attributed to gender swearing are the primary source for abuse. This will encompass not only a larger number of male participants but also involve a more diverse campus background to invoke generalisation as this could also give more data to the different findings in this study and see if it is isolated to only this campus or is more widespread.

A wider range of demographics will throw some light into understanding the reasons why students swear. The level of study of the parents of participants would have given some insight into the opportunities to use swear words afforded by individual respondents. This in turn, could have influenced their responses. All these extra factors also may have assisted in analysing the motive of swearing, especially whether swearing is considered rude or not and in which context it is considered impolite as this may differ in different settings and different cultures. Future studies must incorporate the study of code switching in Malaysia to enrich the data collected. Thelwall (2008) and Crystal (1987) note that Malaysians tend to use covert forms of speech under the guise of different semantic masks. Creation of new words allows users to push at the boundaries of speech acts as it provides an interesting and stress-free channel to create humour. In Malaysia, each ethnic group and culture is unique and the demographic of each specific culture can provide for an interesting mix of borrowing and code mixing. This then can produce the combination of swear words in two or more languages to create a completely new and creative new word.

If developed in the proper manner, the findings of these studies can shed light on why stress, anger and abuse occur. This will not only benefit the education sector, it would also assist in illuminating why frontliners are being verbally abused in this pandemic. To counter this alarming turn of events, more academic studies should be researched so that

the root cause can be identified and proper measures implemented in order that frontline personnel do not bear the brunt of the frustrations and emotional disturbances of the weary public.

5.4 Conclusion

Even though understanding profanity and what motivates people to swear seems a bit of a stretch to the traditional mindset, in today's world, it has become a necessary tool to navigate social discourse. In this respect, Malaysian multilingual society provides an interesting perspective to this phenomenon as there is a variety of languages used and data to study. The findings from this research can then be used as a platform to explore and share knowledge about understanding swear words in a social context between young adults, male and female. Furthermore, as Malaysia and large parts of Asia regard impolite speech as negative, this study can provide a small step in breaking down cultural taboos. Understanding that swear words are fluid and can bear meaning other than that of aggression and ridicule will provide a first step in this direction.

It must be mentioned here that the main contribution of this study has been new insights into the speaking of swear words used by students from the Malaysian perspective. These findings can enhance the corpus of this area of linguistic discourse, providing an added awareness on this subject. This highlights the recent events in the Malaysian schools regarding a female student and her revelations about rape jokes made in a co-ed class by a male teacher. Also, an earlier report about period checks by female teachers has put a spotlight on taboo norms and the need to break them down, if only to safeguard the more vulnerable sections of society. Therefore, understanding swear words is relevant and much needed in the Malaysian linguistics landscape. It is important to understand swearing in order to aid in communication, to fit in and allow expression of emotions. It is hoped that being the premier university in Malaysia, Universiti Malaya will

blaze the way for this innovative step to be undertaken. New language learners need to be made aware of the range of registers and expressions available in a language for expressing the gamut of human emotions. This faculty could incorporate into the curriculum an introductory course on slang and impolite speech.

This has already been mooted by scholars who suggest that as taboo words are emotionally charged, schools might consider teaching them as a separate, optional course. Teachers can also broach the subject by discussing taboo words when they come up in class. English swearing should be taught in some capacity in language classrooms, but it is necessary to be aware that there are socio-cultural factors that affect when swearing can or should be taught. In fact, there is already a precedent in the University of Washington, where an undergraduate course on swear words and taboo language is taught. This is designed to interest students in the study of language and introduce the field of linguistics to non-majors.

High school students should be taught information about impolite language and how to speak in a dignified way about their bodily functions. However, the undergraduate faculty does caution that these classes should be limited to evening or adult classes and not in the normal education system. This study can provide a small step in that direction, mainly in breaking down cultural taboos by understanding that swear words are multifaceted and can bear meaning other than that of aggression and ridicule. The expansion of the internet and with it, social media has accelerated the emphasis needed to remove cultural misconception and this has placed a priority on establishing the proper understanding of speech acts such as profanity in order to foster camaraderie and mutual understanding of the multicultural platform. Understanding the rationale behind the utterance of swear words as a part of social discourse can be the first step on that journey.

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