

Teenage Taboo Jargons among High Schoolers and Undergraduates

Alemina Br. Perangin-angin^{1*}, Meliana Siboro², Ade Namira³

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Abstract. The dynamic of language can be seen from the constant emergence of new vocabulary, which mainly spread among teenagers. Swearing, cursing, and other taboo words are daily among teenagers. Compared to the previous generation, like those born in the 90s, the prominent use of taboo words is now more evident. This study investigated how the benefits of swear terms among high schoolers differ from undergraduate students. Data were collected through direct online interviews via Zoom call. Each participant was asked about the frequently used swear words and their reasons. The data were presented in the qualitative descriptive method. The result showed that high school students use swear words relating to sexuality, animal terms abuse, sexist terms abuse, intellect-based terms abuse, insult, and slur, while college students used the same categories of swear words, except sexist terms abuse. Accordingly, high school students used swear words to show they were mature enough, such as self-expression, humor, social bonding among friends, and a new normal in teenagers' lives. Meanwhile, college students used swear words as humor, self-expression, and pain relief.

Keywords: *Taboo, Teenager, Jargon, Favorite*

Received [19 Mar 2022] | Revised [30 Apr 2022] | Accepted [9 May 2022]

1 Introduction

“*Cuk, sini kau. Ada musuh disitu, goblok.*” Here is a sentence that is an example of how teenagers talk to each other when they play games. When translated into English, the ruling means ‘fuck, come here, there’s an enemy nearby, you stupid.’ Swear is related to verbal obscenity or obscene words, categorized as taboo words. Jay (2000: 13) said that swearing is the linguistic form to express emotions, including anger, frustration, fear, happiness, etc. Swearing is being excluded from the standard variety and official use. Swearing is meant not to be used in a formal situation despite its wide usage. It also has no place in the education system (Horan, 2011: 13).

* Corresponding author at: English Department, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail address: alemina@usu.ac.id

Andersson and Trudgill (1990) define swear words as something that:

- Refers to anything taboo and stigmatized in culture
- Should not be interpreted literally
- Can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes.

Swearing is one of the phenomena which appears in society. Fueled by the internet, where people have limitless access to the internet, swearing is now undergoing significant changes as people obtain swear words in more languages than before. Swearing represents a linguistic behavior that is always related to emotive utterance types (Ljung, 2011: 1). Swear is initially taken from an oath (Allan & Burridge, 2006). A similar view is shared by Wajnryb (2005:20), who stated that “swear” was used to make promises or oaths. There are some criteria for swearing, such as always containing taboo words; the taboo words are used in non - literal meaning; and swearing is always related to emotive language (Ljung, 2011: 4).

Swear words are considered foul language; they distinguish between native and non-native speakers since swear expressions are idiomatic and cannot be semantically understood (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990). There are two types of swearing; social and aggressive. Aggressive swearing seems to appear because someone explodes emotion. People use social swearing since they belong to a community that uses the same kind of swearing (Ljung, 1984: 23). So, someone uses social swearing to maintain his existence inside the community. He believes that both purposes of social and aggressive are equally important.

Rassin and Muris (2002) define swearing as the use of taboo words, the content of which can be in religion, race, gender, madness, body parts, body excretions, and body functions. They further explain that swearwords can be distinguished based on their targets. They can be general and undirected such as “goddamn,” “shit,” and “fuck”, or they can be directed at someone or something like “damn you” and “fuck it.” And finally, some swearwords are intended to hurt or insult the addressed receiver, for instance, “asshole,” “idiot,” and “fucker”.

According to World Atlas, more than 700 languages are spoken throughout Indonesia. The Indonesian language is also formally recognized as the country’s official language, as is provided for by Article 35 of the Constitution of Indonesia. About 43 million people in Indonesia are identified as native Indonesian speakers, while another 156 million use the language as a second language because most Indonesian use their mother tongue at home. Therefore, you will most likely hear various languages in public places. Going back to the sentence above, the word ‘*cuk*’ is a swear word that originated from the Javanese ‘*jancok*,’ which came from the word ‘*encuk*,’ meaning to have sex, or equivalent to the word ‘fuck’ in English. The phrase ‘*di-encuk*’ became ‘*diancok*’ and ‘*dancok*’ and finally formed the word ‘*jancok*’ (Posciety Edu 2019).

Bahasa Indonesia or Indonesian is one of the languages significantly affected by global language. The number of loanwords adopted from other languages (both local and international) has transformed our own language's linguistic characteristics. This phenomenon is prevalent in youngsters' use of Indonesian daily. The use of standard and proper Indonesian continues to deteriorate, replaced by informal words or *slang* and taboo words. This situation is worsened by the fact that not all Indonesian are fluent in the language in the first place. As time goes by, the love for the unifying language is getting less and less, especially for the younger generations.

The dynamic of language can be seen from the constant emergence of new vocabulary, which mainly spread among teenagers. Swearing, cursing, and other taboo words are used daily among teenagers when they play games, talk with their friends, or even with themselves. Compared to the previous generation, like those born in the 90s, the prominent use of taboo words is now more evident.

Slang relates to the use of swear. It is asserted that the vernacular nature of swearing and its inherent links with slang, which means profanity, can be a powerful means of establishing and reinforcing group identity for specific categories of speakers, most markedly for adolescents (Stenström, 2006).

Moreover, swearing is often associated with lower levels of education and socioeconomic standing (Mulac, 1976). This is due to higher education students having a different way of thinking due to their age, which makes them more mature and can decide and behave according to the social norm (Amrullah, 2016).

The study conducted by Wulandari (2012) found that swearing happens in Indonesia and is used by adults and students. Of many swear words, Amrullah (2016) found the most swear words used by university students are *fuck*, *bastard*, *shit*, and *god*. Meanwhile, Nicolau (2016) researched the usage of swear words by elementary students. It showed that the most frequently used swear words were related to intellectual-based terms and religion.

Swearing these days are found in both lower and higher level of education. Most elementary students swear wherever and whenever they want without considering other people around them. Some different levels of education, such as junior and senior high school and even undergraduate students also, could do the same. However, the swear words used and the functions might be different.

Previous studies above found how university students and elementary students used swear words. So, this study would like to find out the use of swear words among senior high school students and undergraduates. This writing aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do high schoolers' use of swear words differ from that of college students?
2. Why do teenagers tend to use swear words?

2 Method

This study used descriptive qualitative research. The data and source of the data were taboo languages used by 13 high school students and 13 undergraduate students. The data collection instrument was interview questions about what forbidden words they used and their reasons for using them. The data were analyzed based on Miles et al. (2014) through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

3 Result

3.1. Frequency and List of Using Swear words by High School Students

Telwall (2008) hypothesized that women from younger age groups would gradually start using strong swear words more than men. However, the result showed that males tend to say taboo words more than females, as the interviews' results showed that all eight female participants said 'seldom' as their answers. In contrast, all males answered 'sometimes.' However, when playing games, male participants admitted to having the habit of cursing more than when they were not playing.

The following list contains the most frequently used taboo words among high school students from the interview:

<i>Anjing</i> : dog	<i>Kimak/pukimak</i> : woman's genital organ
<i>Anjir</i> : similar to 'anjing'	(used widely around Sumatera)
<i>Tolol, bodoh</i> : stupid	<i>Bodat</i> : monkey (from Bataknese)
<i>Paok</i> : stupid (in Bataknese)	<i>Asu</i> : dog
<i>Si Kui</i> : bastard (in Chinese)	<i>Gada otak</i> : no brain
<i>Kau sat</i> : dog's flea (in Chinese)	<i>Bajingan</i> : bastard
<i>Anak babi</i> : piglets	<i>Pepek</i> : woman's genital organ
<i>Raimu asu</i> : your face looks like a dog	<i>Memek</i> : woman's genital organ
<i>Otak kau</i> : your brain	<i>Kontol</i> : man's genital
<i>Goblok</i> : dumb	<i>Lonte</i> : whore
<i>Bangsat</i> : bastard	<i>Sialan</i> : equivalent to the English word
<i>Cibai</i> : woman's genital	'shit/damn.'
<i>Ngentod</i> : to have sex	<i>Lanjiao</i> : man's genital organ (from Chinese)
<i>Jancok</i> : equivalent to the English word	<i>Fuck</i>
'fuck' (from Javanese)	<i>Shit</i>

These swear words can be classified into the following groups: words relating to sexuality, animal terms of abuse, sexist terms of abuse, intellect-based terms of abuse, common English swear words, and insults (Sarnika 2018). Words relating to sexuality such as: *cibai*, *ngentod*,

kimak/pukimak, pepek, memek, kontol, lanjiao. Examples of animal terms for abuse are: *anjing, anjir, kau sat, anak babi, bodat, asu, and raimu asu*—sexist terms of abuse such as *lonte*. Intellect-based terms for abuse are *tolol, bodoh, paok, otak kau, goblok, and gada otak*. Examples of insult and slur are *bangsat, bajingan, and sialan*. Aside from these categories, teenagers also use common swear words in English, such as ‘fuck’ and ‘shit.’

Frequency and List of Using Swear Words by College Students

Using swearwords was various, starting from the highest frequency, done daily by 8 participants, followed by rarely, which 4 participants did, and 1 participant used expletives every time he was talking. This showed that the college students quite frequently mentioned the curses. These swear words mentioned by them were classified into the following groups: words relating to sexuality such as *fuck* and *shibal (fuck it)*. Words related to animal terms include *bitch, anjir, anjing, anjay, and kampret*. Words related to intellect-based terms abuse such as *gada otak*. Words to insult and slur such as *shit, damn, hell, pantek* (buttock), *vangke* (carrion).

3.2. Reasons for Swearing

Wardaugh (2010: 250) stated the four reasons for swearing; to draw attention to oneself, to provoke, to mock authority, and also to show contempt. These points are complemented by Burton (2020), who suggests seven reasons for swearing; pain relief, power and control, non-violent retribution, humor, peer and social bonding, self-expression, and improved psychological and physical health.

The following are reasons for swearing according to the interview conducted by the writers. First, ‘because it sounds cool to show people that we are already mature, so we can say those words. This sentence indicates that teenagers learn and say swear words to show that they are already grown up. Hence they have the liberty to swear and not to be taken lightly. Second, “*kadang-kadang lebih gampang pake swear words, lebih ngena, mewakili perasaan*”, which translates to ‘sometimes, it is easier to use swear words, it represented the feeling better than proper words.’ In this case, swear words are used as self-expression or to intensify the speaker's contempt. Third, swear words are used as humor and social bonding among friends; as one of the participants replied, ‘just to have fun with friends, my friends talk like that, so I do too.’ Last, teenagers use swear words because it is the ‘new normal’ for teenagers nowadays. One participant said, ‘*kelengkapan kamus anak zaman sekarang,*’ which means that if you exist in this era, swear words need to be included in your vocabulary. The result of this interview may not enforce all of the above theories as the source of the data are still in their high school years.

On the other hand, most undergraduate students mentioned the reason for using swear words as a joke. This is in line with Burton (2020), who stated that one reason for swearing is humor. It showed that swearing acted as a means to strengthen college students’ bonds. The other reasons

were anger, frustration, shock, and feeling fed up and happy. This showed that using swearwords can be self-expression (Burton, 2020). Another reason was to relieve pain. This is supported by a study that found that repeating a swear word at a steady pace and volume benefits pain tolerance (Stephens and Robertson, 2020).

3 Conclusion

This study comes up with two conclusions based on research problems. Firstly, high school students tend to use swear words relating to sexuality, animal terms abuse, sexist terms abuse, intellect-based terms abuse, insult, and slur. In addition, college students also used the same categories of swearwords, except sexist terms and abuse. Secondly, high school students' reasons for using swear words were to show they were mature enough, self-expression, humor, social bonding among friends, and a new normal in teenagers' lives. Meanwhile, college students used swear words as humor, self-expression, and pain relief. All in all, swearing is a regular occurrence in today's teenagers' lives. All the taboo words, which used to be 'forbidden' to be said, especially by children and teenagers, are now in daily conversation.

REFERENCES

- [1] Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Amrullah, L. (2016). English Swear Words by Indonesian Learners. *JELTL (Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics)*, 1(1): 1-12.
- [3] Burton, N. (2020). *Hell Yes, 7 Best Reasons to Swear*. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-peek/201205/hell-yes-the-7-best-reasons-swearing>
- [4] Mulac, A. (1976). *Effects of obscene language upon three dimensions of listener attitude*. *Communication Monographs*, 43(4).
- [5] Nicolau, S. (2016). *Swear words among young learners: A case study of the elementary students*. Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching. Vol. 11 No.2.
- [6] Posciety (2019). *Apa Artinya Jancok?*. Retrieved from: <https://www.posciety.com/apa-artinya-jancok/>
- [7] Stenstrom, A.B. (1995). *Taboos in teenage talk*. In G. Melchers and B. Warren (eds.). *Studies in Anglistics* (pp. 71-79). Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International.
- [8] Stephens, R., & Robertson, O. (2020). *Swearing as a Response to Pain: Assessing Hypoalgesic Effects of Novel "Swear" Words*. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 723. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00723>
- [9] Wardhaugh, R. (2010). *An introduction to Sociolinguistic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- [10] World Atlas (n.d.). *What Languages are Spoken in Indonesia?* Retrieved from: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-indonesia.html>