CHANGES MEANING IN SWEAR WORDS

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Abstract: Swear words have significantly evolved in modern society, shifting from their traditional role as offensive or taboo language to becoming dynamic tools in communication. This study explores the transformation of profanity, focusing on its meanings, functions, and usage. It examines how swear words have taken on new purposes, such as adding humor, emphasizing speech, expressing solidarity, and conveying identity. Using linguistic, cultural, and psychological perspectives, the research analyzes the influence of media, technology, and globalization in normalizing and reshaping profanity. Social media and popular culture have played a crucial role in spreading swear words across different cultures, resulting in varied interpretations and uses. The study also highlights generational differences, showing how younger people redefine and incorporate profanity to challenge norms, strengthen social connections, or assert individuality. Additionally, it investigates the decreasing shock value of swear words and their increasing presence in everyday language. By analyzing examples from music, movies, and online platforms, the research illustrates how language adapts to reflect societal and cultural shifts. The findings suggest that the evolving role of profanity reflects broader changes in communication styles, cultural trends, and social values, providing new insights into the continuous development of language.

Keywords: Swear words, Language evolution, Profanity in society, Cultural norms, Modern communication

INTRODUCTION

Swear words is words or expressions that are considered impolite, vulgar, or offensive in a particular social or cultural context. Swear words are often used to express strong emotions such as anger, disappointment, or surprise, but their use may offend others or be considered inappropriate, especially in formal situations.

Swear words, which were once seen as strictly inappropriate or offensive, have experienced a notable shift in modern society. What used to be a means of expressing anger, frustration, or shock has now evolved into a versatile tool for communication. Today, profanity is often used for emphasis, humor, and even building connections between groups, a change that mirrors the broader transformation of societal values and communication practices. Swearing, once heavily stigmatized, has gradually become more accepted in a variety of contexts (Jay, 2018; Wajnryb, 2017).

The influence of digital platforms, particularly social media, has been pivotal in reshaping the role of profanity. Swear words, no longer confined to private or informal settings, have become prevalent in public online spaces. These platforms have allowed profanity to serve diverse functions, including expressing emotion, humor, and fostering social bonds (Kaye et al., 2020). As online communities evolve, swearing has increasingly become a symbol of authenticity and relatability, especially among younger individuals (Holmes & Stubbe, 2020).

The changing perception of profanity can also be attributed to generational differences. Younger generations, particularly those who have grown up with the internet and social media, view swear words differently than older generations. Rather than simply using profanity to defy authority, younger individuals often see it as a means of self-expression, social connection, and challenging conventional norms (Alim, 2019; Berger, 2021). This generational shift in the use of swear words reflects broader changes in how language is employed to construct identities and foster relationships.

The impact of globalization further fuels the transformation of swear words. As cultures become more interconnected, words that were once specific to certain regions or groups have spread across the globe, acquiring new meanings and uses along the way (McEnery & Love, 2018; Andersson & Trudgill, 2020). This globalization of language has not only broadened the reach of profanity but also influenced how it is understood and applied in different contexts. As swear words move across cultural boundaries, they are often adapted to fit new linguistic and social frameworks.

Even as profanity becomes more normalized, debates about its impact on communication continue. Some argue that as swear words lose their shock value and emotional weight, they lose their effectiveness, while others believe this change is a natural result of evolving social attitudes toward language (Pinker, 2017; Robertson, 2019). These differing perspectives highlight the ongoing tension between the increasing acceptance of profanity and the potential for it to offend, revealing the complex relationship between language, culture, and social norms.

This study explores how swear words have evolved in modern society, examining the linguistic, cultural, and social factors that have driven this transformation. By analyzing the role of media, generational differences, and globalization, the paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the changing role of profanity in contemporary communication. This evolution of swear words is not just a linguistic shift, but also a reflection of broader societal changes in values, cultural practices, and communication styles.

THE RELATED LITERATURE
Swear Words

Swear words have undergone a significant transformation in their usage and perception within modern society. Once primarily used to express intense emotions such as anger, frustration, or shock, these words have now expanded their role to serve various functions in communication, including humor, emphasis, and even fostering social connections. While historically, profanity was seen as a tool for rebellion, defiance, or breaking societal taboos, it has gradually found its place in more mainstream settings, especially in informal or casual interactions.

This shift is evident in the increasing acceptance of profanity in public spaces, especially on platforms like YouTube, social media, and streaming services. Influencers and content creators

now use swear words to connect with their audiences, building a sense of authenticity and relatability (Jay, 2018). Rather than being reserved for private, informal contexts, profanity has become a feature of everyday discourse.

In film and television, profanity is no longer merely a tool for shock value but is increasingly used to reflect realistic, natural dialogue. Characters who swear in everyday situations are seen as more authentic and relatable to viewers. This evolution shows how swear words have transcended their original emotional function to become a versatile element in modern communication, one that enhances conversation, creates connection, and reflects broader societal shifts in values and language use.

In shows like *The Office* or *Parks and Recreation*, profanity is often used for comedic purposes or to make characters feel more grounded and realistic. Swearing here is no longer merely about shock value, but is a deliberate choice to create humor or reflect the awkwardness of situations, demonstrating how profanity has evolved in the context of entertainment

Language Evolution

The evolution of language plays a key role in altering the function of swear words, as societal values shift and language adapts accordingly. Swear words, which were once mainly used in private, rebellious, or informal contexts to express emotions like anger or frustration, have gradually become more acceptable in everyday speech. Wajnryb (2017) emphasizes that the flexibility of language allows these changes, where words that were once considered offensive now find their place in more public and mainstream usage, in line with changing cultural norms.

A major influence on this shift is the rise of digital platforms like social media, which promote casual, unfiltered communication. These online spaces encourage the use of swear words not just to express feelings, but also to add humor, irony, or authenticity to interactions. Swearing has become an effective means of building connections and resonating with others, particularly among younger people.

As swear words become more prevalent in public spaces—whether online, in media, or in everyday conversations—they are now a normal part of communication. Words that were once regarded as taboo or offensive have become widely accepted, mirroring the larger societal changes in how language is used to express oneself and engage with others in a more relaxed, direct way.

In the realm of online platforms, influencers on Instagram or TikTok often use swear words to make their content more relatable to followers. These digital spaces allow individuals to engage with others authentically, often using profanity as a tool for connecting in a way that feels honest and unpolished, further illustrating how swearing has evolved in modern language.

Profanity in Society

The function and perception of profanity in society have undergone significant changes over the years. In the past, swear words were largely considered inappropriate and were associated with   lower social classes or rebellious behavior. They were often seen as disrespectful and used primarily in private or informal contexts. However, the use of profanity has become more widespread in contemporary culture, extending to various forms of media, entertainment, and even public discussions. McEnery and Love (2018) note that the growing acceptance of swear words in mainstream culture is indicative of broader shifts in societal values. What was once

considered offensive is now viewed as an effective tool for expressing emotion, humor, or emphasis.

In today's society, profanity is no longer limited to informal or private settings. It has evolved into a common form of self-expression, especially in casual conversations, online platforms, and informal exchanges. Swearing is often used to create a sense of authenticity, build rapport, and make statements in relaxed environments. While profanity is still considered inappropriate in formal situations such as professional meetings or academic settings, its increasing acceptance reflects a broader societal trend where language is seen as a means to connect, express emotions, and communicate more openly and authentically.

A politician like Bernie Sanders often uses profanity in his speeches, aiming to connect more personally with his audience and express his passion. Words like "greed" and "corruption" might be emphasized with a swear word for added effect. This use of profanity in such public settings highlights how profanity is now widely accepted in political and social discourse, reflecting broader societal shifts.

Cultural Norms

Cultural norms play a key role in influencing when and how profanity is used, as different cultures have varying levels of acceptance for swear words. In some societies, casual language is welcomed, while others maintain more rigid boundaries regarding what is considered acceptable. With the rise of globalization, swear words have crossed cultural boundaries, often acquiring new meanings. Andersson and Trudgill (2020) point out that profanity, which was once tightly regulated in certain cultures, is now more widely recognized and used globally. Words that were once taboo in one culture are now more accepted in others, and in some cases, they have lost their offensive nature.

This shift reflects broader changes in cultural attitudes towards language. As the world becomes more interconnected, societies are becoming more open to forms of expression that were previously seen as inappropriate or restricted. Swear words are sometimes redefined or repurposed for humor, emphasis, or to make a point, which reduces their former negative associations. This evolution highlights how cultural boundaries around language use are becoming more flexible, leading to a more dynamic and varied approach to communication in an increasingly globalized world.

The word "bollocks," which originally held a strong taboo in British English, is now used more casually in various English-speaking countries. It illustrates how cultural exchange has allowed certain swear words to be recontextualized and normalized, reflecting changing norms around language use.

Modern Communication

The widespread use of digital communication, particularly on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, has had a major impact on the way profanity is utilized. Kaye et al. (2020) highlight that these platforms have made swearing more common in casual interactions. In online environments, swear words are often used to express emotions, convey humor, or foster connections between users. The informal atmosphere of social media encourages people to communicate in a more authentic and less filtered manner, where profanity no longer carries the

negative stigma it once had. Rather, these words are now used purposefully to emphasize certain points, create humor, or make conversations feel more relatable and personal.

As a result, profanity has become a tool for self-expression in online communication. It allows users to connect on a deeper level, making interactions feel more genuine and less formal. This shift is evident in the way that swear words are now integrated into everyday digital conversations, where their use is accepted and even encouraged in many contexts. The rise of social media has contributed to a transformation in the perception of profanity, turning it into a tool for building rapport and fostering a sense of belonging in online communities.

Twitter users frequently use profanity to convey strong opinions or humor, often in response to political events or social issues. For instance, a tweet like "This is complete bullshit" can express frustration, but it also adds emphasis and engages followers with a relatable tone. This shift in communication shows how social media has facilitated the normalization of profanity, making it an integral part of modern digital discourse.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, with a focus on library or desk research. This methodology involves the structured collection and evaluation of secondary data from existing sources, making it well-suited for investigating the evolving role and importance of swear words in contemporary society. By utilizing library research, the study allows for an in-depth exploration of a wide range of academic literature, including books, journal articles, and online resources, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the development of profanity over time. Since primary data collection through fieldwork or interviews is not part of this research, reliance on established   scholarly sources ensures a solid foundation for analyzing the subject matter.

The research procedure follows several stages to maintain a methodical and thorough approach. Initially, a literature search will be conducted using academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and university libraries, focusing on keywords like "profanity," "swear words," and "language evolution." In the next step, source selection will prioritize recent publications from the last decade to ensure up-to-date findings. The data extraction phase will involve reviewing and summarizing the key arguments from selected works, emphasizing the linguistic, cultural, and social aspects of profanity. Finally, thematic analysis will be applied to identify recurring trends, patterns, and themes related to the transformation of swear words.

This qualitative approach provides an in-depth exploration of how profanity has evolved in contemporary communication. Through the collection and analysis of secondary data, the study aims to identify the linguistic, cultural, and social drivers behind the growing significance of swear words in modern discourse.

Research Subject

The subject of this research focuses on the changing nature and role of swear words in modern society. Specifically, the study examines the evolution of the meanings, uses, and functions of profanity in language over time. It explores how swear words have transitioned from being associated with taboo or rebellious behavior to becoming part of everyday communication in various forms—whether in casual conversations, public speeches, media, or social media. The

study also investigates the linguistic characteristics of swear words, including their grammatical structures and how their meanings evolve in different social and cultural contexts. The research will consider how the changing perceptions of profanity reflect broader societal shifts, such as technological advances and evolving cultural norms around language use.

Sampling was carried out using the cluster random sampling technique, namely selecting groups randomly, not individuals, as explained by (Fraenkel et al. 2023). To analyze the perceptions written by students, this study adapted the theoretical analysis steps that have been described.

Research Object

The research object consists of the substantial body of literature surrounding swear words, language change, and their cultural and social roles. This includes an analysis of works from linguistics, sociology, media studies, and cultural studies that examine the historical, linguistic, and cultural evolution of profanity. The study will focus on understanding how swear words have developed, their shifting functions, and how modern forms of communication—particularly through digital platforms—have reshaped their use. The object also includes comparing how profanity is perceived and utilized in different cultures and examining how societal values influence the acceptability and meaning of swear words. By analyzing these varied sources, the research aims to provide a thorough exploration of the topic, highlighting the key trends and transformations in the use of profanity.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study involves a detailed review of secondary sources, particularly literature related to the linguistic, cultural, and social aspects of swear words. This includes academic journals, books, scholarly articles, and online resources that explore various dimensions of profanity, such as its role in language change, its impact on social interactions, and its use in contemporary media. The focus will be on gathering sources published in the last decade to ensure that the research reflects the most current developments in the study of swear words. The literature will be examined for common themes and insights, especially in areas related to language evolution, digital communication, and the social acceptability of profanity. The data collection process will also look at cross-cultural perspectives on profanity and how global communication platforms, such as social media, influence the usage of swear words.

The steps in the data collection process are as follows:

1. **Literature Review**: A comprehensive analysis of existing academic papers, books, and online sources that address profanity in language. Special attention will be given to works from the last ten years to capture the latest trends in profanity usage.
2. **Content Analysis**: Identifying recurring themes and patterns in the literature, such as the role of profanity in media, its increasing acceptance in mainstream culture, and its changing functions in various communication contexts.
3. **Cultural Context**: Investigating studies that explore how different cultures perceive and use swear words, considering the impact of societal norms and values on language.
4. **Digital Influence**: Reviewing studies on how social media platforms and digital communication have transformed the way swear words are used and perceived.

5. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons**: Including works that discuss the differences in profanity use across various societies and languages, which provides a broader understanding of how profanity operates in different contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study relies on secondary data, ethical considerations mainly concern the proper attribution and citation of all sources used. All the literature referenced in the research will be appropriately acknowledged, ensuring that the work of other scholars is respected. Additionally, given that the topic of profanity may be sensitive for some audiences, the research will approach the subject matter in an academic and objective manner, focusing on analysis rather than personal judgment. The goal is to explore the linguistic and cultural evolution of swear words, not to endorse or condemn their use.

Limitations

While library research is an effective method for gathering data, it has certain limitations. The study is dependent on existing literature, which may not capture emerging trends or real-time developments in the use of swear words. Since this research relies on secondary data, it cannot include firsthand accounts or direct observations of language use in modern settings, particularly in the fast-paced world of social media. Moreover, library research is limited by the availability and accessibility of specific studies, and may not encompass every aspect of the subject, especially emerging digital trends. Finally, as the study focuses on secondary sources, it may not account for the latest developments in the public perception and use of swear words.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS
Findings

This research on the evolution of swear words in modern society uncovers several important insights regarding their shifting meanings, usage, and cultural relevance. A key finding is that profanity has moved from being a strictly taboo form of language to one that is more widely accepted in everyday communication. In the past, swear words were mostly confined to private conversations and regarded as inappropriate in public settings. However, in today's society, they are frequently used in media, entertainment, and even professional contexts, reflecting a significant change in how society views their usage.

Another significant discovery pertains to the linguistic development of swear words. Over time, the meanings of many swear words have evolved, with some that were once highly offensive becoming less shocking due to shifts in societal attitudes. Words that once carried strong negative connotations are now used more casually, while others that were once mild expressions have gained greater intensity. This change is largely influenced by factors such as globalization, cultural exchanges, and the spread of language trends through social media.

A third finding highlights the influence of digital communication on how profanity is perceived. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have played a central role in normalizing profanity in public spaces. These platforms foster informal communication, which often includes swear words to express emotions or establish connections. As a result, profanity has become a prominent element of online culture and self-expression.

Moreover, the study reveals that swear words are increasingly used in advertising and branding. Companies, especially in the entertainment and lifestyle sectors, have started to incorporate profanity into their marketing strategies to attract younger, more rebellious consumers. This trend signifies a broader cultural shift where profanity is no longer viewed as inappropriate, but as an effective tool to capture attention and generate excitement.

Lastly, the research shows that, although profanity has gained more acceptance in some contexts, its usage still varies greatly across different cultures. In some societies, swearing remains highly taboo, while in others it is more commonly used in public discourse. This cultural difference emphasizes the complex connection between language and societal norms, highlighting how cultural values shape the limits of acceptable language.

Discussion

The findings of this study on the transformation of swear words in modern society highlight significant changes in their usage and societal perceptions. Traditionally, profanity was viewed as taboo, confined to private or informal settings, with strict social norms regulating its use in public. These norms emphasized respect and formality, particularly in professional and social environments (Jay, 2015). However, over time, societal attitudes towards language have evolved, with profanity becoming more accepted and integrated into everyday communication, reflecting broader changes in social and cultural values.

One of the most striking changes observed is the growing acceptance of profanity in public discourse. As the study suggests, swear words have increasingly appeared in media, advertising, and even professional environments. This shift can be attributed to various factors, such as the decline of rigid language norms and the influence of popular culture. (Jay 2015) notes that profanity has become normalized in entertainment, with public figures using swear words to build rapport with their audiences, presenting themselves as more genuine and relatable. This shift has also been fueled by the rise of digital platforms, which value informality and self-expression over traditional norms of politeness.

The role of social media in transforming how profanity is viewed is another important finding. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have significantly impacted language use, making swear words more visible in public conversations (McEnery, 2006). On these platforms, profanity is often used to express strong emotions, humor, or defiance, particularly among younger users who reject conventional language rules. (McEnery 2006) argues that social media has provided an outlet for linguistic creativity, where swear words are no longer seen only as offensive but are used to express identity and solidarity.

Despite the greater acceptance of profanity in some contexts, the study also reveals that cultural differences continue to shape how swear words are perceived. In certain societies, swearing remains highly restricted and is regulated by social expectations (Jay, 2015). This is especially true in conservative cultures, where religious or traditional values still have a significant influence on language use. In these societies, profanity is still heavily stigmatized, underlining that cultural norms continue to set boundaries on what is considered acceptable language.

Moreover, the study points out that while profanity is being adopted in advertising and branding, its usage is strategically tailored to attract specific consumer groups. In industries such as entertainment, fashion, and lifestyle, companies increasingly use profanity to connect with

younger, more rebellious audiences who resonate with the casual tone prevalent in digital communication (McEnery, 2006). This reflects a broader trend where profanity, once a symbol of defiance, has now become a tool for marketing and engagement in a competitive consumer landscape.

CONCLUSION AND SUGESSTIONS
CONCLUSION

To conclude, the transformation of swear words in modern society reflects a significant shift in language, social norms, and cultural perspectives. Once confined to informal and private spaces, swear words have become increasingly accepted in public settings, including media, advertising, and even professional domains. This change signifies a broader cultural shift towards greater informality and authenticity in communication, with an increasing tolerance for expression that breaks traditional norms. The rise of social media has been particularly influential in this process, normalizing profanity as a means of expressing emotion, humor, and personal identity, particularly among younger individuals.

Despite the increasing acceptance of profanity in certain contexts, cultural disparities remain regarding its use. In more traditional or conservative societies, swearing continues to be viewed negatively and is heavily restricted by social or religious values. Additionally, the study reveals that profanity is being strategically incorporated into marketing, particularly in industries that appeal to younger, more rebellious audiences.

Overall, the evolution of swear words reflects the ongoing transformation of language in response to changing social dynamics. The shifting boundaries of what is deemed acceptable language underscore the impact of cultural and technological changes on communication. As society evolves, the role of profanity will continue to play a crucial part in how we express ourselves and connect with others in an increasingly globalized world.

SUGGESTION

From the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for further exploration and societal reflection regarding the use of swear words in modern culture. First, future research should focus on the psychological and social consequences of the increasing normalization of profanity. Although profanity has become more widely accepted, it is important to understand how this shift affects interpersonal relationships, emotional communication, and overall mental well-being. Research could examine the potential desensitizing effects of frequent exposure to swearing and its implications on social conduct, particularly among younger audiences.

Second, exploring the cultural differences in the perception and use of swear words would provide valuable insights. Understanding how different cultures respond to profanity could reveal the complex ways in which language reflects identity, social structures, and power dynamics. Further studies might look into how globalization and cross-cultural interactions influence the spread and transformation of swear words across languages and societies.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate the ethical aspects of using profanity in advertising and media. While profanity can be an effective tool for engagement, it is essential to consider the potential risks, such as reinforcing harmful stereotypes or encouraging inappropriate behavior, especially when targeting younger or more impressionable audiences.

Finally, as digital communication continues to evolve, further research should be conducted on how social media influences language trends. Studying how online platforms impact real-life interactions and language norms can offer valuable insights into the ongoing changes in language use in the digital age.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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